

## PSYCHOLOGICAL CORRELATES OF MOVIE PREFERENCES IN THE SITUATION OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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### Психологические корреляты кинопредпочтений в ситуации пандемии COVID-19

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#### Abstract

The article presents the results of an empirical research, continuing the series of our works in the field of psychology of film, aimed at acquiring new information about the psychological patterns of how movies are chosen. We studied the relation between psychological characteristics of the individuals, the specifics of their psychological response, and the movie choices they made in the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 1,109 individuals took part in the online survey during the quarantine period (May-June 2020). Data from 811 participants (283 male and 528 female) were selected for analysis. Almost half of the participants (46.1%) started watching movies more often in quarantine. Measures: The Original Movie Preferences Measure, TIPI-RU Big Five Short Test, Coping Strategies Indicator by J. Amirkhan, and State-Trait Anxiety Inventory by Ch. Spielberger. It was found that the choice of films during the quarantine restrictions was determined

#### Резюме

В статье представлены результаты эмпирического исследования, продолжающего серию наших работ в области психологии кино и направленного на получение новых данных о психологических закономерностях его выбора. Изучалась связь индивидуально-психологических характеристик субъекта, особенностей психологического реагирования с кинопредпочтениями в ситуации пандемии COVID-19. Всего в онлайн-опросе, проведенном в период введения карантина (май – июнь 2020 г.), приняли участие 1109 человек, данные 811 (283 мужчин и 528 женщин) из которых были отобраны для анализа. Почти половина респондентов (46.1%) стали смотреть фильмы чаще во время карантина. Участники выполняли следующие методики: оригинальная методика «Кинопредпочтения», краткий тест «Большой пятерки» TIPI-RU, методика «Индикатор копинг-стратегий» Дж. Амирхана, методика диагностики самооценки уровня тревожности Спилбергера – Ханина. Обнаружено, что выбор фильмов в ситуации распространения пандемии и введения ограничительных мер определялся как полом и стабильными психологическими

by gender and stable psychological characteristics (personality traits: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, openness to experience) as well as by less stable ones (coping strategies: avoidance, problem solving, seeking social support; anxiety: S-anxiety, anxiety as concern about pandemic). Gender and personality traits were strong predictors of most genre preferences. However, the choice of emotionally tense, realistic, and entertaining films was also related to coping strategies and levels of anxiety. During the quarantine, people turned to such genres due to their psychological characteristics and on the basis of current needs.

*Keywords:* psychology of film, movie preferences, psychological impact of the films, COVID-19, personality traits, coping strategy.

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характеристиками (чертами личности: экстравертность, дружелюбие, добросовестность, эмоциональная стабильность, открытость новому опыту), так и менее устойчивыми (копинг-стратегиями: разрешение проблем, поиск социальной поддержки, избегание проблем; показателями тревоги: ситуативная тревожность, тревога как обеспокоенность пандемией). Пол и черты личности явились сильными предикторами большинства жанровых предпочтений. Однако выбор эмоционально напряженных, реалистичных и развлекательных фильмов был также связан с копинг-стратегиями и уровнем тревоги. В период карантина люди обращались к таким жанрам в силу своих индивидуально-психологических особенностей и исходя из актуальных потребностей.

*Ключевые слова:* психология кино, кинопредпочтения, психологическое воздействие кино, COVID-19, личностные черты, стратегии совладания.

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In recent decades, with the development of information technology, a person's immersion in mass media is significantly increasing. A large portion of consumed media products is occupied by films. According to sociological surveys, going to the cinema was the most popular way of spending leisure time before the pandemic<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, the popularity of online services has grown, opportunities for Internet views have expanded greatly, and their frequency has rapidly increased during the pandemic. Along with other mass media, cinema has a significant influence on the psyche and behavior of people today (Morgan & Shanahan, 1997; Harris, 2002; Chong & La Ferrara, 2009; McGreavey & Liendfield, 2014; Hefner, 2019; Tylets & Krasnyanskaya, 2020; etc.). There are already opinions that both attitudes toward the pandemic and behavioral responses could have been largely shaped in advance by “pandemic” films (Wade, 2022).

