

LUISS GUIDO CARLI UNIVERSITY

BEHAVIORAL ECONOMICS AND CONSUMER DECISION MAKING

Master's Thesis

**Streaming to Belong : The Socio-Cultural Implications of Media
Consumption Tracking Platforms**

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how media consumption tracking platforms (MCTPs) — defined here as digital services such as Letterboxd, Spotify Wrapped, and Goodreads that systematically log, quantify, and socialise users' engagement with cultural content — influence users' self-perception, social interactions, and cultural identity. MCTPs sit at the intersection of the quantified self movement, digital identity performance, and platform-based cultural participation. They turn private aesthetic experiences into public, gamified, and algorithmically mediated data. Drawing on an integrated theoretical framework comprising the quantified self (Lupton, 2016), cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984), social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), digital identity performance (Goffman, 1959; Boyd, 2014), algorithmic identity (Bucher, 2017; Cheney-Lippold, 2017), and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), this study employs a mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were collected through a self-administered online survey (N = 102 valid responses) from Gen Z users aged 18–30, analysed via SPSS using reliability testing, Pearson correlations, one-way ANOVA, and multiple regression. Qualitative data were gathered through eight semi-structured interviews with MCTP users, analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). All six hypotheses were empirically supported. The most striking quantitative finding is the near-unity correlation between Social Comparison and Cultural FOMO ($r = .944$), with Social Comparison accounting for 89.6% of variance in Cultural FOMO ($\beta = .891$, $p < .001$). Contrary to a digital literacy hypothesis, Algorithmic Awareness positively predicted Performative Behaviour ($\beta = .158$, $p = .036$), indicating that awareness of algorithmic mediation intensifies rather than attenuates strategic self-curation. A consistent pattern emerged: medium-frequency trackers, not the heaviest users, scored highest on all psychological constructs. This suggests that high-frequency users may have become habituated to tracking. Feeling obliged to track was predicted by Performative Behaviour ($\beta =$

.467) and Cultural FOMO ($\beta = .346$), but not by how often people tracked. This suggests that the psychological burden comes from social factors rather than from tracking volume. Demographic variables explained less than 1% of variance in Cultural FOMO, while psychological constructs explained over 90%. Four qualitative themes corroborated and deepened these findings: the authenticity-performance tension, strategic management of the algorithmic gaze, cultural FOMO as symbolic and taste-based anxiety, and the phenomenological transformation of aesthetic experience through quantification. Together, the two strands of evidence demonstrate that MCTPs do not merely track cultural consumption — they actively reshape how users experience, choose, and assign meaning to culture. The thesis makes three principal contributions: conceptually, it establishes MCTPs as a distinct analytical category; empirically, it provides the first systematic mixed-methods evidence of psychological dynamics specific to cultural tracking; and theoretically, it demonstrates that the hedonic costs of self-tracking are socially produced rather than inherent to quantification. Practical implications are advanced for platform design, media literacy education, and cultural institutions. Keywords: media consumption tracking platforms, quantified self, cultural FOMO, social comparison, algorithmic identity, digital identity performance, Letterboxd, Spotify Wrapped, Goodreads, Gen Z

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Context

On February 18, 2026, an X (formerly Twitter) user posted (Appendix C) “First time in a while where I haven’t logged something on Letterboxd in more than a week!” Another responded, “Whenever I reach six days without logging a movie, I intentionally force myself to watch one to keep my streak going.” What appears at first glance as a humorous exchange, illustrates a broader transformation in contemporary media engagement: audiences no longer consume entertainment passively but actively perform their cultural habits in highly visible, gamified, and socially quantified digital spaces. In the hyper-connected landscape of the 21st century, entertainment has transcended its traditional role as a source of personal enrichment and solitary enjoyment. A new category of digital platforms has emerged to quantify, organize, and socialize individuals’ cultural consumption habits. This thesis introduces the term “Media Consumption Tracking Platforms” (MCTPs) to describe digital services like Letterboxd for films, Spotify Wrapped for music, and Goodreads for literature that systematically log, quantify, and socialize users’ engagement with cultural content. Initially designed as tools for personal organization and

discovery, MCTPs have evolved into spaces where private viewing, listening, and reading habits are transformed into public performances, curated and broadcast to peers. MCTPs differ from general social media platforms in crucial ways. Unlike Instagram or X, where users post diverse content, MCTPs are structured specifically around the act of tracking and displaying cultural consumption. They combine three distinctive features: (1) systematic logging and quantification of media consumption (e.g., number of films watched, hours of music streamed), (2) gamification elements that incentivize consumption and competition (e.g., reading challenges, “top listener” badges, year-end statistics), and (3) social

features that encourage comparison and display of cultural taste (e.g., public profiles, follower systems, shareable statistics). This unique combination transforms what was once a private, intrinsically-motivated activity into a public, externally-validated performance. The scale of engagement with media consumption tracking platforms is striking. Spotify Wrapped, in particular, has experienced rapid and sustained growth, increasing from approximately 156 million engaged users in 2022 (Time, 2023) to over 200 million users within the first 24 hours of its 2025 release, generating an estimated 500 million shares across social media platforms (Music Business Worldwide, 2025). Letterboxd experienced similar growth, increasing from 11.4 million members at the end of 2023 to 17 million by 2024. During that period, users collectively logged over 701 million films watched and authored more than 96.4 million reviews, highlighting the intensity and visibility of film consumption on the platform (Letterboxd Year in Review, reported in Deadline, 2025). Comparable patterns are evident within literary consumption: in 2024, more than 9 million Goodreads users participated in the platform's annual Reading Challenge, collectively committing to read over 356 million books (Goodreads, 2024). These figures show not only that MCTPs are widely used, but also that they are part of everyday social life, where cultural consumption is increasingly treated as data to be tracked, compared, and publicly displayed.



Figure 1. presents Letterboxd (Appstore)

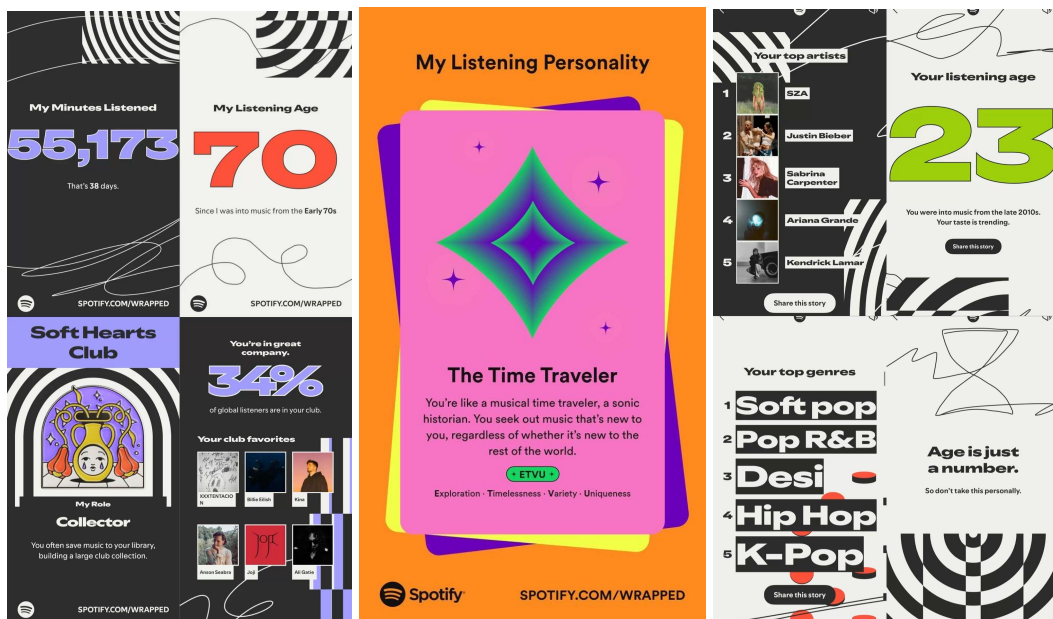


Figure 2. presents Spotify Wrapped feature (Appstore)

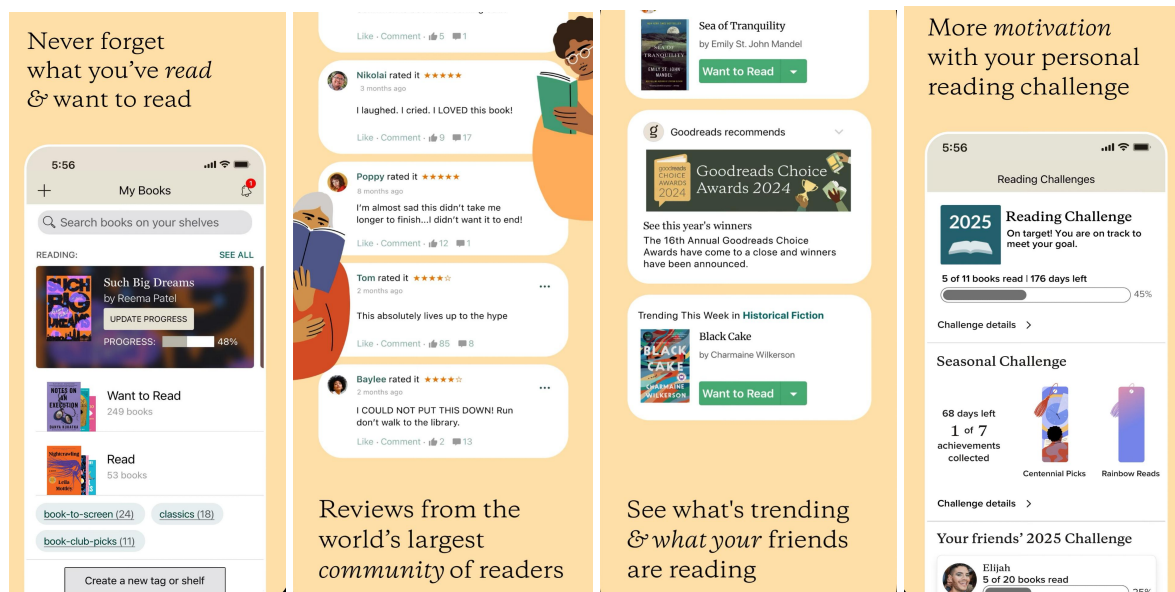


Figure 3. presents GoodReads (Appstore)

1.2 Research Problem and Gap

Understanding this transformation requires integrating multiple scholarly perspectives. Lupton's (2016) concept on the "quantified self" reveals how people use digital tools to track personal behaviors, yet her focus remains on health and productivity metrics rather than cultural activities. Bourdieu's (1984) foundational concept of cultural capital established taste as a mechanism for social distinction, yet predates the digital platforms that make distinctions visible and measurable. More recently, Boyd (2014) has examined how teenagers craft online identities, while research on gamification has explored how game-like features shape user engagement in digital contexts (Deterding et al., 2011). Separately, researchers like Kross et al. (2013) have traced social media's effects on wellbeing and mental health, while Twenge (2006) has examined generational shifts in self-focus and mental health in the age of social media. While this body of literature provides valuable insights, what remains missing is an analysis of media consumption tracking platforms as environments in which taste formation, identity work, and social comparison are

simultaneously shaped. Moreover, empirical research remains limited regarding users' lived experiences with these platforms, including their motivations for tracking consumption, the ways ongoing quantification may shape their relationship with cultural content, and the tensions that may arise between authentic engagement and performative display. As a result, the cognitive and emotional effects of treating cultural taste as measurable and socially visible data, as well as the broader implications for cultural diversity and aesthetic engagement, remain insufficiently explored. The core managerial and societal problem addressed by this thesis centers on the increasingly blurred lines between genuine engagement with media and the performance of engagement for social capital. For arts and culture institutions, this presents the challenge of cultivating a consumer base that values meaningful engagement with content rather than simply chasing metrics and trends. Kross et al. (2013) show that more frequent Facebook use predicts subsequent declines in momentary mood and life satisfaction among young adults, while Twenge (2017) has linked increased smartphone and social media use to rising rates of anxiety and depression among young people. Finally, there is the issue of the commodification of taste, where cultural preferences are increasingly used as markers of social status, potentially leading to the marginalization of diverse voices and the homogenization of cultural expression. As cultural consumption increasingly occurs through platforms that quantify and socialize media habits, questions arise about how tracking affects engagement patterns. If users adjust their consumption choices based on social visibility, or if metrics become primary motivators rather than content itself, this represents a notable shift in cultural participation. Empirical investigation is needed to determine whether these platforms primarily enhance cultural engagement through community building and discovery features, or whether they introduce pressures that constrain exploration and diversity in consumption. Understanding these dynamics provides

evidence for assessing how digital tracking shapes the relationship between individuals and cultural content in contemporary media environments.

1.3 Research Question, Objectives, and Contributions

This thesis seeks to address these research gaps by exploring the following question: How does the use of media consumption tracking platforms like Letterboxd, Spotify Wrapped, and Goodreads influence users' self-perception, social interactions, and cultural identity in the context of late-modern, digital society? To address this overarching question, the study pursues three specific objectives:

1. To identify and analyze user motivations for engaging with media consumption tracking platforms and their tracking/social features
2. To examine how quantification and social visibility shape users' media consumption choices and engagement patterns
3. To explore the tensions between authentic cultural engagement and performative consumption

in users' experiences

Research Approach This study employs a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative data collection. Qualitative methods include semi-structured interviews with MCTP users and digital ethnographic observation, while quantitative data will be gathered through a self-administered questionnaire. This design enables both in-depth exploration of user experiences and identification of broader patterns. The detailed methodology is presented in Chapter 3.

Contributions This research aims to make several contributions to scholarship on digital culture and media consumption: First, conceptual contribution: The study develops "Media Consumption Tracking Platforms" (MCTPs) as a distinct analytical category, providing a framework that distinguishes this phenomenon from general social media use and online identity performance. This conceptual

clarification enables systematic analysis of platforms that have been studied only in isolation. Second, empirical contribution: Drawing on mixed-methods data, the research provides systematic empirical evidence about user experiences with MCTPs, documenting motivations, practices, and perceived impacts that existing scholarship has not captured. This addresses the current gap in understanding how users actually experience and navigate these platforms. Third, theoretical contribution: The study integrates insights from cultural sociology, critical media studies, and social psychology to develop a framework for understanding how platform-mediated quantification reshapes cultural participation. This interdisciplinary synthesis addresses fragmentation in current research on digital culture and identity.

Finally, practical insights: The findings translate into evidence-based considerations for platform design, media literacy education, and digital wellbeing, bridging academic research and applied contexts. Thesis Structure This thesis is organised into five chapters. Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature on the quantified self, cultural capital, digital identity performance, social comparison, and gamification. Chapter 3 details the research methodology, including research design, sampling, instrument development, data collection procedures, and analytical strategy. Chapter 4 presents and discusses findings from both the quantitative survey and qualitative interviews, integrating them through cross-method synthesis. Chapter 5 concludes by summarising contributions, acknowledging limitations, and suggesting directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Quantified Self and Cultural Consumption

2.1.1 Introduction: From Self-Knowledge to Self-Tracking

The concept of the “quantified self” refers to practices of using digital technologies to systematically track, measure, and analyze personal data about daily activities, behaviors, and bodily states (Lupton, 2016). Emerging in the late 2000s alongside the proliferation of wearable devices, smartphone applications, and personal analytics platforms, the quantified self movement represents what Lupton (2013) describes as “self-monitoring and self-surveillance through numbers.” While self-tracking is not new—individuals have long kept diaries, food logs, and personal records—digital technologies enable unprecedented granularity, continuity, and visualization of personal data (Neff & Nafus, 2016). This transformation from occasional self-reflection to continuous self-measurement raises fundamental questions about identity, agency, and the relationship between data and selfhood. Originally focused on health and fitness tracking—monitoring steps walked, calories consumed, sleep patterns, and exercise routines—the logic of quantification has expanded to encompass productivity, mental states, and increasingly, cultural and leisure activities (Swan, 2013). Media consumption tracking platforms (MCTPs) exemplify this expansion. Goodreads enables users to log every book read, setting annual reading goals and visualizing progress through statistics and charts. Spotify Wrapped transforms a year of music listening into shareable data summaries featuring top artists, genres, and listening minutes. Letterboxd allows film enthusiasts to maintain detailed viewing diaries, tracking films watched and patterns over time. Understanding how self-tracking operates provides crucial insight into how these platforms transform cultural consumption into quantifiable, trackable data. This

section examines the theoretical foundations of the quantified self, the mechanisms through which datafication shapes identity and behavior, and the critical questions that emerge when tracking extends from bodily optimization to aesthetic experience.

2.1.2 Theoretical Foundations of the Quantified Self

2.1.2.1 Origins and Core Concepts

The term “quantified self” was coined in 2007 by Wired magazine editors Gary Wolf and Kevin Kelly to describe a community of “self-trackers” who used technology to collect personal data (Wolf, 2010). Wolf articulated the movement’s central premise in The New York Times Magazine: “numbers are making their way into the smallest crevices of our lives,” transforming subjective experiences into objective measurements. The underlying assumption is that systematic data collection enables individuals to gain self-knowledge that would otherwise remain inaccessible—revealing patterns, correlations, and insights invisible to unaided introspection (Swan, 2013). Lupton’s (2016) comprehensive sociological analysis, published by Polity Press as *The Quantified Self: A Sociology of Self-Tracking*, positions the quantified self within broader processes of datafication—the transformation of social action into quantified data (Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier, 2013). She identifies five key dimensions of self-tracking practices. First, self-monitoring involves the deliberate, systematic observation and recording of personal behaviors or states. Second, self-optimization reflects the goal of using data insights to improve performance, health, or efficiency. Third, self-discipline emerges as individuals internalize tracking regimes and regulate behavior accordingly. Fourth, self-entertainment acknowledges that tracking can be playful, curiosity-driven, and socially engaging rather than purely instrumental. Finally, self-presentation recognizes that tracked data increasingly becomes material for identity construction and social display (Lupton, 2016). These dimensions manifest distinctly in

cultural consumption tracking. While users of health and fitness tracking applications may track steps for health optimization, Letterboxd users log films for multiple reasons: documenting viewing history (self-monitoring), discovering patterns in taste (self-knowledge), maintaining viewing streaks (self-discipline), exploring new cinema (self-entertainment), and displaying cinematic expertise (self-presentation). The relative emphasis on these dimensions differs from health tracking, where optimization typically dominates.

2.1.2.2 Datafication and Identity Construction

A central theoretical concern within quantified self scholarship is how datafication reconfigures the relationship between individuals and their identities. In their influential review article published in the *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Ruckenstein and Schüll (2017) argue that self-tracking produces a “data double”—a numerical representation of the self that exists alongside and potentially competes with embodied, experiential self-knowledge. This data double is not merely descriptive; it becomes prescriptive, shaping how individuals understand themselves and what actions they take (Lupton, 2016). As Nafus and Sherman (2014) observe, “the data and the self become increasingly entangled,” with numbers mediating self-perception in ways that can both illuminate and constrain. The implications are significant. Traditional modes of self-knowledge—introspection, reflection, narrative self-construction—involve interpretation, ambiguity, and subjective meaning-making (Ricoeur, 1992). Quantified data, by contrast, presents itself as objective, precise, and empirical (Porter, 1995). This shift from qualitative to quantitative self-understanding can create what Lupton (2016) calls a “faith in numbers,” where numerical representations are trusted more than lived experience. Users may trust a wearable device’s assessment of sleep quality more than their own felt sense of restfulness, or accept Spotify’s algorithmic categorization of their musical taste over their subjective preferences. In

the context of media consumption tracking, this tension between data and experience operates differently than in health tracking. Prey (2018) argues that Spotify's data infrastructure transforms music listening from an aesthetic experience into quantifiable behavioral patterns—tracks played, skip rates, replay frequencies, listening contexts. The platform's algorithmic interpretation of this data claims to “know” users' musical taste better than users themselves, generating personalized recommendations based on pattern recognition rather than stated preferences. This can create what Prey (2018) calls a tension in musical identity, where users question whether their “true” taste is what they consciously prefer or what the algorithm detects in their behavior. Similarly, Goodreads' reading statistics—books completed, pages read, average rating given—create a quantified reading identity that may diverge from users' subjective sense of themselves as readers. Thelwall and Kousha (2017), in research published in the *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, found that Goodreads functions

simultaneously as a cataloging tool, social network, and recommendation system, with users engaging in systematic tracking behaviors. A user who has logged 127 books in a year may come to identify as a “prolific reader” based on the metric, even if the reading experience felt fragmented or unsatisfying.

2.1.3 Motivations for Self-Tracking

Understanding why individuals adopt self-tracking practices illuminates the psychological and social functions that platforms like MCTPs serve. Existing research identifies multiple, often overlapping motivations (Choe et al., 2014; Rooksby et al., 2014). Health and wellness optimization represents the most widely studied motivation, particularly for physical activity and nutrition tracking (Lupton, 2013). Users seek actionable insights to improve fitness, manage chronic conditions, or pursue preventive health goals. The

underlying logic aligns with neoliberal ideals of self-responsibility and entrepreneurial selfhood, where individuals are expected to actively manage their own health and productivity (Ajana, 2017; Moore & Robinson, 2016). This optimization-oriented motivation appears less central in cultural consumption tracking, where improvement targets are less clear and optimization itself may seem inappropriate. Memory-keeping and documentation emerge as particularly salient motivations for media tracking. Morris (2015) found that Last.fm¹ users valued the platform primarily as a “listening diary”—a personal archive documenting their musical journey over time. Similarly, Letterboxd users frequently describe the platform as a “film diary,” enabling them to remember what they watched and when. This archival function serves both practical purposes (avoiding re-watching forgotten films) and nostalgic ones (revisiting past viewing phases as markers of personal history). Unlike fitness data that focuses on present optimization and future goals, cultural consumption data often looks backward, creating what van Dijck (2007) calls “mediated memories.” Curiosity and self-discovery motivate many self-trackers who describe tracking as intrinsically interesting rather than instrumentally useful (Rooksby et al., 2014). These users want to “see what the data shows” about patterns they had not consciously noticed. Hagen (2015), in her research on music streaming practices published in *Popular Music and Society*, found that Spotify users appreciated discovering their listening patterns—learning they listened to certain genres during specific activities, or that their taste evolved seasonally. This curiosity-driven tracking often lacks specific behavioral goals, instead reflecting what Neff and Nafus (2016) term “soft resistance” to purely optimization-focused uses of personal data. Social connection and community emerge as significant motivations when tracking occurs within platforms that enable sharing, comparison, and collective challenges (Lupton, 2017). While health tracking platforms offer step competitions with friends, cultural consumption platforms create

¹ Last.fm is a music platform and music recommender system that tracks your listening history.

communities of shared taste. Goodreads users join reading challenges collectively, Letterboxd users follow fellow cinephiles and discuss films, and Spotify users share their Wrapped summaries across social media. The social dimensions transform solitary consumption into participatory practice, introducing elements of belonging, recognition, and collective identity (Beer & Burrows, 2013). Identity expression and self-presentation motivate tracking when data becomes material for constructing and performing identity (Ruckenstein, 2014). This motivation is particularly pronounced in cultural consumption tracking, where taste functions as an identity marker. A marathon runner's accumulated mileage demonstrates athletic dedication; similarly, a Letterboxd user's count of films watched, breadth of international cinema explored, or detailed reviews written demonstrate cinephile credentials. The difference is that cultural consumption tracking directly signals taste, knowledge, and cultural sophistication—forms of identity that health metrics cannot easily convey.

2.1.4 The Mechanisms of Datafication: How Tracking Shapes Behavior

Beyond motivations for adoption, research examines how ongoing engagement with self-tracking technologies affects behavior, perception, and identity. Several mechanisms have been identified.

2.1.4.1 The Observer Effect and Behavioral Change

The act of measuring behavior can itself alter that behavior—a phenomenon known as the observer effect or reactivity (Gimpel et al., 2013). When individuals know their steps are being counted, they may walk more; when calorie intake is logged, consumption patterns shift. Critically, Etkin (2016), in her article “The Hidden Cost of Personal Quantification” published in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, demonstrated through six experiments that while measurement increases how much of an activity people do (e.g., walk or read more), it can simultaneously reduce how much people enjoy those activities. This occurs because

measurement can undermine intrinsic motivation—by drawing attention to output, measurement can make enjoyable activities feel more like work, which reduces their enjoyment.

This mechanism has clear implications for cultural consumption. If tracking films watched, music listened to, or books read makes consumption more instrumental and less intrinsically motivated, it could fundamentally alter the phenomenology of cultural engagement. Conversely, awareness of tracking might heighten attention and appreciation, enhancing rather than diminishing the experience (Gorm & Shklovski, 2019). Empirical evidence from media platforms suggests mixed effects. Hagen (2015), in her study of playlist practices among Spotify and WiMP users, found that user control was a primary motivation for playlist creation and curation. While her research focused on how users create, maintain, and organize personal playlists rather than on year-end statistics specifically, her findings suggest that streaming users engage in deliberate, thoughtful management of their musical collections. The broader implications for how tracking awareness shapes listening behavior remain an area requiring further empirical investigation, particularly regarding features like Spotify Wrapped that make consumption patterns explicitly visible. On Goodreads, tracking can accelerate reading pace as users race to complete books before year-end, potentially at the cost of comprehension or enjoyment. Some users report selecting shorter books toward the end of the year to reach their numerical goals, suggesting that the measurement target influences consumption choices.

2.1.4.2 Goal-Setting and Feedback Loops

Self-tracking platforms typically enable users to set targets (10,000 steps, eight hours of sleep, 52 books per year) and provide feedback on progress toward these goals (Consolvo et al., 2009). Goal-setting theory suggests that specific, challenging goals enhance performance when individuals are committed and receive feedback (Locke & Latham, 2002).

However, critics note that externally imposed or arbitrarily defined targets can create pressure, guilt, or obsessive focus on hitting numbers rather than addressing underlying needs (Sharon & Zandbergen, 2017). Goodreads' Reading Challenge exemplifies goal-setting in cultural consumption. Thelwall and Kousha (2017) found that millions of users annually set and publicize reading goals, with the platform providing ongoing feedback through progress bars and statistics. While some users report that challenges motivate increased reading, others describe feeling stressed when falling behind their targets, particularly when their progress is publicly visible to friends. The arbitrary nature of numerical goals (why 52 books rather than 30 or 80?) can create anxiety about meeting self-imposed targets that may bear little relationship to reading quality or personal enrichment.

2.1.4.3 Gamification and Extrinsic Motivation

Many self-tracking platforms incorporate game elements—points, badges, levels, streaks, leaderboards—to maintain engagement (Hamari et al., 2014). While gamification can increase

participation, self-determination theory suggests that such extrinsic rewards may undermine intrinsic motivation for the tracked activity itself (Deci et al., 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Individuals may come to perform activities “for the badge” rather than for inherent satisfaction, a shift with potentially problematic consequences for activities traditionally valued for their intrinsic rewards, such as cultural consumption (Whitson, 2013). Goodreads employs explicit gamification through badges awarded for reviewing books, participating in challenges, and achieving reading milestones. The platform also features group reading challenges where users compete for highest book counts, introducing competitive elements that transform reading from solitary pleasure to social contest. Spotify Wrapped functions as an annual gamified event, transforming listening data into shareable achievements complete with personalized graphics, superlative categories (“top 1% of listeners”), and retrospective

rankings. Webster (2021), in research published in *New Media & Society*, found that users often treated their statistics as competitive achievements, comparing listening minutes and positioning their musical expertise in relation to others. The event's game-like presentation—unlocking successive data reveals, achieving “top fan” status—frames everyday listening as performance to be measured and celebrated. Webster's findings on how personalisation shapes class identities and distinction are discussed in detail in Section 3.2.

2.1.5 Critical Perspectives: Surveillance, Discipline, and Data Commodification

While much quantified self literature emphasizes empowerment through data, critical scholars raise concerns about surveillance, disciplinary power, and commercial exploitation.

2.1.5.1 Self-Surveillance and Internalized Discipline

Drawing on Foucault's (1977) concept of panoptic surveillance, scholars argue that self-tracking represents a form of self-surveillance where individuals internalize monitoring and disciplinary logics (Lupton, 2016; Gilmore, 2016). Unlike external surveillance imposed by institutions, self-tracking is ostensibly voluntary and self-directed. However, this voluntariness may be illusory when tracking becomes normative, expected, or necessary for social participation (Ruckenstein, 2014). The disciplinary effects extend beyond behavior modification to the constitution of subjectivity itself. Constant measurement can produce what Till (2014) calls “quantified selves” who habitually translate experience into data, orient behavior toward measurable outcomes, and judge worth through numerical achievement. This represents a form of what Ajana (2017) terms “algorithmic subjectivity,” where identity becomes inseparable from data-driven self-management.

In cultural consumption contexts, this self-surveillance operates through taste rather than health. Beer (2013) argues that music streaming platforms create “listening subjects” who become conscious of themselves as data-generating entities, aware that their every click

and skip contributes to profiles that categorize, predict, and influence them. This awareness can make listening feel surveilled even when self-initiated, particularly when users know their data feeds algorithmic recommendations, social feeds, or annual summaries.

2.1.5.2 The Political Economy of Personal Data

Self-tracking platforms are typically commercial enterprises that accumulate vast quantities of intimate behavioral data (Ruckenstein & Schüll, 2017). While users may experience tracking as personal and empowering, the data generated has exchange value for platform companies who monetize it through advertising, sale to third parties, or algorithmic product development (Neff & Nafus, 2016). This creates what Zuboff (2019) terms “surveillance capitalism”—business models predicated on extracting, analyzing, and commodifying behavioral data. Prey (2018) provides detailed analysis of Spotify’s data economy, demonstrating how the platform converts listening behavior into multiple revenue streams: targeted advertising based on mood and context detection, licensing negotiation leverage based on popularity metrics, and algorithmic playlist curation that privileges certain artists (often those accepting lower royalties). Users receive “free” music and personalized recommendations, but the actual product being sold is their attention and behavioral data. Wrapped’s viral sharing extends this logic, turning users into unpaid marketers who advertise Spotify while generating additional data about social influence and sharing patterns. Goodreads, owned by Amazon since 2013, feeds readers’ activity—ratings, reviews, and shelving practices—into Amazon’s broader data ecosystem, where it can be used to refine recommendations and inform commercial decision-making. Driscoll and Rehberg Sedo (2019) argue that what users experience as helpful personalization is also a form of cultural taste data extraction that serves Amazon’s market optimization, situating Goodreads within a wider regime of book-industry surveillance and control.

2.1.6 Platform-Specific Research: What We Know About Media Consumption Tracking

While theoretical frameworks provide important foundations, understanding MCTPs requires examining platform-specific empirical research. This section synthesizes existing studies of Goodreads, Spotify, and Letterboxd, identifying what has been documented and what remains unexplored.

2.1.6.1 Goodreads: Social Reading and Quantified Literary Identity

Goodreads represents the most extensively studied media consumption tracking platform, offering insights into how readers engage with tracking, social features, and gamification. Thelwall and Kousha (2017) analyzed Goodreads as a social network site for book readers, examining a random sample of 50,000 members. Their research, published in JASIST, suggests that about three quarters of members with a public profile are female, and that there is little difference between male and female users in patterns of behavior, except for females registering more books and rating them less positively. In subsequent research, Kousha et al. (2017) compared Goodreads book metrics with different book-based impact indicators for 15,928 academic books across broad fields, finding Goodreads engagements were numerous enough in the arts (85% of books had at least one), humanities (80%), and social sciences (67%) for use as a source of impact evidence. Nakamura (2013), in her article “‘Words with Friends’: Socially Networked Reading on Goodreads” published in PMLA, examines how Goodreads transforms reading into a socially networked practice. Her analysis demonstrates how the platform enables public displays of reading activity that signal intellectual identity. Users do not merely track books read; they curate reading lists, write reviews, and participate in discussions that position them within literary taste hierarchies. The quantitative dimension (books completed) intertwines with qualitative performance (review

sophistication, obscure titles chosen), creating complex identity work that exceeds simple documentation. Driscoll and Rehberg Sedo (2019) show that discussions and reviewing practices on Goodreads often reproduce gendered genre hierarchies, with popular, feminized genres such as romance and young adult fiction treated as less legitimate, while literary fiction accrues higher cultural status. This suggests that Goodreads' tracking and social features interact with existing cultural hierarchies, potentially reinforcing rather than challenging literary taste distinctions.

2.1.6.2 Spotify and Music Streaming: Algorithmic Taste and Data-Driven Listening

Research on Spotify addresses datafication of music listening, though less focuses specifically on tracking features like Wrapped compared to algorithmic recommendation. Prey (2018) provides the most comprehensive critical analysis of Spotify's data practices, arguing that Spotify operates as "a massive machine listening apparatus" that tracks not just what users listen to but how they listen—skips, replays, playlist creation, listening contexts. This granular data serves personalization (recommendations, Discover Weekly) and commodification (advertising, licensing negotiations, artist royalty calculations). Music listening becomes data generation, with aesthetic experience secondary to behavioral measurement.