The efficiency of psychological influence is a key issue in media research (Latynov, 2013). The connection of the impact with the activity of the person themselves and their motivation in turning to specific mass media products makes

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fond-kino.ru/news/kto-ty-rossijskij-kinozritel/>

it necessary to study the psychological mechanisms of their choice. The choice is determined by a person's actual needs (McQuail & Windahl, 1981; Rubin, 1994) and is mediated by individual psychological characteristics (Voskresenskaya, 2015; Cohen, 2008; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; etc.), among which personal features occupy a central place (Rentfrow et al., 2011; Kraaykamp & van Eijck, 2005; Weaver, 1991; etc.). Over the past decades, many studies have been conducted on the relationship between personality traits and media preferences. The Big Five personality traits (extraversion, emotional stability, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience) (Kraaykamp & van Eijck, 2005; Rentfrow et al., 2011), as well as psychoticism, stimulation seeking, Machiavellianism, aggressiveness, etc., were considered as determinants of preferences (Tamborini et al., 1987; Slater, 2003; Weaver, 1991). Different research designs were developed, from simple ones that identify links between traits and particular genres, TV shows, etc. (Kraaykamp, 2001; Kraaykamp & van Eijck, 2005; Mar et al., 2009), to more complex ones that involve identifying some global factors that include a wide range of media preferences (Rentfrow et al., 2011; Xu & Peterson, 2017).

Numerous works have shown the influence of personality traits on people's media preferences, especially such traits as openness, stimulation seeking, psychoticism, and conscientiousness; for example, people who are open to experience generally prefer more complex and emotionally stimulating media products and are not interested in non-original and popular ones (Kubrak & Latynov, 2019). In regard to movies, it was found that people with high openness to experience choose independent movies and dislike melodramas, action films, and comedies, while friendly people, on the contrary, prefer melodramas and comedies but are not interested in horror; extroverts choose dramas, films about love, comedies, and action movies, while introverts choose cartoons, tragedies, noir, horror, and fantasy (Cantador et al., 2013; Krcmar & Kean, 2005; Weaver, 1991). People with strong stimulation seeking prefer action and horror films to comedies (Krcmar & Kean, 2005; Slater, 2003; Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015), and people with high psychoticism prefer horror and erotica without interest in love movies or romantic comedies (Hall, 2005; Weaver, 1991). In addition, the choice is determined by gender and age (Orestova et al., 2021). For example, young people as well as men in general prefer thrilling and fear-inducing plots (Oliver et al., 2006; Oliver & Krakowiak, 2009; Mares & Sun, 2010).

The current study continues our research in the field of the psychology of film (Kubrak & Latynov, 2019; Kubrak, 2019, 2020). Previously, a connection between young people's film preferences and their personality traits, intelligence, and gender was revealed (Kubrak et al., 2017). However, the choice of films is determined not only by basic characteristics but may be due to less stable psychological characteristics and situational factors. For example, the turning to a media product may be caused by a desire to change an emotional state (Voskresenskaya, 2016; Oliver, 2008; Mares et al., 2008).

The COVID-19 pandemic was a key event in 2020-2021 that had a significant impact on all aspects of people's lives around the world. The uncertainty of the situation, quarantine restrictions, and health concerns affected people's emotional

states and psychological well-being and caused the need to find and form new patterns and strategies of behavior in a changed world (Chen et al., 2022; Sameer et al., 2020; Kostromina et al., 2022; Nestik et al., 2021; etc.). In the new circumstances, many people started to devote most of their time to watching films<sup>2</sup>. According to the Global Web Index in the US and the UK, film products ranked third after coronavirus news and music among the Internet content consumed, which increased significantly after the outbreak<sup>3</sup>. Movies about pandemics and disasters gained great popularity<sup>4</sup>. For example, the film *Contagion* (2011) about the deadly virus spread was the most watched film in Russia<sup>5</sup> and one of the most popular in the world at the beginning of the pandemic<sup>6</sup>. Due to the new circumstances for watching films, our research interest focused on the analysis of psychological patterns of how movies were chosen. A number of studies in other countries have also focused on psychological and related studies of cinema in the context of the pandemic, but they are still insufficient (Clasen et al., 2020; Scrivner et al., 2020; Qiao, 2021; Özkent, 2022; Reis, 2020; Testoni et al., 2021; Boursier et al., 2021; Henkel, 2022; Edgar et al., 2022). The aim of our study was to identify the psychological correlates of movie preferences in the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic. We put forward a general hypothesis about the connection between people's movie preferences, features of their psychological response, and individual psychological characteristics. Achieving the aim of the study involved the following tasks: to determine the structure of genre preferences; to identify the association between movie preference factors and personality traits, coping strategies, and levels of anxiety; to determine the contribution of individual psychological characteristics to the choice of films in a pandemic situation; to reveal the relations between the frequency of watching movies, coping strategies and levels of anxiety.