Hagen and Lüders (2017), in their article "Social streaming? Navigating music as personal and social" published in *Convergence*, examined how Spotify's social features are experienced within negotiations of music as personal and social through the acts of sharing music and of following others. Drawing on focus-group interviews with 124 Spotify and/or Tidal users, they found that users incorporate social awareness in non-sharing, selective-sharing and all-sharing approaches with strong, weak and absent ties. These ties are characterized by different configurations of social and music homophily, demonstrating how negotiations of music as personal and social shape how music-streaming services are

experienced. Karakayali et al. (2018) conceptualise recommendation systems as “technologies of the self,” arguing that algorithmic curation can shape how users reflect on and revise their musical identities. They found that datafication and algorithmic curation can function as “technologies of the self”—tools through which users examine and transform their music taste. Some users were surprised by their own data, forced to reconcile algorithmic characterizations with subjective self-understanding. Their research reveals the dual nature of recommendation systems: they can facilitate both algorithmic control and creative self-transformation. Webster (2021) provides crucial empirical insight into how Spotify’s personalisation features shape class identities and distinction. His qualitative research, based on 42 semi-structured interviews, demonstrates that personalisation is undermining opportunities to achieve social distinction by taking over the labour of music curation and compressing the time needed to appreciate music for its own sake. His findings are discussed in full in Section 3.2.

2.1.6.3 Letterboxd: The Understudied Platform

Letterboxd remains notably understudied in academic literature despite growing cultural influence. The platform enables users to maintain detailed viewing diaries, track films watched, and engage with a community of cinephiles through reviews and lists. However, peer-reviewed research specifically examining tracking behaviors on Letterboxd is sparse. The limited academic attention to Letterboxd is notable given the platform’s millions of members and cultural visibility. No peer-reviewed studies have systematically examined user motivations for tracking films, how logging affects viewing choices, the role of statistics in cinephile identity construction, or the relationship between tracking and aesthetic engagement. This gap is particularly significant because film tracking combines elements present in book and music tracking (taste signaling, cultural capital, completionist tendencies)

with unique aspects (film rewatching practices, the role of visual aesthetics in logged collections, international/arthouse film hierarchies).

2.1.7 Research Gaps and Implications for This Study

Despite the expansion of self-tracking into cultural domains, significant gaps remain in understanding how quantification affects engagement with films, music, and literature specifically. Existing quantified self research has three key limitations relevant to understanding MCTPs. First, most studies focus on instrumental activities—health improvement, productivity enhancement, goal achievement—where quantification serves clear optimization purposes. Cultural consumption, by contrast, is often valued for intrinsic, non-instrumental reasons: aesthetic appreciation, emotional engagement, intellectual stimulation, entertainment (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990). How quantification affects activities pursued primarily for their own sake, rather than for measurable outcomes, remains underexplored. Etkin’s (2016) research suggests measurement may undermine enjoyment of hedonic activities, but this has not been systematically examined in cultural consumption contexts. A small but growing body of work on media platforms—for example, Hagen’s research on Spotify listening practices and Nakamura’s analysis of Goodreads—points to tensions between tracking, social affordances and intrinsic engagement, yet these studies remain fragmented and platform-specific rather than forming a systematic literature. Second, existing research emphasizes private self-tracking—personal data collected for individual use and self-knowledge. While some studies examine social features like sharing step counts or competing in fitness challenges, these remain secondary to individual health goals (Lupton, 2017). MCTPs, however, integrate social visibility as a core feature, with consumption data explicitly designed for public display. The implications of this shift from private self-knowledge to public self-presentation require investigation. This distinction is

particularly relevant for platforms such as Letterboxd, Goodreads, and Spotify, where cultural engagement is continuously rendered visible, comparable, and socially interpretable. Third, quantified self scholarship has largely neglected the role of cultural capital in shaping tracking practices and their effects. Unlike step counts or sleep hours, films watched and books read function as markers of taste, sophistication, and cultural status (Bourdieu, 1984). Tracking cultural consumption is thus not merely about self-knowledge but potentially about identity signaling and social distinction. Webster's (2021) research on Spotify provides valuable insight into how streaming platforms interact with cultural capital, but similar investigations of book and film tracking platforms remain absent. Existing research has not adequately examined how quantification intersects with taste hierarchies and cultural capital accumulation.

2.1.8 Theoretical Implications for Understanding MCTPs

The quantified self framework provides crucial theoretical grounding for analyzing media consumption tracking platforms. This section brings into focus that first, MCTPs represent the extension of datafication logic from bodily optimization to cultural participation. They transform aesthetic experience—inherently subjective, interpretive, and resistant to measurement—into quantifiable data points. This transformation raises questions about whether and how the phenomenology of cultural engagement changes when consumption becomes tracked metrics. Second, the mechanisms identified in quantified self research—observer effects, goal-setting, feedback loops, gamification, visualization—likely operate in MCTPs but may produce different effects given the nature of cultural consumption. Understanding whether tracking 500 films watched enhances cinematic appreciation or reduces viewing to checkbox completion requires empirical investigation informed by self-tracking theory. Third, the critical perspectives on self-surveillance,

disciplinary power, and data commodification apply to MCTPs but must be examined in relation to cultural capital and taste performance. Tracking cultural consumption involves not just self-discipline but strategic identity work and social positioning, adding layers of complexity beyond individual optimization. Finally, the gaps in existing research highlight the need for domain-specific investigation. While quantified self theory offers valuable frameworks, the distinctive characteristics of cultural consumption—its aesthetic, interpretive, and socially symbolic dimensions—necessitate empirical study of how users actually experience platforms like Letterboxd, Spotify Wrapped, and Goodreads. The quantified self framework reveals how digital tracking transforms personal behavior into measurable data, and how this datafication reshapes identity, motivation, and self-understanding. Yet when applied to cultural consumption, one dimension remains insufficiently addressed by self-tracking theory alone: the social meaning of what is tracked. Unlike step counts or sleep hours, the films users watch, the music they stream, and the books they read carry symbolic weight—they signal taste, knowledge, and belonging. To understand how MCTPs operate as sites of social positioning and not merely personal documentation, it is necessary to examine the concept of cultural capital and its transformation in digital environments. The following section turns to Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of taste and its contemporary extensions, exploring how

platforms like Letterboxd, Spotify, and Goodreads reconfigure the mechanisms through which cultural distinction is accumulated, displayed, and contested.

2.2 Cultural Capital and Digital Distinction

2.2.1 Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Capital

Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) foundational work *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* established that cultural preferences operate as mechanisms of social

differentiation. Bourdieu argues that taste — far from being a neutral expression of individual preference — functions as a form of capital that can be accumulated, displayed, and converted into social advantage. In his formulation, cultural capital exists in three states: embodied (dispositions and competencies), objectified (cultural goods), and institutionalized (educational credentials). Individuals deploy cultural capital to signal membership in social groups and to distinguish themselves from others, making taste something that “classifies, and it classifies the classifier” (Bourdieu, 1984). Central to Bourdieu’s framework is the concept of habitus — the system of durable dispositions acquired through socialization that shapes how individuals perceive, appreciate, and engage with cultural objects (Bourdieu, 1984). Habitus operates largely unconsciously, generating practices and perceptions that appear natural while actually reproducing social hierarchies. The “legitimate” tastes of dominant classes become naturalized as superior, while popular or mass cultural preferences are positioned as vulgar or unsophisticated.

2.2.2 Digital Platforms and the Transformation of Cultural Capital

While Bourdieu’s framework predates digital media, scholars have increasingly applied his concepts to online cultural practices. Media consumption tracking platforms introduce novel dynamics to cultural capital accumulation and display. Unlike traditional contexts where demonstrating cultural knowledge required face-to-face interaction or physical collection display, MCTPs enable continuous, quantified, and networked performances of taste. As Beer (2013) argues in *Popular Culture and New Media*, digital platforms create new modalities for circulating cultural capital, where data about consumption itself becomes a resource for identity construction and social positioning. Webster (2021), in research published in *New Media & Society*, provides the most detailed

empirical insight into how streaming platforms shape the performance of class identities and distinction. Drawing on 42 semi-structured interviews, Webster examined how Spotify's personalisation features—including algorithmic playlists like Discover Weekly and the annual Wrapped summary—are experienced by users with varying levels of cultural capital. His findings reveal that those with cultural capital at stake — particularly young, male cultural omnivores — perceived algorithmic personalisation as challenging their claims to social distinction by taking over the labour of music curation. For these users, the ability to discover and curate music independently was central to their identity as discerning listeners; when algorithms performed this work for them, it compressed the time and effort traditionally required to develop musical expertise, thereby undermining the distinction that such expertise conferred. Personalisation was not experienced uniformly, however: users with less investment in musical distinction found algorithmic recommendations convenient and enjoyable rather than threatening. Webster's research suggests that MCTPs may be transforming the mechanisms through which cultural capital operates: the traditional markers of distinction (obscure knowledge, rare tastes, curatorial skill) become visible as platform metrics while simultaneously being threatened by algorithmic recommendation.

2.2.3 The Quantification of Cultural Capital

MCTPs introduce a distinctive transformation: the quantification of cultural capital. Traditionally, cultural capital operated through qualitative markers — depth of knowledge, sophistication of interpretation, breadth of exposure. Platforms like Letterboxd, Spotify Wrapped, and Goodreads translate these qualities into numbers: films watched, listening minutes, books completed. This quantification makes cultural capital newly visible and comparable. Bourdieu (1984) emphasized that cultural capital often operates through subtle cues legible primarily to those already possessing it. MCTP metrics, by contrast, render

cultural consumption explicit and accessible to broad audiences. Furthermore, quantification may flatten qualitative distinctions. A user who has watched 200 films receives the same numerical credit regardless of whether those films represent challenging arthouse cinema or mainstream blockbusters. As Thelwall and Kousha (2017) found in their analysis of Goodreads, platform metrics often emphasize quantity over quality, potentially undermining traditional modes of distinction that valorize depth, difficulty, and discrimination.

2.2.4 Algorithmic Identity and Platform Mediation

Recent scholarship has examined how algorithmic systems shape identity construction in ways that extend beyond simple quantification. Gillespie (2014), in his influential chapter “The Relevance of Algorithms” published in *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication,*

Materiality, and Society (MIT Press), argues that algorithms embedded in search engines, social media platforms, and recommendation systems play an increasingly important role in selecting what information is considered most relevant to us, a crucial feature of participation in public life. As we embrace computational tools as primary media of expression, Gillespie contends, we subject human discourse and knowledge to the procedural logics that undergird computation. Gillespie (2014) identifies several dimensions through which algorithms exert influence: patterns of inclusion (what data algorithms are designed to assess and how they draw on it); cycles of anticipation (how users, aware they are being assessed, may adjust behavior to suit algorithmic criteria); the evaluation of relevance (how algorithms determine what matters); the promise of algorithmic objectivity (how providers frame algorithms as neutral); and the production of calculated publics (how algorithms create representations of collective interest). Each dimension has implications for understanding how MCTPs shape cultural consumption and identity.

2.2.4.1 The Algorithmic Imaginary

Building on this theoretical foundation, Bucher (2017) introduces the concept of the “algorithmic imaginary” in research published in *Information, Communication & Society*. Through analysis of tweets and interviews with 25 ordinary Facebook users, Bucher examines how people experience and make sense of algorithms given their often hidden and invisible nature. She argues that the algorithmic imaginary² is not merely descriptive but generative, actively shaping both user behavior and the algorithms themselves. Bucher’s (2017) research reveals that users develop complex, often emotionally charged relationships with algorithmic systems. Participants reported feeling “creeped out” when algorithms seemed to know too much, confused when recommendations seemed off-base, and frustrated when unable to understand why certain content appeared in their feeds. Critically, Bucher found that users adjust their behavior based on assumptions about algorithmic function, even when those assumptions are inaccurate. This creates a feedback loop: user behavior shapes algorithmic outputs, which in turn shape subsequent behavior, with the algorithmic imaginary mediating the entire process. For MCTPs, the algorithmic imaginary has particular significance. Spotify users may adjust their listening based on beliefs about how the algorithm will interpret their choices—skipping songs they fear will “pollute” their recommendations, deliberately streaming preferred artists to shape their data profile, or avoiding guilty pleasures that might compromise their algorithmic identity as sophisticated listeners. As Webster (2021) found (see Section 3.2), users with cultural capital at stake experienced personalization as threatening their claims to musical expertise. The algorithm’s characterization of their taste—made visible through features like Discover Weekly and Wrapped—could either validate or undermine their sense of themselves as discerning cultural consumers.

2.2.4.2 Algorithmic Identity and the Data Double

Cheney-Lippold (2017), in his book *We Are Data: Algorithms and the Making of Our Digital Selves* (NYU Press), provides a comprehensive examination of what he terms “algorithmic identity”—the versions of ourselves that exist within corporate and governmental data systems. Drawing on Deleuze’s concept of the “dividual,” Cheney-Lippold argues that algorithms create and recreate us, using our data to assign and reassign our gender, race, sexuality, and citizenship status. These algorithmic identities exist independently of our self-understanding, constructed not for our benefit but for the purposes of those who operate the systems. Cheney-Lippold (2017) introduces the concept of “measurable types”—classifications empirically observed and transcribed as data that become discrete analytical models for profiling. These categories (“indie music lover,” “arthouse film enthusiast,” “literary fiction reader”) may have nothing to do with how users understand themselves, yet they structure the information users encounter, the recommendations they receive, and the advertising targeted at them. The gap between embodied identity and algorithmic identity creates what Cheney-Lippold describes as an “asymmetry of power”—users have little control over who they algorithmically are, while platforms leverage these algorithmic identities for commercial purposes. This framework extends the “data double” concept identified by Ruckenstein and Schüll (2017) in their *Annual Review of Anthropology* analysis of datafication and health. The data double—a numerical representation of the self that exists alongside embodied self-knowledge—takes on particular significance for MCTPs because it actively shapes future cultural consumption through algorithmic recommendations. Unlike a health tracker’s data double, which primarily reports past behavior, an MCTP’s algorithmic representation of taste continuously influences what cultural content users encounter, potentially creating feedback loops where past consumption patterns increasingly constrain future exploration.

2.2.4.3 Implications for Cultural Consumption Tracking

The algorithmic dimension adds significant complexity to understanding cultural capital accumulation in MCTP contexts. Users must negotiate not only human audiences who may judge their cultural consumption but also algorithmic systems that categorize, predict, and respond to their behavior. Prey (2018), drawing on Cheney-Lippold's (2011) concept of "pliable behavioral models," shows how Spotify constructs users' musical identities from real-time listening data, replacing static genre labels with dynamic, context-dependent profiles used to

drive recommendations and advertising. This raises tensions between embodied self-understanding and algorithmically inferred taste, particularly when features like Discover Weekly and Wrapped present the platform's version of who users "are" musically. For platforms like Letterboxd or Goodreads, where algorithmic recommendation systems operate alongside user-curated lists and reviews, similar tensions may emerge between self-constructed cultural identity and algorithmically inferred taste profiles. The public nature of MCTP profiles adds another layer: users may curate their tracked consumption not only for human followers but with awareness that algorithms are interpreting their activity, creating complex strategic calculations about authentic versus performed cultural identity. The critical algorithm studies literature suggests that these dynamics have implications beyond individual identity management. Gillespie (2014) argues that algorithms produce "calculated publics"—representations of collective interest based on aggregated user behavior. On MCTPs, this manifests in trending lists, popularity rankings, and "what's hot" features that present algorithmically determined cultural relevance. Users encounter not just their own taste profiles but platform-mediated representations of collective cultural consumption, potentially homogenizing taste as users orient toward algorithmically validated cultural objects while avoiding content that might mark them as outliers. The preceding analysis

demonstrates that MCTPs create new conditions for cultural capital accumulation, where quantified metrics and algorithmic mediation complicate traditional mechanisms of distinction. However, cultural capital does not operate in a vacuum—it is performed, displayed, and negotiated through ongoing acts of self-presentation. On MCTPs, users do not simply possess cultural capital; they actively construct and project cultural identities for diverse audiences through ratings, reviews, lists, and shared statistics. Understanding how these performances unfold requires a complementary theoretical lens focused on identity construction and impression management. The following section draws on Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical framework and its digital extensions to examine how MCTP users navigate the challenges of self-presentation in networked environments, including the phenomenon of context collapse that arises when cultural consumption becomes simultaneously visible to friends, strangers, and algorithmic systems.

2.3 Digital Identity Performance and Self-Presentation

2.3.1 Goffman’s Dramaturgical Framework

Erving Goffman’s (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* provides a foundational framework for understanding how individuals manage impressions in social interaction. Using a dramaturgical metaphor, Goffman argues that social life operates like a theatrical performance, with individuals acting as performers who present particular versions of themselves to various audiences. Central to this framework is the distinction between “front stage” performances — carefully managed presentations for public consumption — and “backstage” regions where individuals can relax their performed identities. Goffman’s concept of impression management describes the strategies individuals employ to control how others perceive them. These strategies involve manipulating “expressive equipment” — including setting, appearance, and manner — to convey desired impressions (Goffman,

1959). Importantly, Goffman emphasizes that successful performances require ongoing work to maintain consistency and avoid “breaking character” in ways that reveal the performed nature of social interaction.

2.3.2 Digital Self-Presentation and Context Collapse

Boyd’s (2014) research on teenagers’ social media use, published as *It’s Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*, extends Goffman’s framework to digital contexts. Boyd demonstrates that young people engage in sophisticated identity work online, carefully curating their profiles and posts for imagined audiences. However, digital environments introduce complications absent from face-to-face interaction: the persistence of digital content, the scalability of potential audiences, the searchability of posts, and the collapsing of multiple social contexts into single platforms — what Boyd terms “context collapse” (boyd, 2014). Context collapse is particularly relevant to MCTPs. When users log films on Letterboxd or share Spotify Wrapped summaries, their cultural consumption becomes visible to diverse audiences simultaneously — friends, acquaintances, strangers, potential romantic partners, and professional contacts. Users must navigate the challenge of presenting a coherent cultural identity that works across these varied contexts, potentially leading to strategic consumption choices designed to project desired impressions. Research on social media self-presentation has documented the significant effort users invest in curating their digital identities. Hogan (2010), writing in the *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, distinguishes between “performances” (synchronous interactions where users respond in real-time) and “exhibitions” (asynchronous displays of curated content). MCTPs function primarily as exhibition spaces, where users construct enduring displays of cultural identity through accumulated consumption data, ratings, reviews, and lists.

The dramaturgical perspective reveals that MCTP users engage in deliberate, strategic identity work, curating their consumption data as cultural exhibitions for multiple audiences. Yet this very visibility introduces a reciprocal dynamic: just as users present their own cultural identities, they are simultaneously exposed to the curated profiles and quantified achievements of others. This constant exposure to peers' consumption data creates fertile conditions for social comparison—a process with significant psychological implications. When users encounter a contact's Letterboxd diary filled with acclaimed international cinema, a Goodreads friend who has completed sixty books by mid-year, or a Spotify Wrapped summary boasting top-percentile listening statistics, the experience may trigger evaluative processes that affect self-perception and wellbeing. The following section examines how social comparison theory, research on fear of missing out (FOMO), and scholarship on digital media and mental health illuminate the psychological consequences of engaging with platforms that make cultural consumption continuously visible, quantifiable, and comparable.

2.4 Social Comparison and Psychological Wellbeing

2.4.1 Social Comparison Theory

Leon Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory, first published in *Human Relations*, provides essential theoretical grounding for understanding how MCTP users evaluate themselves in relation to others. Festinger proposed that humans have a fundamental drive to evaluate their opinions and abilities, and in the absence of objective standards, they do so by comparing themselves with others. The theory distinguishes between upward comparisons (comparing oneself to those perceived as superior) and downward comparisons (comparing oneself to those perceived as inferior), with different psychological consequences for each. Upward comparisons can motivate self-improvement but may also generate feelings

of inadequacy, envy, or dissatisfaction when the comparison target seems unattainably superior. Downward comparisons may enhance self-esteem by highlighting one's relative advantages but can also produce complacency or guilt. The direction and frequency of social comparisons significantly influence psychological wellbeing, with chronic upward comparison associated with lower self-esteem and life satisfaction.

2.4.2 Social Media, Social Comparison, and Wellbeing

A substantial body of research has examined how social media environments affect social comparison processes and psychological outcomes. Kross et al. (2013), in research published in

PLoS ONE, conducted an experience-sampling study that text-messaged participants five times daily for two weeks. Their findings demonstrated that Facebook use predicted negative shifts in both momentary affect (how people feel moment-to-moment) and life satisfaction over time. Importantly, these negative effects were not moderated by network size, perceived support, motivation for use, or pre-existing psychological characteristics. Subsequent research by Verduyn et al. (2015), published in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, clarified that passive social media use (browsing, viewing others' content) undermines wellbeing, while active use (posting, commenting, messaging) does not. They identified social comparison and envy as mediating mechanisms: passive consumption exposes users to curated highlight reels of others' lives, triggering unfavorable comparisons and negative affect.

2.4.2.1 Fear of Missing Out and Digital Social Anxiety

A construct that has received significant empirical attention in social media research is fear of missing out (FOMO)—defined by Przybylski et al. (2013) as “a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent.”

In their foundational study published in *Computers in Human Behavior*, Przybylski and colleagues developed and validated a 10-item FOMO scale across three studies, establishing FOMO as a measurable individual difference linked to patterns of social media engagement and psychological wellbeing. The theoretical grounding of FOMO research draws on self-determination theory (SDT). Przybylski et al. (2013) found that individuals with lower satisfaction of basic psychological needs—competence, autonomy, and relatedness—reported significantly higher levels of FOMO. Their nationally representative UK sample (n = 2,079 working-age adults) demonstrated that FOMO was robustly associated with lower need satisfaction, lower mood, and lower life satisfaction, while simultaneously predicting higher levels of social media engagement. Critically, FOMO mediated the relationship between deficits in need satisfaction and increased social media use, suggesting that individuals turn to social platforms to compensate for unmet psychological needs. The relationship between FOMO and social comparison has been empirically examined in integrated models. Research published in *Frontiers in Psychology* tested social comparison of ability (SCA) and social comparison of opinion (SCO) as distinct constructs mediating the relationship between subjective wellbeing and social network site addiction (Kim et al., 2023). Results demonstrated that SCA—comparing oneself to others on performance, material wealth, and achievements—together with FOMO, uniquely mediated this relationship, while SCO did not. This finding suggests that exposure to others’ accomplishments on social platforms triggers FOMO specifically when users engage in ability-based comparisons. A serial mediation model published in *Addictive Behaviors Reports* further illuminated these pathways, demonstrating that FOMO influences problematic social media use through social comparison and self-esteem (Servidio et al., 2024). Among 256 Italian university students, the study found that higher FOMO predicted more frequent social comparison, which in turn predicted lower self-esteem, ultimately contributing to problematic social media use patterns.

These findings suggest cascading psychological effects wherein FOMO initiates a chain of social comparison and diminished self-worth.

2.4.2.2 FOMO in the Context of Media Consumption Tracking Platforms

While FOMO research has primarily examined general social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, the construct has particular theoretical relevance for MCTPs. When users observe friends' Spotify Wrapped summaries revealing extensive listening hours, Letterboxd contacts who have logged hundreds of films, or Goodreads connections completing ambitious reading challenges, FOMO may operate in culturally specific ways. The public visibility of others' cultural consumption—quantified and displayed in achievement-like formats—creates conditions for what might be termed cultural FOMO: fear of missing out not merely on social experiences but on cultural ones. This cultural dimension of FOMO connects to Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital. Users may experience anxiety not simply about exclusion from social activities but about falling behind in cultural knowledge and taste development. When a Letterboxd user sees contacts logging critically acclaimed films or a Goodreads user observes friends completing reading challenges with literary fiction, the resulting FOMO may motivate strategic consumption choices—watching or reading to “keep up” rather than for intrinsic enjoyment. This aligns with Etkin's (2016) finding that measurement can transform hedonic activities into work-like tasks, potentially undermining the intrinsic satisfaction that cultural consumption traditionally provides. The relationship between FOMO, need satisfaction, and platform engagement suggests a potentially concerning cycle for MCTP users. Research consistently demonstrates that individuals whose psychological needs are less satisfied in daily life experience higher FOMO, which drives increased platform engagement (Przybylski et al., 2013; Riordan et al., 2022). For MCTPs specifically, this engagement involves not only passive consumption of others' cultural activities but active tracking of one's own consumption—creating what might

become a dual source of comparison pressure. Users compare their cultural consumption to others while

simultaneously measuring their own activities against platform-enabled goals and metrics, though the specific effects of cultural consumption tracking remain empirically unexplored yet.

2.4.3 Social Comparison on Media Consumption Tracking Platforms

MCTPs create distinctive conditions for social comparison that warrant specific examination. Unlike general social media where comparison dimensions vary widely (appearance, relationships, experiences, achievements), MCTPs focus comparison specifically on cultural consumption — a domain closely tied to identity and self-concept. Several features of MCTPs may intensify social comparison processes. First, MCTPs provide explicit quantification that facilitates direct comparison. Users can observe exactly how many films a contact has watched, how their reading pace compares to friends' progress, or whether they achieved “top listener” status. These precise metrics remove ambiguity, making comparison effortless and potentially more frequent. Second, MCTPs often incorporate ranking and leaderboard features that explicitly position users relative to others. Goodreads' Reading Challenge displays progress bars comparing users to friends; Spotify Wrapped reveals percentile rankings of fandom; Letterboxd enables sorting contacts by films logged. These design choices embed social comparison into platform architecture.

2.4.4 Generational Perspectives on Digital Media and Mental Health

Jean Twenge's (2006) book *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled — and More Miserable Than Ever Before* documents generational shifts in self-focus, expectations, and mental health. Twenge's research, drawing on large-scale longitudinal datasets, finds that recent generations report higher levels of

anxiety and depression alongside increased self-esteem and individualistic values. She attributes these patterns partly to cultural shifts toward self-focus and external validation. In subsequent work, Twenge (2017), in her book *iGen*, argues that the generation coming of age with smartphones shows distinctive patterns of mental health challenges that correlate with increased screen time and social media use. While debates continue about causation and effect sizes, this research highlights the importance of considering how platforms like MCTPs may interact with broader cultural and generational trends in self-presentation, social comparison, and wellbeing. The social comparison literature demonstrates that MCTPs create environments where cultural consumption becomes a basis for evaluating oneself against others, with potential consequences

for self-esteem, anxiety, and the experience of cultural FOMO. These comparison processes, however, do not arise spontaneously—they are actively facilitated and amplified by specific platform design choices. Reading challenges with public progress bars, annual listening summaries framed as competitive achievements, and percentile rankings that position users relative to millions of others are not neutral features; they are gamification mechanisms deliberately engineered to drive engagement. Understanding how these design elements interact with users' intrinsic motivations for cultural consumption is therefore essential to completing the theoretical picture. The final section of this review examines gamification theory and self-determination theory to analyze how game-like features embedded in MCTPs may reshape the relationship between users and the cultural activities they track—potentially transforming reading, watching, and listening from intrinsically rewarding experiences into extrinsically motivated performances.

2.5 Gamification and Motivation

2.5.1 Defining Gamification

Gamification refers to “the use of game design elements in non-game contexts” (Deterding et al., 2011). In their foundational conceptualization presented at the CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, Deterding and colleagues distinguish gamification from related concepts like serious games (full games designed for non-entertainment purposes) and playful design (incorporating playfulness without specific game elements). Gamification typically involves implementing discrete components — points, badges, leaderboards, challenges, progress indicators — drawn from games into applications, services, or activities that are not inherently game-like. MCTPs extensively employ gamification elements. Goodreads features annual Reading Challenges with progress bars, badges for reviewing milestones, and group competitions. Letterboxd enables tracking streaks, year statistics, and comparative rankings. Spotify Wrapped transforms listening data into achievement-style presentations with superlative categories and rankings. These features are designed to increase engagement, but their effects on user motivation and experience require careful examination.

2.5.2 Self-Determination Theory and Intrinsic Motivation

Self-determination theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000), provides a framework for understanding how gamification affects motivation. SDT distinguishes

between intrinsic motivation (engaging in an activity for its inherent satisfaction) and extrinsic motivation (engaging for external rewards or pressures). The theory identifies three basic psychological needs — competence, autonomy, and relatedness — whose satisfaction supports intrinsic motivation and wellbeing. Przybylski et al. (2010), in their article “A

Motivational Model of Video Game Engagement” published in *Review of General Psychology*, apply SDT to understand video game appeal. They demonstrate that games satisfying needs for competence (mastery, challenge), autonomy (choice, agency), and relatedness (connection, cooperation) produce greater enjoyment and positive wellbeing effects.

2.5.3 The Risks of Gamification: Undermining Intrinsic Motivation

A substantial body of research demonstrates that extrinsic rewards can undermine intrinsic motivation — a phenomenon known as the “overjustification effect” (Deci et al., 1999). When individuals receive external rewards for activities they previously found inherently enjoyable, they may come to attribute their engagement to the reward rather than intrinsic interest, reducing motivation when rewards are absent. This finding, replicated across numerous studies and meta-analyses, raises concerns about gamifying activities traditionally valued for intrinsic satisfaction. Etkin (2016), in research published in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, specifically examined how measurement affects enjoyment of hedonic activities. Through six experiments, she demonstrated that while measurement increases how much of an activity people do, it can simultaneously reduce how much people enjoy those activities. Measurement draws attention to output, potentially transforming enjoyable activities into work-like tasks evaluated by productivity rather than pleasure. This finding has direct implications for MCTPs, where cultural consumption — traditionally a hedonic, intrinsically motivated activity — becomes measured, tracked, and quantified. The gamification of cultural consumption raises distinctive concerns. Reading, watching films, and listening to music have traditionally been valued for qualities that resist quantification — aesthetic appreciation, emotional resonance, intellectual stimulation, imaginative escape. When these activities become structured around points, badges, challenges, and leaderboards,

they risk being transformed from intrinsically rewarding experiences into extrinsically motivated performances. Users may come to read for the badge rather than the book, watch films to complete challenges rather than for aesthetic engagement, or listen to music to maintain streaks rather than for musical pleasure.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research design, sampling strategy, instrument development, data collection procedures, and analytical methods employed in this study. The methodology was designed to address the overarching research question — How does the use of media consumption tracking platforms like Letterboxd, Spotify Wrapped, and Goodreads influence users' self-perception, social interactions, and cultural identity? — through a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative breadth with qualitative depth.

3.1 Research Design and underlying assumptions

This study adopts a convergent mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), integrating quantitative and qualitative strands to produce a comprehensive account of MCTP user experiences. The quantitative strand employs a cross-sectional survey to identify patterns, correlations, and predictive relationships among key psychological constructs. The qualitative strand uses semi-structured interviews to explore the lived experience of tracking, capturing meaning, ambiguity, and subtle aspects of lived experience that survey data cannot access. The rationale for mixing methods is both epistemological and pragmatic (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Epistemologically, the research question covers measurable psychological constructs (such as social comparison, FOMO and performative behaviour) as well as interpretive phenomena about how tracking reshapes the subjective experience of culture that would require different modes of inquiry. Pragmatically, the quantitative data

establish the generalisable structure of relationships among constructs, while the qualitative data illustrate the mechanisms and lived experiences that underlie those statistical patterns. The two strands are integrated at the interpretation stage through cross-method synthesis (Section 4.11), where the qualitative themes are compared with and used to deepen the quantitative findings.

3.2 Quantitative Strand

3.2.1 Sampling and Participants

The target population comprised Gen Z users (aged 18–30) of at least one media consumption tracking platform (Letterboxd, Spotify Wrapped, or Goodreads). Participants were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling via social media channels and personal networks. Although non-probabilistic sampling limits generalisability, it is widely used in exploratory

research on digital platform behaviour (Bryman, 2016) and was appropriate given the absence of a sampling frame for MCTP users. A total of 103 responses were collected, of which 102 were retained after one incomplete case was removed. The final sample comprised approximately 64% female-identifying and 36% male-identifying respondents. Age distribution was skewed toward younger Gen Z members (18–25, $n = 70$; 25–30, $n = 32$). Letterboxd was the most commonly used platform (64.7%, $n = 66$), followed by Spotify Wrapped (44.1%, $n = 45$) and Goodreads (12.7%, $n = 13$). Respondents were classified into three tracking intensity groups based on self-reported frequency: Low (33.3%, $n = 34$), Medium (29.4%, $n = 30$), and High (37.3%, $n = 38$).

3.2.2 Instrument Development

The survey instrument was developed specifically for this study, as no validated scale for MCTP-specific constructs existed at the time of data collection. Items were derived deductively from the theoretical framework established in Chapter 2 and refined through pilot testing. All items used a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) unless otherwise noted. Seven composite scales were constructed: Motivations (9 items, D scale). Items captured the range of reasons for engaging with MCTPs, mapped to Lupton's (2016) five modes of self-tracking: personal documentation (D1: "To keep a personal record/diary of what I've consumed"), content discovery (D3: "To get recommendations for new content to explore"), goal-setting (D4: "To set and track goals for my consumption"), social sharing (D5: "To share my taste and cultural interests with others"), community (D6: "To connect with a community of people who share my interests"), social comparison (D7: "To see how my consumption compares to others"), identity expression (D8: "To express my identity through what I watch/read/listen to"), accomplishment (D9: "To feel a sense of accomplishment when I reach milestones"), and enjoyment (D10: "Because it makes consuming media more enjoyable or fun"). Quantification Effects (6 items, E scale). Items measured the perceived behavioural and psychological consequences of tracking: increased consumption (E1: "Since I started tracking, I consume more media"), profile-driven choice (E2), changed behaviour due to statistics (E3), task-like obligation (E4: "I sometimes feel that tracking has turned media consumption into a task or obligation"), statistical satisfaction (E5: "Seeing my statistics gives me a sense of satisfaction"), and trust in algorithmic summaries (E6: "I trust the platform's summary of my taste as an accurate reflection of who I am culturally").