## Methods

### *Participants*

A total of 1,109 participants completed the online survey during the quarantine restrictions (May – June 2020). Participants were recruited through various social networks and personal accounts on the Internet, as well as through links from thematic websites. All individuals gave informed consent for their voluntary and anonymous participation in the study. Then 811 participants were selected: 283 (34.9%) males and 528 (65.1%) females aged 18 to 59 ( $M=36$ ,  $SD=10.2$ ).

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<sup>2</sup> [https://adindex.ru/news/researches/2020/05/15/281899.phtml?\\_sp=%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%BE](https://adindex.ru/news/researches/2020/05/15/281899.phtml?_sp=%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%BE)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/covid19-media-consumption-generation-pandemic-entertainment>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/pandemic-and-2012-among-netflixs-most-popular-titles-2020-3>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ridus.ru/news/326935>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/davidmack/contagion-movie-coronavirus>

Participants were from different regions of Russia and other countries with different lockdown conditions. Therefore, only data from participants who were in Russian cities with similar quarantine restrictions during the first wave of the pandemic were used. Data obtained after June 1, 2020, were excluded because most regions began to remove restrictive measures at that time.

### *Measures*

1. The Original Movie Preferences Measure (Kubrak et al., 2017) is aimed at identifying genre film preferences. It includes a list of genres that most fully reflects the entire range of film products and is familiar to the majority of viewers. Participants were asked to rate how much they liked each of the 30 genres using a 7-point scale (from not at all like to very much like).

2. TIPI-RU, an adaptation of Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI) by S. Gosling, P. Rentfrow, and W. Swann (Gosling et al., 2003; Sergeeva et al., 2016), measures five personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, openness to experience). Participants indicated the extent to which each item was characteristic of themselves using a 7-point scale (from strongly disagree with the statement to strongly agree with the statement).

3. Coping Strategy Indicator (CSI) by J. Amirkhan (Amirkhan, 1990) in the adaptation of N. A. Sirota and V. M. Yaltonsky is directed at the identification of dominant coping strategies (avoidance, problem solving, seeking social support) (Kupriyanov & Kuzmina, 2012). The measure presents possible ways of coping with problems. Participants chose one of three answers (strongly agree / agree / disagree) for each of the 33 statements.

4. State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) by Ch. Spielberger (Spielberger & Sydeman, 1994), in adaptation of Y. Khanin (Raigorodsky, 2011; Khanin, 1976). Participants assessed on a 4-point scale how much they agreed with each of the 20 statements describing their emotional state (State Anxiety Scale). In addition, participants completed items aimed at identifying their demographic characteristics, frequency, and preferred ways of watching movies, and items that revealed attitudes towards the pandemic and its threats (Table 1).

### *Procedure*

Data were collected through the online survey *Movies and their Role in the Situation of the Pandemic*, which was an electronic version of the measures in Google Forms. The filling time was 15-20 minutes.

### *Statistical Methods*

Descriptive statistics, factor analysis, independent two-sample t-test, and multiple regression analysis. The statistical software package IBM SPSS Statistics 23 was used for data processing.

### Results

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. Participants with a university degree were the majority of the sample (81%). Most of the participants (76.2%) watch movies or series several times a week or more. In a pandemic situation,

Table 1

**Descriptive Statistics for Included Participants by Gender**

	N = 811		Male N = 283		Female N = 528	
<i>Education</i>						
University degree	657	81.0%	197	69.6%	460	81.0%
Students	129	15.9%	71	25.1%	58	11.0%
Others	25	3.1%	15	5.3%	10	1.9%
<i>How often do you watch films/series?</i>						
Several times a week or more often	618	76.2%	207	73.1%	411	77.8%
Several times a month or less	193	23.8%	76	26.9%	117	22.2%
<i>Have you begun to watch movies / series more often in the situation of the pandemic?</i>						
Yes	374	46.1%	116	41%	258	48.9%
No, nothing has changed	346	42.7%	139	49.1%	207	39.2%
On the contrary, I watch less often	91	11.2%	28	9.9%	63	11.9%
<i>Do you usually watch movies/series alone or with other people?</i>						
Alone	447	55.1%	144	50.9%	303	57.4%
With other people	164	20.2%	68	24.0%	96	18.2%
Equally	200	24.7%	71	25.1%	129	24.4%
<i>Do you watch movies/series more often alone or with other people lately?</i>						
Alone	442	54.5 %	149	52.7 %	293	55.5%
With other people	222	27.4 %	85	30.0%	137	25.9%
Equally	147	18.1 %	49	17.3%	98	18.6%
<i>I am anxious about the threat of the virus</i>						
Strongly agree	139	17.1%	37	13.1%	102	19.3%
Agree	470	58.0%	153	54.1%	317	60.0%
Disagree	202	24.9%	93	32.9%	109	20.6%
<i>The pandemic is an extraordinary event in my life</i>						
Strongly agree	217	26.8 %	64	22.6%	153	29.0%
Agree	363	44.8 %	128	45.2%	235	44.5%
Disagree	231	28.5 %	91	32.2%	140	26.5%
<i>I do not trust information about the epidemiological situation from official sources</i>						
Strongly agree	251	30.9%	92	32.5%	159	30.1%
Agree	387	47.7%	138	48.8%	249	47.2%
Disagree	173	21.3%	53	18.7%	120	22.7%
<i>I follow the recommended rules to protect myself from the virus (restrictions on leaving the house, use of masks, gloves, etc.)</i>						
Strongly agree	497	61.3%	152	53.7%	345	65.3%
Agree	81	34.6%	112	39.6%	169	32.0%
Disagree	33	4.1%	19	6.7%	14	2.7%