Social Comparison (5 items, F scale). Items operationalised Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory in the MCTP context, capturing the extent to which users compare their

consumption patterns, taste, and cultural knowledge with those of other platform users. Algorithmic Awareness (5 items, I scale). Items drew on Bucher's (2017) concept of the algorithmic imaginary, measuring users' awareness of and beliefs about how platform algorithms shape their recommendations, profile, and cultural identity. Performative Behaviour (derived). Items assessed the degree to which users engage in strategic self-presentation through their tracked consumption, drawing on Goffman's (1959) impression management framework. Cultural FOMO (derived). Items extended Przybylski et al.'s (2013) FOMO construct to the domain of cultural consumption, measuring anxiety about falling behind peers in taste development and cultural engagement. Tracking Pressure (derived). Items captured the extent to which tracking creates a sense of obligation or psychological burden, operationalising Etkin's (2016) concept of the hedonic cost of measurement.

3.2.3 Data Collection Procedure

The survey was administered online using a self-completion questionnaire distributed via social media platforms. Data collection took place in early 2026 over a period of approximately two weeks. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. No financial incentives were offered. Informed consent was obtained at the beginning of the survey, which included a brief explanation of the study's purpose and confirmation that responses would be anonymised and used solely for academic purposes.

3.2.4 Quantitative Analytical Strategy

All quantitative analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 29). The analytical sequence proceeded as follows: Descriptive statistics. Means, standard deviations, and ranges were computed for all composite scales and demographic variables. Reliability analysis. Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each composite scale to assess

internal consistency, with the conventional threshold of .70 (Nunnally, 1978) adopted as the minimum acceptable level. Item-total correlations were examined to identify potentially problematic items. Bivariate correlations. Pearson product-moment correlations were computed among all composite scales to identify the strength and direction of relationships.

Group comparisons. Independent-samples t-tests compared psychological outcomes between users of different platforms (Letterboxd vs. non-Letterboxd; Spotify Wrapped vs. non-Spotify Wrapped). One-way ANOVA tested differences across three tracking intensity groups, with eta-squared as the effect size measure. Multiple regression. Four hierarchical multiple regression models were estimated, each testing a specific hypothesis by examining the predictive contribution of theoretically specified independent variables to a designated dependent variable. Model assumptions (linearity, homoscedasticity, normality of residuals, absence of multicollinearity) were verified prior to interpretation. Demographic controls. Supplementary analyses examined whether gender and age moderated the key relationships identified in the primary analyses.

3.3 Qualitative Strand

3.3.1 Sampling and Participants

Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with Gen Z users of media consumption tracking platforms. Participants were recruited through personal networks and selected to capture variation in platform use, tracking intensity, and engagement style. The sample included users of Spotify (all eight), Letterboxd (seven), Goodreads (two), and additional platforms including Hobi, MyAnimeList, and Deezer (one participant each). Duration of platform use ranged from a few months to over twelve years. Participants ranged in age from approximately 20 to 30.

3.3.2 Interview Design

The interview guide was developed to address the three research objectives while allowing flexibility for emergent themes. Questions were organised around six thematic areas: platform usage patterns, profile perception and curation, performative consumption, cultural FOMO and social comparison, algorithmic awareness, and the subjective impact of tracking on the experience of media consumption. The guide was designed with increasing phenomenological depth: opening questions established factual patterns of use, middle questions explored social and comparative dimensions, and closing questions invited reflection on how tracking had transformed participants' relationships with cultural media. This structure encouraged participants to move beyond surface-level descriptions toward more introspective accounts.

3.3.3 Data Collection Procedure

Interviews were conducted via text-based digital communication — a method aligned with the digital-native practices of the target demographic (boyd, 2014) and chosen to reduce interviewer presence effects in discussions of sensitive topics such as self-presentation and social anxiety. Text-based interviewing also provided a natural setting for participants accustomed to articulating their thoughts about digital platforms through written communication. Participation was voluntary and anonymised. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and provided consent prior to the interview. Each interview covered the full range of thematic areas, though the sequence and depth varied depending on participants' responses.

3.3.4 Qualitative Analytical Strategy

Interview transcripts were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase methodology: familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final analysis. Coding was conducted inductively in the first instance, with codes subsequently mapped deductively against the theoretical framework to identify correspondences and departures. Four superordinate themes emerged from this process: (1) the authenticity-performance tension, (2) strategic management of the algorithmic gaze, (3) cultural FOMO as symbolic and taste-based anxiety, and (4) the phenomenological transformation of aesthetic experience through quantification. These themes are presented in Section 4.10 alongside illustrative quotations from participants.

3.4 Mixed-Methods Integration

The two strands of evidence are integrated at the interpretation stage through cross-method synthesis (Section 4.11). This integration follows what Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) term a "merging" strategy, in which quantitative results and qualitative themes are compared, contrasted, and woven together to produce a unified interpretation. Specifically, qualitative themes are examined for the extent to which they corroborate, deepen, or complicate the statistical patterns established by the survey data.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

All participation was voluntary and anonymised. Informed consent was obtained from all survey respondents and interview participants prior to data collection. No personally identifiable information was collected or stored. Interview participants are referred to by

number (Participant 1 through Participant 8) throughout the thesis, and any identifying details have been removed from transcript excerpts.

3.6 Methodological Limitations

Several methodological limitations should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional survey design precludes causal inference; the relationships documented are correlational and directional claims rest on theoretical reasoning rather than temporal precedence. The convenience sampling strategy and the overrepresentation of Letterboxd users (65%) and female-identifying respondents (64%) limit the generalisability of findings. The survey instrument was developed for this study and, while internal consistency was strong (all scales $\alpha > .80$), it has not been externally validated. The qualitative sample of eight interviews provides meaningful thematic insight but does not guarantee thematic saturation. Finally, text-based interviewing, while appropriate for the target population, may have limited the spontaneity and depth of some responses compared to face-to-face or video-based formats. These limitations are addressed further in Section 5.4.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents findings from the quantitative survey ($N = 102$) and the qualitative interviews ($n = 8$) conducted with users of media consumption tracking platforms. All quantitative analyses were conducted using SPSS; qualitative data were subjected to reflexive thematic analysis. The chapter is organised as follows: Sections 4.1–4.6 report quantitative results across descriptive, reliability, correlational, group comparison, regression, and demographic analyses; Section 4.7 presents the research aims and conceptual framework; Section 4.8 evaluates each hypothesis against the statistical findings; Section 4.9 presents the

integrated quantitative discussion; Section 4.10 presents the qualitative thematic findings; and Section 4.11 provides a cross-method synthesis.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics and Sample Characteristics

A total of 102 valid responses were retained for analysis after the removal of incomplete cases from the initial submissions. The sample was Gen Z (aged 18–25, $n = 70$, aged 25–30, $n = 32$), reflecting the core demographic of media tracking platform users. The gender distribution comprised approximately 64% female and 36% male respondents. Regarding platform usage, Letterboxd was the most widely used platform in the sample (64.7%, $n = 66$), followed by Spotify Wrapped (44.1%, $n = 45$) and Goodreads (12.7%, $n = 13$). Respondents were classified into three tracking intensity groups based on their self-reported tracking frequency: Low trackers (33.3%, $n = 34$), Medium trackers (29.4%, $n = 30$), and High trackers (37.3%, $n = 38$).

4.1.1 Composite Scale Descriptives

Table 4.1 presents the means and standard deviations for all seven composite scales. Scores were

Scale	M	SD	Min	Max	N
Motivations	3.24	0.51	1.60	4.60	102
Quantifications	3.27	0.52	1.71	4.71	102
Social Comparison	3.18	0.61	1.60	4.80	102
Algorithmic Awareness	3.77	0.71	1.60	5.00	102
Performative Behaviour	3.22	0.63	1.60	4.80	102
Cultural FOMO	3.14	0.71	1.40	5.00	102

Tracking Pressure	3.17	0.64	1.67	4.67	102
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computed as the mean of constituent items, yielding a theoretical range of 1.00 to

5.00. Scale

Pressure ($M = 3.17$) showed the lowest means but still exceeded the midpoint of 3.00, indicating that negative psychological consequences of tracking were present but moderate. The standard deviations ranged from 0.51 (Motivations) to 0.71 (Algorithmic Awareness, Cultural FOMO), reflecting moderate variability in responses. The comparatively low dispersion

of the Motivations scale suggests relative consensus around the reasons for engaging with tracking platforms, consistent with the notion that intrinsic motivations such as record-keeping and content discovery are shared across user types (Lupton, 2016).

4.2 Scale Reliability

Internal consistency for each composite scale was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha.

Table 4.2 presents the reliability coefficients and the number of items per scale.

Scale	α	Items	Interpretation	α Standardised
Motivations	.882	9	Good	.880
Quantifications	.807	6	Good	.800
Social Comparison	.889	5	Good	.889
Algorithmic Awareness	.833	5	Good	.834

with only five items each, indicating high inter-item coherence. Within the Quantifications scale, item-total statistics revealed that the item E6 ("I trust the platform's summary of my taste as an accurate reflection of who I am culturally") had a corrected item-total correlation of .205, substantially below the other items (.536–.723). This suggests

that trust in algorithmic summaries may tap a distinct construct—platform credibility—rather than the quantified self-tracking behaviors captured by the remaining five items. Despite this, removing E6 would only marginally increase alpha, and the item was retained for theoretical coherence with the Quantified Self framework (Lupton, 2016).

4.3 Bivariate Correlations

Pearson product-moment correlations were computed among all seven composite scales and tracking frequency.

Table 4.3 presents the complete correlation matrix.

	Track Freq	Motiv.	Quant.	SocComp	AlgoAw	Perf.	CultFOM O	TrackPr
Track Freq	1	.184	-.014	-.139	-.122	-.226*	-.144	.107
Motivations	.184	1	.612***	.506***	.408***	.480***	.457***	.609***
Quantif.	-.014	.612***	1	.774***	.597***	.890***	.745***	.923***
SocComp	-.139	.506***	.774***	1	.677***	.828***	.944***	.673***
AlgoAware	-.122	.408***	.597***	.677***	1	.648***	.664***	.492***
Perform.	-.226*	.480***	.890***	.828***	.648***	1	.752***	.764***
CultFOMO	-.144	.457***	.745***	.944***	.664***	.752***	1	.658***
Track Pr.	.107	.609***	.923***	.673***	.492***	.764***	.658***	1

Tracking frequency showed a weak negative correlation with Performative Behavior ($r = -.226$, $p < .05$) and non-significant associations with all other scales. This suggests that how often one tracks is largely independent of the psychological and social processes that tracking engenders—a finding consistent with the Quantified Self literature, which emphasizes that the qualitative meaning users derive from their data matters more than the sheer frequency of engagement (Lupton, 2016; Ruckenstein, 2014).

4.4 Group Comparisons

4.4.1 Platform-Based Comparisons (Independent Samples t-Tests)

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare composite scale scores between users and non-users of each platform. Because this study examines multi-platform users whose tracking behaviors may overlap, these comparisons should be interpreted as exploratory characterizations rather than causal attributions. Letterboxd (n = 66 users vs. n = 36 non-users). No statistically significant differences emerged between Letterboxd users and non-users on any of the seven composite scales (all two-tailed $p > .05$). The largest observed difference was for Tracking Pressure, $t(100) = 1.517$, $p = .132$, with Letterboxd users scoring slightly higher ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.62$) than non-users ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 0.68$). The absence of significant platform-specific effects suggests that Letterboxd use itself does not differentiate users on these psychological dimensions, consistent with the interpretation that tracking behaviors are shaped more by individual engagement patterns than by platform membership alone. Spotify Wrapped (n = 45 users vs. n = 57 non-users). Spotify Wrapped users similarly showed no significant differences from non-users on any scale (all two-tailed $p > .05$). The closest to significance was Motivations, $t(100) = -1.806$, $p = .074$, where non-users scored slightly higher ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 0.53$) than users ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 0.47$). This null finding for Spotify Wrapped is particularly noteworthy given the platform's highly publicized, gamified year-end feature; the data suggest that engagement with Wrapped does not reliably distinguish users' broader tracking motivations or psychological experiences. Goodreads (n = 13 users vs. n = 89 non-users). No significant differences were observed for any scale (all two-tailed $p > .05$). The small subsample of Goodreads users (n = 13) limits statistical power for this comparison; the largest effect was for Cultural FOMO, $t(100) = 1.326$,

$p = .188$, where Goodreads users scored somewhat higher ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 0.65$) than non-users ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.71$). This trend, though non-significant, may reflect the social reading community's emphasis on reading challenges and visible "currently reading" shelves.

4.4.2 Tracking Intensity (One-Way ANOVA)

One-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted to examine differences across the three tracking intensity groups (Low, $n = 34$; Medium, $n = 30$; High, $n = 38$) on all seven composite scales. Levene's test indicated heterogeneity of variances for Motivations ($p = .017$) and Quantifications ($p = .004$); however, ANOVA is robust to moderate violations with approximately equal group sizes. Effect sizes are reported as eta-squared (η^2).

Bonferroni-corrected post hoc comparisons identified the locus of significant differences.

Table 4.4 presents the ANOVA results.

Scale	F(2,99)	p	η^2	M Low	M Med	M High
Motivations	8.326	<.001	.144	3.00	3.49	3.25
Quantifications	7.371	.001	.130	3.14	3.56	3.17
Social Comparison	4.380	.015	.081	3.15	3.43	3.01
Algo. Awareness	14.152	<.001	.222	3.65	4.28	3.48
Performative	9.842	<.001	.166	3.23	3.57	2.94
Cultural FOMO	7.221	.001	.127	3.07	3.52	2.91
Track Pressure	6.791	.002	.087	2.96	3.43	3.16

All seven scales showed statistically significant differences across tracking intensity groups. The largest effect was for Algorithmic Awareness ($\eta^2 = .222$), followed by Performative Behavior ($\eta^2 = .166$) and Motivations ($\eta^2 = .144$). A striking and consistent

curvilinear pattern emerged: Medium-intensity trackers scored highest on virtually every scale, while High-intensity trackers often scored lowest or comparably to Low trackers. Bonferroni post hoc tests confirmed that the significant differences were primarily driven by the Medium group. For Algorithmic Awareness, Medium trackers ($M = 4.28$) scored significantly higher than both Low ($M = 3.65$, $p < .001$) and High trackers ($M = 3.48$, $p < .001$). For Performative Behavior, Medium trackers ($M = 3.57$) scored significantly higher than High trackers ($M = 2.94$, $p < .001$) but not Low trackers ($M = 3.23$, $p = .062$). For Cultural FOMO, Medium trackers ($M = 3.52$) scored significantly higher than High trackers ($M = 2.91$, $p < .001$) but only marginally higher than Low trackers ($M = 3.07$, $p = .028$). This inverted-U pattern has significant theoretical implications. It suggests that moderate-frequency trackers are the most psychologically engaged: they are the most aware of algorithms, the most prone to performative curation, and the most susceptible to cultural FOMO. High-frequency trackers, by contrast, may have either habituated to their tracking practices (reducing reflexive awareness) or may track in a more routinized, less emotionally invested manner. This interpretation aligns with Lupton's (2016) distinction between "pushed" and "communal" modes of self-tracking: routine, habitual trackers may engage less critically than those who track with more deliberate social intent.

4.5 Multiple Regression Analyses

Four multiple regression models were estimated to identify the predictors of key outcome variables. All models used the Enter method with individual survey items and composite scales as predictors. Collinearity diagnostics indicated no problematic multicollinearity.

Table 4.5 summarizes the four models.

Model / DV	R ²	Adj. R ²	F	df	p	SEE
1. Cultural FOMO	.896	.892	209.834	4, 97	<.001	.233
2. Performative	.711	.699	59.694	4, 97	<.001	.345
3. Algo. Awareness	.402	.378	16.321	4, 97	<.001	.584
4. Track Pressure	.590	.573	34.868	4, 97	<.001	.464

Model / DV = -.058, $p = .166$) and tracking frequency contributed virtually nothing ($\beta = .003$, $p = .928$). The near-total predictive dominance of Social Comparison over Cultural FOMO reinforces the bivariate finding ($r = .944$) and provides strong evidence that cultural FOMO is, in this context, essentially a manifestation of social comparison. This is consistent with Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory: users who look at others' consumption and feel they are falling behind may experience FOMO as an affective consequence of upward comparison. The non-significance of taste sharing and tracking frequency indicates that FOMO is not about broadcasting one's identity or tracking itself, but specifically about the comparative assessment of one's cultural position relative to peers.

4.5.2 Model 2: Predictors of Performative Behavior

The second model predicted Performative Behavior from Social Comparison (composite), Algorithmic Awareness (composite), D8 ("To express my identity through what I watch/read/listen to"), and tracking frequency. The model was significant, $F(4, 97) = 59.694$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .711$ (Adjusted $R^2 = .699$). Social Comparison was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .709$, $t = 9.431$, $p < .001$), followed by Algorithmic Awareness ($\beta = .158$, $t = 2.122$, $p = .036$). The identity expression item D8 was not significant ($\beta = -.013$, $p = .819$),

nor was tracking frequency ($\beta = -.108$, $p = .055$, approaching but not reaching significance). That Algorithmic Awareness positively predicted Performative Behavior is a key finding. Rather than serving as a “protective” factor that reduces performative curation, awareness of algorithmic mediation appears to amplify it. This is consistent with Bucher’s (2017) concept of the “algorithmic imaginary”: users who believe that algorithms shape their profile may strategically curate their consumption to “feed” the algorithm a preferred identity. The non-significance of the explicit identity expression item (D8) suggests that performative behavior is driven more by social comparison dynamics and algorithmic game-playing than by a conscious desire to express identity.

4.5.3 Model 3: Predictors of Statistical Satisfaction

The third model predicted the item E5 (“Seeing my statistics gives me a sense of satisfaction”) from D9 (“To feel a sense of accomplishment when I reach milestones”), D1 (“To keep a personal record/diary”), E1 (“Since I started tracking, I consume more media”), and tracking frequency. The model was significant, $F(4, 97) = 16.321$, $p < .001$, though it explained a more modest 40.2% of the variance (Adjusted $R^2 = .378$). The accomplishment motivation (D9) was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .392$, $t = 3.715$, $p < .001$), followed by increased consumption since tracking (E1; $\beta = .230$, $t = 2.083$, $p = .040$). Record-keeping motivation (D1) was not significant ($\beta = .131$, $p = .160$), nor was tracking frequency ($\beta = .003$, $p = .973$). The primacy of accomplishment motivation over record-keeping in predicting statistical satisfaction aligns with gamification research (Deterding et al., 2011), which links game-like tracking elements to feelings of achievement rather than just a personal archive: a finding consistent with Letterboxd’s design emphasis on film counts, annual statistics, and challenge completion. The significant positive effect of increased consumption (E1) suggests a reinforcement loop: users who consume more as a result of

tracking derive greater satisfaction from their growing statistics, which may in turn motivate further consumption.

4.5.4 Model 4: Predictors of Tracking Obligation

The fourth model predicted the item E4 (“I sometimes feel that tracking has turned media consumption into a task or obligation”) from Performative Behavior (composite), Cultural FOMO (composite), D3 (“To set and track goals for my consumption”), and tracking frequency. The model was significant, $F(4, 97) = 34.868, p < .001, R^2 = .590$ (Adjusted $R^2 = .573$). Performative Behavior was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .467, t = 4.530, p < .001$), followed by Cultural FOMO ($\beta = .346, t = 3.423, p < .001$). Goal-setting motivation (D3) was not significant ($\beta = .037, p = .639$), nor was tracking frequency ($\beta = .110, p = .111$). That both Performative Behavior and Cultural FOMO independently predicted the sense of tracking as obligation is theoretically important: it localizes the source of tracking burden in social and comparative processes rather than in the act of tracking itself. The non-significance of tracking frequency underscores this point: it is not how much one tracks but the social meaning attached to tracking that transforms it from a voluntary hobby into a felt obligation. This aligns

with Etkin’s (2016) finding that measurement can undermine intrinsic enjoyment by introducing external evaluative standards.

4.6 Demographic Controls

To assess whether demographic variables (gender and age group) contributed unique variance to the primary outcome variables, hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted for Cultural FOMO. In Block 1, gender and age group were entered; in Block 2, the composite scales were added. Block 1 (demographics only) was not significant, $F(2, 99) =$

0.187, $p = .829$, $R^2 = .004$, indicating that gender and age group together explained less than 1% of the variance in Cultural FOMO. Block 2 (adding composite scales) produced a dramatic improvement, $\Delta R^2 = .907$, $F \text{ Change} = 133.950$, $p < .001$, bringing total R^2 to .911 (Adjusted $R^2 = .902$). This confirms that the psychological constructs measured in this study—not demographic characteristics—are the meaningful predictors of cultural FOMO in this sample.

4.7 Summary of Research Aims and Hypotheses

This study addresses the overarching research question: *How does the use of media consumption tracking platforms like Letterboxd, Spotify Wrapped, and Goodreads influence users' self-perception, social interactions, and cultural identity in the context of late-modern, digital society?* Drawing on the integrated theoretical framework established in the literature review (Chapter 2), six hypotheses were formulated: H1: Stronger motivations for using MCTPs — combining personal documentation, social connection, identity expression, and gamification elements — are positively associated with greater perceived effects of quantification on consumption behaviour. H2: Higher levels of social comparison on MCTPs are positively associated with cultural FOMO. H3: Higher levels of social comparison and algorithmic awareness together predict greater performative consumption behaviour. H4: Tracking frequency is associated with differences in key psychological outcomes across groups, with medium-intensity trackers reporting the greatest levels of all measured constructs, reflecting a curvilinear engagement pattern.

H5: Among motivational factors, the sense of accomplishment derived from milestones and increased consumption volume predict greater satisfaction with personal statistics, indicating a gamification-driven feedback loop. H6: Cultural FOMO and

performative consumption together predict the perception that tracking has turned media consumption into a task or obligation, while tracking frequency does not.

4.7.1 Conceptual Framework and Analytical Approach

The conceptual framework integrates five theoretical perspectives into a unified model for understanding MCTP user experiences. The quantified self framework (Lupton, 2016; Ruckenstein & Schüll, 2017) addresses how datafication transforms cultural consumption into trackable metrics, creating a "data double" that exists alongside embodied self-knowledge. Bourdieu's (1984) cultural capital theory explains why cultural consumption tracking carries distinctive social significance: unlike step counts, films watched and books read function as markers of taste, sophistication, and cultural status. Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), extended to digital environments by research on FOMO (Przybylski et al., 2013) and passive social media use (Verduyn et al., 2015), provides the mechanism through which platform visibility generates psychological consequences. Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical framework, updated for digital contexts by Boyd's (2014) concept of context collapse and Hogan's (2010) distinction between performances and exhibitions, illuminates the identity work users perform through tracked consumption. Finally, the algorithmic identity literature (Bucher, 2017; Cheney-Lippold, 2017; Gillespie, 2014; Prey, 2018) addresses how platform algorithms shape, categorise, and respond to user behaviour in ways that complicate self-understanding. The survey instrument operationalised these frameworks through seven composite scales: Motivations (mapping to Lupton's five self-tracking dimensions), Quantifications (capturing datafication effects and the observer effect identified by Etkin, 2016), Social Comparison (operationalising Festinger's theory in the MCTP context), Algorithmic Awareness (reflecting Bucher's algorithmic imaginary), Performative Behaviour (drawing on Goffman's impression management), Cultural FOMO (extending

Przybylski et al.'s construct to cultural consumption), and Tracking Pressure (capturing the hedonic cost of quantification).

4.8 Hypothesis Evaluation

Table 4.6 presents the evaluation of each hypothesis against the statistical findings. All six

H	Hypothesis	Key Result	Outcome
H1	Motivations (+) associated with quantification effects	$r = .612, p < .001; \beta = .392$ (accomplishment $\rightarrow$ satisfaction)	Supported
H2	Social comparison $\rightarrow$ Cultural FOMO (+)	$\beta = .891, p < .001; R^2 = .896$ (Model 1)	Supported
H3	Social comparison + algorithmic awareness $\rightarrow$ performative behaviour (+)	$\beta = .709$ (SocComp), $\beta = .158$ (AlgoAware); $R^2 = .711$	Supported
H4	Medium-frequency trackers peak on all constructs (curvilinear)	ANOVA all sig.; η^2 up to .222; Medium > High on 6/7 scales	Supported
H5	Accomplishment + increased consumption $\rightarrow$ statistical satisfaction	$\beta = .392$ (D9, $p < .001$); $\beta = .230$ (E1, $p = .040$); $R^2 = .402$	Supported
H6	FOMO + performative behaviour $\rightarrow$ obligation; frequency not sig.	$\beta = .467$ (Perf.); $\beta = .346$ (FOMO); Freq. $\beta = .110$, n.s.	Supported

All six hypotheses were supported. algorithmic gaze does not liberate users but equips them to engage with it more strategically. Third, tracking intensity shows a curvilinear relationship: medium trackers are the most psychologically engaged, while high trackers appear to have habituated, aligning with Lupton's (2016) distinction between routine and communal modes of self-tracking. Fourth, tracking obligation is driven by social processes rather than tracking

frequency — it is not how much one tracks but the social meaning attached to tracking that transforms it from voluntary self-knowledge into felt compulsion. Fifth, psychological constructs are far more consequential than demographic variables: gender and age explained less than 1% of variance in Cultural FOMO, while psychological scales explained over 90%.

4.9 Qualitative Findings: Thematic Analysis of Semi-Structured Interviews

4.9.1 Sample and Method

To complement and contextualise the quantitative findings, eight semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with Gen Z users of media consumption tracking platforms. Participants were recruited through personal networks and interviewed via text-based digital communication — a method aligned with the digital-native practices of the target demographic (Boyd, 2014) and chosen to reduce interviewer presence effects in discussions of sensitive topics such as self-presentation and social anxiety. Full transcripts are included in Appendix A. Participants ranged in age from approximately 20 to 30. Platform use was varied: seven reported using Spotify; seven used Letterboxd; two used Goodreads; and one participant additionally used Hobi (tracking TV Shows), MyAnimeList (tracking Animes series), and Deezer's artist-ranking feature (Spotify's competitor). Duration of platform use ranged from three to over twelve years. Reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) methodology was applied, with codes inductively derived from the data and subsequently mapped deductively against the theoretical framework. Four superordinate themes emerged.

4.9.2 Theme 1: Authenticity Under Surveillance — The Performance-Genuine Engagement

Tension The most pervasive theme across all eight interviews was the tension between authentic cultural engagement and performative self-presentation. Participants occupied different positions on this spectrum, yet virtually all acknowledged its existence — supporting Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical framework and Boyd's (2014) concept of context collapse, wherein culturally diverse audiences collapse onto a single platform view. Participant 3 described the most explicit performative behaviour, deliberately choosing not to log films they had genuinely enjoyed if they were unlikely to be well-regarded by her followers, while simultaneously attempting to engage with trending music artists she did not particularly like: "I have tried getting into artists that were trendy even though I didn't like their genre [...], I purposely didn't log some films on Letterboxd because I liked them while they were not enjoyed by the general public or my followers." This behaviour maps precisely onto Hogan's (2010) concept of "exhibition" — the curated, asynchronous display of cultural identity for imagined audiences — and supports the

quantitative finding that Social Comparison was the dominant predictor of Performative Behaviour ($\beta = .709$, Model 2). Participant 6 articulated a more ambivalent relationship with performance, simultaneously expressing disgust at their own participation in it and acknowledging its compulsory quality: "I'm also disgusted at how much we care about it, yet I post my wrapped anyways." This self-aware complicity is consistent with Bucher's (2017) algorithmic imaginary: users who recognise the performative dimension of platform engagement do not thereby abandon it. Awareness deepens strategic participation — consistent with the quantitative finding that Algorithmic Awareness positively predicted Performative Behaviour (H3, $\beta = .158$, $p = .036$). By contrast, Participant 1 — a professional film researcher — maintained a position of principled resistance, acknowledging a small

performative dimension while insisting it was not central to her practice: "I do think it could be hypocritical to say that there is NO performance at all, but I don't think that in my case it's a big part of it." Participant 4 similarly described keeping their Spotify account private and uncurated for external audiences. These participants correspond to what Lupton (2016) terms archival or instrumental self-trackers — users whose primary orientation is personal documentation rather than social display. Their qualitative accounts align with the ANOVA finding that high-frequency trackers showed lower performative behaviour scores than medium trackers, potentially reflecting greater habituation and less social investment in the platform. Participant 8 offered a nuanced position, acknowledging that their profile represents a curated version of their taste while maintaining that performance remains secondary to genuine engagement: "I think my profile on those platforms is more like an edited version. It always reflects things I like and a part of me in that way, but I definitely try to filter what I show there." They further noted the influence of professional identity on consumption choices — studying cinema created a sense of obligation to engage with certain films — yet distinguished this from purely performative behaviour: "I sometimes consume some things because I feel like I should, mostly because I study cinema, but also because there are songs I know I will love and I love feeling like I discover some niche things." This account introduces a third motivational category alongside social performance and archival documentation: disciplinary obligation, wherein academic or professional identity creates consumption imperatives that are neither purely performative nor purely intrinsic. The distinction matters theoretically because it suggests that the performance–authenticity binary identified in the quantitative scales may be insufficient to capture the full range of consumption motivations.

4.9.3 Theme 2: Managing the Algorithmic Gaze — Strategic Consumption to Sculpt the

Data Self A second theme concerned deliberate management of algorithmic systems — behavioural adjustments driven not by social audiences but by a desire to shape or protect taste profiles. This constitutes an enactment of Bucher's (2017) algorithmic imaginary and Cheney-Lippold's (2017) concept of "measurable types." Participant 6 provided the most detailed account, describing systematic avoidance of entire genres to protect their algorithmic profile: "If I wanted to explore K-pop just for fun, I don't want that showing up on my algorithm. I avoid it. If I want to play musicals or Disney songs, or when I am with kids and they want to play music on my phone, I don't let them because it would mess up my algorithm." This behaviour constitutes a form of self-censorship directed not at human audiences but at the algorithmic system itself — extending the quantitative results by illuminating the precise mechanism through which algorithmic awareness produces performative curation (H3). The algorithm is experienced not as a recommendation tool but as an audience whose judgement must be managed. Participant 3 described the same dynamic in reverse — suppressing genuine enjoyment of a song to prevent it dominating their year-end statistics: "I sometimes catch myself thinking 'oh I must stop listening to this song so much, I don't want it in my wrapped.'" This involuntary self-monitoring illustrates Beer's (2013) account of "listening subjects" who become conscious of themselves as data-generating entities, transforming enjoyment into a liability when it conflicts with a desired algorithmic identity. Participant 2 described a different but related form of influence — social rather than algorithmic in origin: "I never avoided but I watched things that my friends logged because I was influenced." This distinction between algorithm-directed and socially directed consumption adjustment is theoretically significant. It suggests that

performative behaviour operates through two related but distinct channels — management of algorithmic self-representation and management of

social perception — which the regression models did not fully disentangle. Future research employing path analysis could productively separate these pathways. Participant 8 described a subtler form of algorithmic engagement — awareness of the platform as a review space that shapes self-expression: “I might change how I leave reviews on Letterboxd. I realise that I try to be funny on there and not as true to myself as I would like, in fear of how cringe people might think I am.” This account extends the algorithmic gaze to encompass the social audience embedded within the platform: the curation here is not directed at the recommendation algorithm but at the imagined readership of reviews. It represents a form of performative self-censorship operating through anticipated social judgement rather than algorithmic consequence — a mechanism that Goffman’s (1959) impression management framework captures more precisely than Bucher’s (2017) algorithmic imaginary.

4.9.4 Theme 3: Cultural FOMO as Symbolic and Taste-Based Anxiety

The third theme concerned the qualitative texture of cultural FOMO — the specific forms of anxiety experienced when participants observed others' consumption data. This theme provides phenomenological depth that aggregate scales could only approximate. Participant 6 described FOMO operating primarily at the level of taste distinction and symbolic positioning, framing the Wrapped event as a competitive display of cultural identity: “I worry and hope mine is cooler and edgier and more underground than everyone's.” This account illuminates the Bourdieusian dimension of cultural FOMO identified theoretically in the literature review: the fear is not simply about missing enjoyable experiences but specifically about falling behind in taste distinction and cultural capital accumulation. Their account of subsequently listening to a new artist after discovering peers

engaging with them demonstrates the behavioural consequence of comparative cultural anxiety — consumption driven by the need to remain culturally current rather than by intrinsic interest. Participant 6 also articulated a more global form of cultural FOMO connected to self-concept as a cultural consumer: "It has made me feel lame... makes me feel like I consume less than others and I'm not a real 'film lover' or 'music lover' which I see myself as." This self-diminishing upward comparison maps precisely onto the mechanism identified by Festinger (1954): exposure to apparently superior cultural engagement produces inadequacy rather than inspiration — consistent with the quantitative finding that Social Comparison was also the primary predictor of Tracking Pressure and Obligation (Model 4).