Note. Values represent the number and percentage of participants.

almost half of the participants (46.1%) began to watch films more often, especially women (48.9% compared to 41% of men). 55.1% of participants usually watch movies alone. At the same time, some participants began watching more movies/serials with other people during lockdown (27.4% compared to 20.2% in usual conditions).

The connection of the participants' emotional states with the frequency of watching movies and the choice of viewing situation was determined. Anxiety related to the pandemic situation was defined using the STAI ("S-anxiety") and indexes of attitude toward various aspects of the pandemic. Factor analysis revealed two factors of attitude to the pandemic that explained 69.02 % of the variance: "Anxiety as a concern", which included the scales "I am anxious about the threat of the virus" with factor loadings 0.82, "The pandemic is an extraordinary event in my life" (0.80) and "I follow the recommended rules to protect myself against the virus" (0.61), and "Trust" – "I do not trust information about the epidemiological situation from official sources" (0.94). In accordance with the tasks of the study, in further analysis, only the first factor "Anxiety as a concern" was used, which represented the individual's reflection on the threats of coronavirus.

There were no significant differences in the levels of S-anxiety between those who began to watch movies more often during the pandemic and those whose habits did not change ( $t$ -test,  $p = 0.127$ ). At the same time, such differences were found for "Anxiety as a concern" ( $t$ -test,  $p = 0.003$ ). Among those who began to watch films more often, the level of concern was higher. In addition, such a coping strategy as avoidance was more typical for them ( $t$ -test,  $p = 0.007$ ). The results are presented in Table 2.

There was no connection between anxiety and the viewing situation (alone or with other people) during the spread of the pandemic ( $t$ -test,  $p > 0.05$ ), and this was consistent with the data relating to the normal viewing situation ( $t$ -test,  $p > 0.05$ ). The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 2

**Comparison of Anxiety and Coping Strategies among Those Who Increased/Did Not Change the Frequency of Movie Viewing during the Pandemic**

	The frequency of viewings has increased (n=374)		The frequency of viewings has not changed (n=346)		t-test	
	M	SD	M	SD	t	p
S-anxiety	46.32	11.520	44.98	12.084	1.528	0.127
Anxiety as a concern (R)	-0.124	0.973	0.101	1.02	-3.030	0.003
Problem solving	23.79	4.434	23.90	4.374	-0.319	0.750
Seeking social support	20.56	5.641	19.90	5.472	1.591	0.112
Avoidance	19.02	4.091	18.22	3.828	2.709	0.007

Note. R = reverse-scored.

Table 3

Comparison of Anxiety among Those Who Preferred to Watch Movies Alone/with Other People

	The preferred situation for watching movies: alone		The preferred situation for watching movies: with other people		t-test	
	M	SD	M	SD	t	p
<i>During the pandemic (n = 442/n = 222)</i>						
S-anxiety	46.63	11.852	45.87	11.757	0.781	0.435
Anxiety as a concern (R)	0.005	1.000	-0.059	0.999	0.784	0.433
<i>Before the pandemic (n=447/n=164)</i>						
S-anxiety	46.03	11.810	44.76	11.854	1.174	0.241
Anxiety as a concern (R)	0.010	1.000	-0.118	1.011	1.397	0.163

Note. R = reverse-scored.

Factor analysis of the data obtained with the Original Movie Preferences Measure identified six movie preference factors that explained 55.56 % of the variance (Table 4). The analysis of the Bartlett’s test of sphericity ( $p = 0.000$ ) and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure ( $KMO = 0.829$ ) indicated that data were adequate for factor analysis. The resulting factor structure made it possible to interpret each factor based on several variables.