Participants 2 and 5 framed FOMO more positively, as curiosity-driven motivation rather than anxiety: "Yes I have FOMO not pressure because it seems so good so it makes me feel like I don't want to miss it." These accounts reflect the distinction between upward inspirational comparison (which can motivate) and upward contrastive comparison (which can diminish) — a nuance the composite Social Comparison and Cultural FOMO scales were not designed to distinguish. The qualitative data thus reveal heterogeneity within the high-FOMO group that aggregate scores conceal, and suggest that future scale development should attempt to separate these two comparison orientations. Participant 8's account of FOMO was comparatively moderate, suggesting awareness of the pressure without being consumed by it: "I sometimes feel the pressure to keep up but it honestly doesn't bother me that much. I'm okay with going at my own rhythm." This measured response represents what might be termed acknowledged but managed FOMO — a position in which the participant recognises the comparative dynamics identified by Festinger (1954) but exercises sufficient psychological autonomy to resist their behavioural consequences. This aligns with self-determination theory's emphasis on autonomous regulation: participants whose need for

autonomy is sufficiently satisfied may experience FOMO without it producing obligatory consumption patterns.

4.9.5 Theme 4: Quantification as Phenomenological Transformation — How Tracking

Reshapes the Experience of Culture The fourth and theoretically richest theme concerned how tracking platforms change not merely what users consume but how they experience culture. This theme most directly addresses the thesis's overarching research question, and provides qualitative corroboration for the quantitative finding that tracking obligation is socially rather than metrically produced. Participant 1 articulated the most incisive account, drawing an analogy that illustrates the fundamental tension between quantification and aesthetic experience: "You wouldn't go to the museum and rate a painting from 1 to 5." They went on to identify the specific phenomenological cost of tracking — the compression of interpretive time:

"I also regret the way it kinda crushes the opportunity for a movie to grow on you or think about it for a few days before really settling on how you think about it. Now you have to set it straight in your head as soon as you finished watching it." This account provides precisely the kind of testimony that quantitative Likert items cannot capture: tracking has accelerated and instrumentalised the temporality of aesthetic reception, transforming an open-ended interpretive process into a logistical task requiring immediate resolution. This is Etkin's (2016) hidden cost of quantification rendered in experiential terms — and it is a cost that does not appear in tracking frequency or obligation scales because it concerns the quality, not the quantity, of the cultural experience itself. Participant 6 articulated the same transformation more tersely, in a statement that encapsulates Goffman's (1959) entire dramaturgical framework in six words: "It's public not personal, we all act differently

observed." The transformation of private cultural experience into a public performance changes its character fundamentally — not because users are being dishonest, but because the structural conditions of social observability alter the activity itself. Participant 1 also observed an emergent cultural shift beyond individual user psychology, describing how Letterboxd's "Top 4" format — popularised through red-carpet interviews — has restructured everyday cultural conversation: "Now when I ask someone for their favourite film they are always sceptical and feel pressured to answer, as soon as I say your top 4 Letterboxd it changes, they get more chatty and comfortable." This observation suggests that MCTP conventions have not merely tracked but actively restructured the grammar of cultural discourse, migrating from digital space into embodied social interaction. It provides evidence that the platforms' quantified logic has effects extending beyond individual psychology into the sociology of cultural practice — a finding with implications for cultural institutions and public discourse about taste. Participants 4 and 5 reported minimal phenomenological transformation, using their platforms primarily as personal archives. Participant 5 noted that they enjoy stats for personal insight rather than to optimise or log more; Participant 5 affirmed that tracking helped memory without shaping consumption choices. These accounts suggest that the phenomenological costs identified by Etkin (2016) are not universal but are moderated by social embeddedness: users who track privately and without a social audience appear largely insulated from the comparative and performative pressures that transform tracking into obligation for more socially invested users.

Participant 8 provided a distinctive perspective on the phenomenological transformation, framing platform engagement through the lens of self-knowledge and organisational satisfaction: "I really like when Spotify Wrapped comes up, as I enjoy any other form of quiz that would reveal some part of me. I feel like it shows how productive I've been and I love what it tells about me." This account reveals how quantification can be

experienced as pleasurable self-revelation rather than constraining surveillance — the annual summary functions as a mirror that reflects identity back to the user in a way that generates satisfaction rather than anxiety. However, the framing of cultural consumption as “productivity” is itself significant: it suggests that the quantification logic has been internalised to the point where aesthetic engagement is valued partly through metrics of volume and commitment. Etkin’s (2016) hidden cost of quantification may thus operate even in cases where users experience tracking as enjoyable, by subtly reframing what counts as valuable engagement.

4.10 Cross-Method Synthesis: Qualitative Evidence in Dialogue with

Quantitative Findings The qualitative data support and enrich the quantitative findings in four substantive ways, strengthening the overall argument of the thesis. First, the qualitative data provide phenomenological specificity to the near-unity correlation between Social Comparison and Cultural FOMO ($r = .944$, H2 supported). Interview accounts show that this statistical relationship is lived as competitive anxiety about cultural standing — particularly about taste distinction and symbolic positioning within peer groups — not merely as diffuse apprehension about missing experiences. Participant 6’s account of worrying that their Wrapped summary would be less “underground” than peers’ gives experiential content to a correlation coefficient. Second, the qualitative data illuminate the mechanism behind H3 — Algorithmic Awareness → Performative Behaviour — through participants’ detailed accounts of deliberate consumption avoidance to protect algorithmic taste profiles. Participant 6’s refusal to let children use their phone in case they “mess up” their algorithm illustrates Bucher’s (2017) algorithmic imaginary operating in practice, extending the quantitative $\beta = .158$ finding into a concrete behavioural logic.

Third, the qualitative data corroborate H6 by demonstrating, at the individual level, that tracking obligation is produced by social immersion rather than tracking volume. Participants 4 and 5 — who track regularly but privately — experienced no sense of obligation, while Participant 6 — a socially embedded user — described multiple forms of compulsion. Participant 8 occupied an intermediate position, acknowledging performative dimensions while maintaining autonomous engagement. This individual-level pattern validates the regression finding that frequency ($\beta = .110$, n.s.) does not predict obligation while social processes (Performative Behaviour $\beta = .467$; Cultural FOMO $\beta = .346$) do. Fourth, the qualitative data reveal heterogeneity and complexity within aggregate patterns that quantitative scales flatten. The distinction between upward inspirational FOMO (Participants 2, 5) and upward contrastive FOMO (Participant 6) is obscured in the composite Cultural FOMO scale. The distinction between algorithm-directed performance (Participant 6) and social-audience-directed performance (Participant 3) is not captured by the Performative Behaviour composite. These distinctions suggest that future quantitative instruments would benefit from sub-scales that map onto the qualitative variation identified here. Together, the two strands of evidence converge on a coherent account: MCTPs transform cultural consumption into a social performance mediated by quantification and algorithmic systems, generating psychological pressures — comparison anxiety, strategic self-curation, aesthetic instrumentalisation — that are products of social architecture rather than of tracking itself. Users who opt out of the social dimensions of these platforms largely opt out of these pressures as well.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of Contributions

This thesis set out to investigate how media consumption tracking platforms shape the self-perception, social interactions, and cultural identity of their users. Beginning from the observation that digital services like Letterboxd, Spotify Wrapped, and Goodreads have transformed what was once a private, intrinsically motivated activity into a publicly visible, quantified, and algorithmically mediated performance, the study proposed that existing scholarship had yet to account for this convergence as a unified phenomenon. Three types of original contribution were made.

Conceptual contribution. This thesis introduces and systematically defines "Media Consumption Tracking Platforms" (MCTPs) as a distinct analytical category, differentiating them from general social media by their combination of systematic quantification, gamification, and social visibility of cultural consumption data. This conceptual clarification enables rigorous analysis of a phenomenon that existing scholarship had examined only in platform-specific isolation. Empirical contribution. This study provides the first systematic mixed-methods empirical evidence of the psychological dynamics specific to cultural consumption tracking. Quantitatively, social comparison emerged as the central mechanism ($\beta = .891$, $R^2 = .896$ for Cultural FOMO); algorithmic awareness was shown to amplify rather than attenuate performative curation; and a curvilinear tracking intensity pattern was documented for the first time. Qualitatively, four themes emerged that enriched, deepened, and in some cases revealed complexity beyond the quantitative aggregate findings — most notably the phenomenological compression of aesthetic time and the algorithmic gaze as a behavioural constraint. Theoretical contribution. The study advances theory in three respects. It extends Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory to the domain of cultural tracking. It

empirically substantiates Bucher's (2017) algorithmic imaginary in a quantitative framework. And, most significantly, it resolves an ambiguity in Etkin's (2016) theory: the hidden cost of quantification is not intrinsic to measurement but a consequence of the social architecture in which measurement is embedded. Tracking that occurs privately produces no such cost — the problem is not the diary, it is the audience.

5.2 Principal Findings and Their Significance

Five overarching findings define this thesis's empirical contribution. First, social comparison is not merely one factor among many — it is the central organising mechanism through which platform visibility generates psychological consequences. The near-unity correlation between Social Comparison and Cultural FOMO ($r = .944$) and the regression dominance of Social Comparison across all outcome models suggest that in this domain, these constructs may be better understood as a unified socio-affective process than as empirically separable variables. Second, algorithmic awareness functions as an accelerant of performance rather than a safeguard against it, directly challenging the dominant narrative in media literacy scholarship. Users who understand how algorithms profile taste use that understanding to curate more deliberately, not

to disengage from the logic of self-presentation. Algorithmic literacy, in this context, means more strategic participation — not critical distance. Third, the curvilinear relationship between tracking intensity and psychological engagement represents a substantive theoretical contribution. The consistent ANOVA pattern — medium trackers peaking on all constructs — suggests habituation among heavy users, reframing the assumption that more intensive platform use necessarily produces more adverse psychological outcomes. Fourth, the mixed-methods design reveals a phenomenological transformation that quantitative scales could not capture alone. Several interview participants described a compression of aesthetic

temporality — the sense that tracking requires immediate evaluative closure on an experience that would, under other conditions, develop meaning over time. This constitutes a structural alteration of how cultural experience is undergone, not merely of what is consumed. Fifth, within the Gen Z population studied, demographic variables are largely irrelevant to cultural FOMO. Psychological constructs — social comparison orientation, performative tendencies, algorithmic awareness — are what differ between users who experience tracking as enriching and those who experience it as obligatory.

5.3 Practical Implications

For platform designers, the evidence that social visibility — not quantification itself — produces tracking obligation argues for meaningful privacy defaults. Platforms that allow users to engage tracking features without automatic social broadcasting could preserve the archival and self-knowledge benefits that users consistently valued while reducing comparative pressures. Specific interventions might include opt-out mechanisms for Wrapped percentile rankings, private diary modes on Letterboxd, and the removal of friend-facing reading progress bars on Goodreads. For media literacy education, the finding that algorithmic awareness amplifies rather than attenuates performative behaviour indicates that informational approaches to platform literacy are insufficient. Curricula should address not only how algorithms function but the psychological and social dynamics that make strategic self-presentation feel compulsory even for users who intellectually critique it. Literacy must be behavioural as well as informational. For cultural institutions, the qualitative evidence that MCTP conventions have restructured how people discuss culture — and that tracking compresses the interpretive time through which aesthetic meaning develops — suggests a need for counter-spaces that de-emphasise

quantification and encourage reflection, ambiguity, and extended engagement without the pressure of immediate numerical evaluation.

5.4 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations shape the interpretation of these findings. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; longitudinal and experience-sampling designs would be necessary to establish temporal precedence among variables. The very high inter-scale correlations (Social Comparison and Cultural FOMO at $r = .944$) raise questions about discriminant validity that confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling should address in future work. The sample's overrepresentation of Letterboxd users (65%), female-identifying respondents (64%), and younger Gen Z members limits generalisability. Future studies should aim for more balanced platform representation and include older millennials and non-European users to test cross-cultural and cross-generational robustness. The qualitative sample of eight interviews, while providing meaningful thematic insights, approaches but does not guarantee thematic saturation; additional interviews with male-identifying participants, Goodreads-primary users, and private (non-social) trackers are particularly warranted. Theoretically, the most productive direction concerns the boundary condition between private and social tracking. The qualitative data strongly suggest that users who track privately are insulated from the social pressures documented here. A study that experimentally manipulates social visibility — comparing users who track privately versus publicly over time — would provide the causal evidence that the present design cannot offer, and would directly test the central theoretical claim that social embeddedness, not quantification, produces the adverse consequences of MCTP engagement.

5.5 Concluding Remarks

In 2007, Gary Wolf and Kevin Kelly coined the term "quantified self" to describe a community of people who used technology to turn lived experience into data. Fifteen years later, that logic has reached culture itself — the films we watch, the music we stream, the books we read. Letterboxd, Spotify Wrapped, and Goodreads are not neutral archives of personal taste; they are socially embedded, gamified, and algorithmically mediated environments in which culture has become a performance as much as an experience. This thesis has demonstrated, through quantitative rigour and qualitative depth, that this transformation carries real psychological and phenomenological costs. But those costs are not

inherent to tracking. They are produced by the social architecture of platforms: by the visibility of others' consumption, by the comparative metrics that position users relative to peers, by the algorithmic systems that construct and respond to taste profiles. A user who tracks privately, for memory and self-knowledge, is largely insulated from these pressures. The problem is not the diary — it is the audience. Understanding where these pressures come from matters because it suggests where interventions can be made. Platform design choices about what to make visible by default, whose consumption to surface, and how to frame statistics are consequential decisions about the conditions under which millions of people experience culture. And if those decisions can produce cultural FOMO, performative obligation, and the compression of aesthetic experience into immediate verdict, they can equally be redesigned to preserve the reflective, intrinsically motivated relationship with culture that has historically made art meaningful. The quantified self has reached culture. Whether that quantification enriches or diminishes cultural experience depends on the social conditions — the privacy settings, the comparison affordances, the algorithmic systems — within which it operates. That is a design problem, a literacy problem, and ultimately a values problem. This thesis has tried to name it clearly.

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Appendix A: Interview Transcripts

The following transcripts are from the eight semi-structured interviews conducted with Gen Z users of media consumption tracking platforms. Interviews were conducted via text-based digital communication. Participants have been anonymised and are referred to by number. The interview guide included questions about platform usage, profile curation, consumption behaviour, FoMO, algorithmic awareness, and the subjective experience of tracking.

The Questions:

Which platform(s) do you use, and how long have you been using them?

If someone looked at your profile on these platforms, what kind of person do you think they would assume you are? Do you think your profile on the platform accurately represents your taste, or is it more like an edited version?"

Have you ever consumed something, or avoided consuming something, because of how it would look on your profile?

Have you ever felt pressure to keep up with what others on the platform are watching/reading/listening to?"

In Letterboxd, Has tracking ever made you realize you were consuming things on autopilot, just to have something to log?

When Spotify/Apple Music Wrapped comes out and everyone posts their results, what does that experience actually feel like for you personally?

How do recommendations or yearly summaries shape how you see your own taste?
Have you ever felt surprised, validated, or misrepresented by them?

If tomorrow nobody could see your activity and there were no stats or challenges anymore, would you still use the platform the same way?

Do you think these platforms have changed your relationship with how you consume media, not just how you track it, but how you experience it?

Participant 1

Platform(s) and duration: Spotify (12 years), Letterboxd (6 years).

Profile perception and accuracy: “I don’t think that they both translate the same idea of me. I don’t really follow anyone on Spotify, it’s only for the pure functionality of listening to music. Whereas my Letterboxd, as I have gained followers and friends paying attention to my logs over the years, I suppose I’m more aware of how I may appear. I do believe that they both translate perfectly my taste as I would not watch something purely for the image it gave me. Even if Letterboxd is a bit of a social platform, I do firstly see it as its main purpose: having a catalogue of what I watched.”

Performative consumption: “No I did not. Both of those apps are linked to art and I take it seriously. I don’t believe that how I look on my profile is that serious. I do get annoyed now that people comment on it as the social aspect of Letterboxd made them feel like they have a say on it, but I wouldn’t force myself to watch anything just for a log or stats.”

FOMO: “Not at all. I do enjoy the aspect of knowing as I’m a curious person and it’s nice to know people’s opinions sometimes but I don’t care that much.”

Tracking on autopilot: “I do not. I do feel like it’s important to say that I’m a film researcher. Letterboxd is also for me a tool to work. I truly just watch what I want but I did take the habit to log it. I can’t really say if there is a performative place in it now. I do think it could be hypocritical to say that there is no performance at all, but I don’t think that in my case it’s a big part of it.”

Spotify Wrapped experience: “I have no idea what other people listen to. I like to discover what they do and how different it is from my taste. I’d say the performance would be in the rank. Now that Deezer allows you to know which rank you have if you really listen to an artist, I have been number one of all listeners. I think I like the title so I do think about it during the year but I won’t force it.”

Recommendations and taste: “I think validated is not the best word but it could work. I never really questioned it; they usually match my taste so I like that I can discover new things.”

Without visibility: “Yeah I would, I’d enjoy it. I don’t use it to divert others that much.”

Impact on media relationship: “I think that as a society it did, I’m not sure how deep it changed it for me. Trends help too; when you think about the way Letterboxd marketed the app on red carpets by asking people their top 4, I see how it has influenced the public but also cinema workers. Now when I ask someone for their favourite film they are always sceptical and feel pressured to answer; as soon as I say ‘your top 4 Letterboxd’ it changes, they get more chatty and comfortable. Now I feel like it has created itself a place in pop culture and daily conversation. It does mean that people will think about it more now. I know people — and I have to admit I do as well — that sometimes during a movie the thought of which rate I’ll give it occurs to me. It means that I do changed my way of consuming art; it made me more likely to put a rate, give a numerical value to a piece of art. You wouldn’t go to the

museum and rate a painting from 1 to 5. I do believe it's sad. I also regret the way it kind of crushes the opportunity for a movie to grow on you or think about it for a few days before really settling on how you think about it. Now you have to set it straight in your head as soon as you finished watching it."

Participant 2

Platform(s) and duration: Letterboxd, Hobi, MyAnimeList (since 2018), Goodreads (since approximately 2015).

Profile perception and accuracy: "Someone with too much free time. They would not be able to assume my personality based on the websites because I experiment with genres and they're not all what I prefer."

Performative consumption: "I never avoided, but I watched things that my friends logged in because I was influenced."

FOMO: "I feel like I have to keep up when I see all my friends logging their entries."

Tracking on autopilot: "No."

Spotify Wrapped experience: "It's surprising sometimes but I don't really care that much."

Recommendations and taste: "I'm shocked every single year, but I feel they don't really represent my preferences because all the music I listen to I have it downloaded on my devices. The anime and manga app are usually quite accurate because I only watch online."

Without visibility: "Yes, it helps me remember because I have a terrible memory."

Impact on media relationship: "Sometimes I feel like I need to fulfil a certain quota of how much I consume, but it did not affect my preferences."

Participant 3

Platform(s) and duration: Letterboxd and Spotify (5 years each).

Profile perception and accuracy: “On Spotify I would say they would assume I’m pretty ‘basic’ as my music taste is quite trendy. As for Letterboxd, it would be quite the opposite as my taste in films is not so trendy. I like rewatching films I’ve already seen.”

Performative consumption: “Unfortunately, I have. I have tried getting into artists that were trendy even though I didn’t like their genre, and on the other hand I purposely didn’t log some films on Letterboxd because I liked them while they were not enjoyed by the general public or my Letterboxd followers.”

FOMO: “I have not felt pressure because if one piece of media does not interest me I will not engage with it, but I have got into popular things because everyone around me was into it (the most recent example would be Zara Larsson, even though she’s not a piece of media).”

Tracking on autopilot: “Not really. I don’t watch films that often so I always forget I have that app on my phone, but when I first downloaded it I admit I was unemployed and trying to build my film culture so I was watching two to three films a day.”

Spotify Wrapped experience: “I like to see what others have been listening to this year and I love sharing things about myself on social media; Spotify Wrapped is one of them. As self-absorbed as it may sound, I know I have good and diverse taste so I love sharing it.”

Recommendations and taste: “I guess I have been disappointed by some statistics because I felt like they were not very representative (for example, a song I loved and listened to year round did not make it as high as I thought it would in my top songs). I have been surprised at times obviously but they were mostly fun surprises.”

Without visibility: “I don’t think it would change my consumption habits.”

Impact on media relationship: “I don’t feel like it, but it must have, as I have become used to exposing my taste to others. But I do admit I sometimes catch myself thinking ‘oh I must stop listening to this song so much, I don’t want it in my Wrapped.’”

Participant 4

Platform(s) and duration: Spotify (several years). Account is private.

Profile perception and accuracy: “My profile is private, so others can’t really judge it. I’d say it reflects my taste quite accurately since I don’t curate it for others.”

Performative consumption: “No. I don’t listen to music just for appearances — I only listen to what I genuinely enjoy.”

FOMO: “Not really. I don’t feel the need to follow trends, though I stay curious and open to new music.”

Tracking on autopilot: “Not in a performative way. I enjoy the stats for personal insight, not to ‘optimise’ or log more.”

Spotify Wrapped experience: “I like it as a personal summary of my listening habits, but I never share mine. I don’t see it as something to perform or compare.”

Recommendations and taste: “They help me discover new music, especially Spotify’s recommendations. But they don’t define my taste — I stay selective.”

Without visibility: “Yes. Since my account is private and I don’t share anything, my habits wouldn’t really change.”

Impact on media relationship: “A bit — they make discovery easier and more structured, but I still try to keep my listening genuine and curiosity-driven.”

Participant 5

Platform(s) and duration: Letterboxd (approximately 10 years).

Profile perception and accuracy: “Maybe a movie lover. I do think that it represents my taste especially because I rate the movies I watch sometimes, so it is referencing all the things I’ve seen and liked.”

Performative consumption: “It’s true that I don’t really like the fact that we can see ‘the bad movies’ in my profile because it is like it is related to me, but I don’t stop consuming it or hiding it from my profile. I always consume what I want to see at that specific moment, never because I felt I should.”

FOMO: “Yes I have FOMO, not pressure, because it seems so good so it makes me feel like I don’t want to miss it and I want to feel the same good feeling about it as the others, but sometimes I can be disappointed.”

Tracking on autopilot: “No, it helps me a lot to remember what I watched and my favourite movies, not specifically to consume more.”

Spotify Wrapped experience: “I feel like that’s funny to see the taste of people. Even this year when they give an age to your music taste. But sometimes a bit boring to see it everywhere every day.”

Recommendations and taste: “Often I care about my friends’ recommendations, not the Letterboxd summaries. I love seeing movies, even some that I don’t know if I’m going to like, so I don’t follow my taste — I follow my curiosity and the culture to discover new things.”

Without visibility: “Yes still, because my main use is tracking my activity.”

Impact on media relationship: “No, I don’t think it changed my way to consume. I use it only for tracking.”

Participant 6

Platform(s) and duration: Spotify (since 2019), Goodreads (since 2022), Letterboxd (since 2022).

Profile perception and accuracy: “If someone looked at my profile on these platforms they would assume I’m artsy, eclectic, alternative, gay, young, international, fun. I think it is partially an accurate representation of my taste. I don’t think it encompasses my roots, my taste before I used these platforms. It doesn’t encompass my taste in events and music I listen to there and culture I consume that way; it doesn’t encompass what I eat or the clothes I wear. I don’t think it’s edited. However, on dating platforms when there is the option to include my top music of Spotify, I do edit things I don’t feel are accurate — like it seems the algorithm is playing dumb — but I feel Wrapped is accurate more or less.”

Performative consumption: “Yes I’ve avoided consuming something because of how it would look. Like if I wanted to explore K-pop just for fun, I don’t want that showing up on my algorithm. I avoid it. If I want to play musical or Disney songs, or when I am with kids and they want to play music on my phone, I don’t let them because it would mess up my algorithm. Yes I’ve consumed things because I feel like I should — the newest album, it’s gonna be brought up later and I want to be ‘in the know.’ Also FOMO! I want an opinion on what is discussed. Also things I don’t like that much and play to please the crowd. Letterboxd did make me want to watch three movies in a row instead of just one to have a more hefty log.”

Spotify Wrapped experience: “Wrapped feels like a big event. It feels like people showing a

piece of themselves. I'm also disgusted at how much we care about it, yet I post my Wrapped anyways. People choose to share different bits of Wrapped. I love judging people, also finding new music from others (I saw a lot of people listening to Mietze Conte so I wanted to see what I was missing out on!). It's fun and feels like I have to see everyone's posts and I worry and hope mine is cooler and edgier and more underground than everyone's."

Recommendations and taste: "I think yearly summaries do make me a bit surprised and push me to seek more music and films. I never felt very validated, but, because I do trust data, it has made me feel lame. Also makes me feel like I consume less than others and I'm not a real 'film lover' or 'music lover,' which I see myself as. Makes me want to consume more to get on everyone else's apparent level."

Without visibility: "If no one could see my stats, maybe I would consume differently. Play more things on repeat, play more basic things without shame."

Impact on media relationship: "How I experience it — yes, it's public not personal. We all act differently observed."

Participant 7

Platform(s) and duration: Spotify (10 years).

Profile perception and accuracy: "A cool person who is open-minded. It represents my taste but the algorithm is not perfect. Music I have listened to a lot years ago are in my most listened to even if I don't listen anymore."

Performative consumption: "No. And yes, to try it, but I don't force it. But I did try it because of the hype."

FOMO: "No FOMO. I am too cool. I am the inspiration."

Tracking on autopilot: "No, I abandoned Letterboxd because I don't like bragging."

Spotify Wrapped experience: “I think it does give credibility in some ways but only to those who are like you. At first it made me insecure but over time it only made me give more importance to being authentic and going towards my people. I only share it privately with my friends now because now music is very personal to me. I don’t give access to everyone.”

Recommendations and taste: “It shows me how my emotions impact what I listen to. So I listen to happy music so I stay happy. Validated, because I really like what I listen to.”

Without visibility: “Yes!”

Impact on media relationship: “Yes, because it showed me how personal media is and how they reflect you. The question of data is also important. I don’t track my media; it’s media that tracks us. I experience it for my pleasure solely.”

Participant 8

Platform(s) and duration: Spotify (3 years), Letterboxd (a few months).

Profile perception and accuracy: “I think my profile on those platforms is more like an edited version. It always reflects things I like and a part of me in that way, but I definitely try to filter what I show there.”

Performative consumption: “I never avoided consuming something because of how it would look. However, I sometimes consume some things because I feel like I should, mostly because I study cinema (regarding Letterboxd), but also because there are songs I know I will love and I love feeling like I discover some niche things.”

FOMO: “I sometimes feel the pressure to keep up but it honestly doesn’t bother me that much. I’m okay with going at my own rhythm.”

Tracking on autopilot: “Not really, quite the opposite actually. I don’t watch or log as many movies as I would love to.”

Spotify Wrapped experience: “I really like when Spotify Wrapped comes up, as I enjoy any other form of quiz that would reveal some part of me. I feel like it shows how productive I’ve been and I love what it tells about me.”

Recommendations and taste: “I’ve honestly felt all of those emotions — surprise, validation, and misrepresentation — depending on the category.”

Without visibility: “I think I would still use the platform to log my activity, because I love the feeling of organisation it gives me. However, I might change how I leave reviews on Letterboxd. I realise that I try to be funny on there and not as true to myself as I would like, in fear of how cringe people might think I am.”

Impact on media relationship: “No, I don’t think it has changed how I experience the media. I stay true to my taste regarding what I like and what I don’t.”

Appendix B: Questionnaire Qualtrics

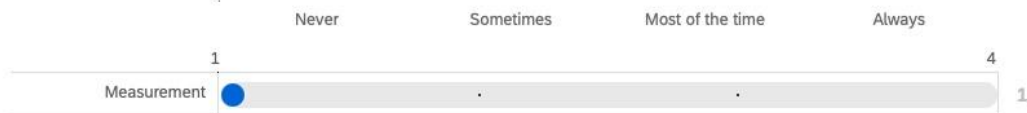
You are invited to participate in a research study about how people use media consumption tracking platforms (such as Letterboxd, Spotify/Spotify Wrapped, Goodreads). This study is conducted as part of a master's thesis. Your participation is voluntary and anonymous. No personally identifying information will be collected unless you choose to provide your email for a follow-up interview. You may withdraw at any time by closing the survey. The survey takes approximately 10–12 minutes. By clicking "I agree to participate," you confirm that you are 18 years or older and consent to take part in this study.

- ☐ I agree to participate
- ☐ I do not agree

Do you currently use or have you regularly used (within the past 12 months) any of these media tracking platforms? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Letter Box
- ☐ Spotify Wrapped
- ☐ Good Reads
- ☐ Others

How often do you log/track your consumption on these platforms? (1 = Not at all important, 4 = Extremely important) ★



Which features do you regularly use? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Logging/rating content (films, books, music)
- ☐ Writing reviews
- ☐ Viewing my own statistics/data summaries
- ☐ Browsing others' profiles, lists, or reviews
- ☐ Participating in challenges or goals (e.g., Reading Challenge, year-end goals)
- ☐ Sharing stats on social media (e.g., Spotify Wrapped screenshots)
- ☐ Following friends/other users
- ☐ Using algorithmic recommendations or discovery features

**Please rate how important each of the following reasons is for your use of this platform. (1 = Not at all important, 4 = Very important)*

Not at all important	Slightly important	Important	Very important
To keep a personal record/diary of what I've consumed			
☐			☐
1			4
To get recommendations for new content to explore			
☐			☐
1			4
To set and track goals for my consumption (e.g., reading challenges)			
☐			☐
1			4
To share my taste and cultural interests with others			
☐			☐
1			4
To connect with a community of people who share my interests			
☐			☐
1			4
To see how my consumption compares to others'			
☐			☐
1			4
To express my identity through what I watch/read/listen to			
☐			☐
1			4
To feel a sense of accomplishment when I reach milestones			
☐			☐
1			4
Because it makes consuming media more enjoyable or fun			
☐			☐
1			4

**Please indicate how much you agree with each statement. (1 = Strongly disagree, 4 = Strongly agree)*

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

Since I started tracking, I consume more media than I used to (e.g., watch more films, read more books, listen to more music).

☐ 1 4

Tracking sometimes makes me choose content based on what will look good on my profile rather than what I genuinely want.

☐ 1 4

I have changed what I consume (e.g., tried new genres, avoided certain content) because of how it would appear in my statistics.

☐ 1 4

I sometimes feel that tracking has turned media consumption into a task or obligation.

☐ 1 4

Seeing my statistics (e.g., number of films watched, books read, listening minutes) gives me a sense of satisfaction.

☐ 1 4

I trust the platform's summary of my taste (e.g., Wrapped, yearly stats) as an accurate reflection of who I am culturally.

☐ 1 4

**Please indicate how much you agree with each statement. (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)*

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

I often look at other users' profiles or statistics to see what they have consumed.

☐ 1 4

I sometimes feel anxious or left out when I see others engaging with content I haven't experienced yet.

☐ 1 4

I have watched/read/listened to something mainly because I saw it was popular or trending among people I follow.

☐ 1 4

Sharing my own statistics or Wrapped summary makes me feel validated.

☐ 1 4

I sometimes curate what I share to present a certain image of my cultural taste.

☐ 1 4

*Please indicate how much you agree with each statement. (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 5 = *Strongly agree*)

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

I am aware that the platform uses algorithms to shape the content recommended to me.

☐

1

5

I sometimes adjust my behavior on the platform to influence what the algorithm recommends (e.g., avoiding certain content, deliberately engaging with preferred genres).

☐

1

5

The platform's characterization of my taste (e.g., 'your top genre is indie') sometimes conflicts with how I see myself.

☐

1

5

I feel that the platform 'knows' my taste better than I could describe it myself.

☐

1

5

I have discovered aspects of my taste through the platform that I was not previously aware of.

☐

1

5

(No obligation to answer)

Would you be willing to participate in a brief follow-up interview (approximately 30 minutes) to discuss your experiences with media tracking platforms in more depth?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, please provide your email address/instagram username so we can contact you. Your email/username will be stored separately from your survey responses and used only for scheduling the interview.

Appendix C: Post On X

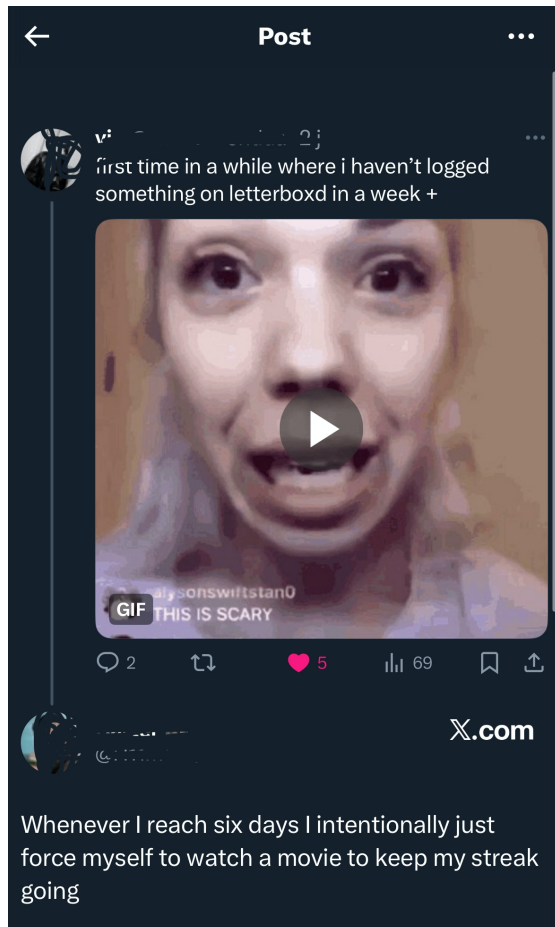


Figure 4. Meme of X post on Letterboxd (Anonymized)