The first factor, Emotional Tension (21.36 % of the variance): thriller, horror, mystery, disaster, and criminal films. These films are characterized by heightened tension and emotionality; they can create an atmosphere of anxious uncertainty and suspense, and evoke emotions not experienced in ordinary life.

The second factor, Power (10.40 % of the variance): action, western, criminal, and war films. They have the stereotype of “male” movies. The plots are characterized by dynamism and the “heroism” of the protagonists.

The third factor, Lightness (7.75 % of the variance): romantic comedy, melodrama, and comedy. This factor is composed of entertainment films with an uncomplicated plot, positive emotional content, and a happy ending.

The fourth factor, Fantasy (6.76 % of the variance): fantasy, sci-fi, anime, and animation. Fantasy and animated films are characterized by a certain fictitiousness or even fabulousness of the plot, and conventionality of the forms of representation.

The fifth factor, Art (6.00 % of the variance): auteur cinema, classic, and silent films. These movies have a rather high artistic level. They may not be popular with most viewers.

The sixth factor, Realism (4.29 % of the variance): documentary, historical, and biographical films. This factor combines together feature and documentary films in which a story is told about particular events or people.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the association of gender and individual psychological characteristics with movie preferences. The results are presented in Table 5. The dependents variables were factors of movie



Table 4

## Factor Structure of Movie Preferences

Genres	Factors					
	1	2	3	4	5	
Auteur cinema		-0.121*			0.758*	0.156
Animation				0.626*	0.403	
Anime			-0.108	0.670*	0.300	
Biography			0.121		0.157	0.758*
Action	0.252	0.719*		0.207	-0.116	
Western	0.164	0.726*		0.187	0.220	0.101
War film		0.635*				0.369
Detective film	0.382	0.319	0.226	-0.123		0.192
Documentary					0.197	0.621*
Drama	0.381	-0.182	0.332	-0.162	0.400	0.340
Historical film		0.174				0.745*
Classic film			0.195		0.586*	0.331
Comedy		0.285	0.693*	0.111		
Criminal film	0.521*	0.532*	0.197	-0.101		
Melodrama	0.164		0.782*			
Mystery	0.684*		0.117	0.369		
Musical		0.207	0.346	0.345	0.301	
Silent film		0.198		0.202	0.692*	0.102
Adventure	0.251	0.330	0.369	0.448	-0.132	
Psychological drama	0.417	-0.308	0.293	-0.167	0.469	0.214
Romantic comedy	-0.102		0.838*			
Sports film		0.459	0.290			0.325
Thriller	0.783*	0.162			0.117	
Disaster film	0.599*	0.255		0.133	-0.191	0.227
Horror	0.675*	0.164	-0.216	0.173		
Sci-Fi	0.396	0.180		0.706*	-0.172	
Fantasy	0.274	0.147	0.111	0.763*	-0.167	
Black comedy	0.423	0.269		0.109	0.361	-0.158
Film adaptation	0.219		0.318	0.159	0.226	0.348
Erotica	0.181	0.298	0.261		0.250	

*Note.* Factor loadings less than 0.1 are excluded, and factor loadings over 0.5 are marked \*.

preferences, the independent variables were gender, personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, openness to experience), coping strategies (avoidance, problem solving, seeking social support), anxiety (S-anxiety), and attitude to pandemic (anxiety as concern about pandemic).

It was determined that gender affects movie preferences: male gender is a predictor of the choice of films related to Emotional Tension, Power, and Fantasy factors, and female gender – Lightness, and Realism factors.

Table 5

Association of Movie Preferences with Gender and Psychological Characteristics

Variables	Emotional Tension			Power			Lightness		
	B	SEB		B	SEB		B	SEB	
Gender	-0.198	0.081	-0.095*	-1.001	0.071	-0.478***	0.343	0.076	0.164***
<i>Personality traits</i>									
Extraversion	0.009	0.014	0.025	0.049	0.012	0.140***	0.035	0.013	0.100**
Agreeableness	-0.014	0.017	-0.030	-0.024	0.015	-0.051	0.077	0.016	0.164***
Conscientiousness	-0.006	0.014	-0.017	0.016	0.012	0.043	0.028	0.013	0.078*
Emotional Stability	0.007	0.014	0.022	0.004	0.012	0.013	-0.014	0.013	-0.044
Openness	-0.003	0.014	-0.007	-0.033	0.013	-0.087**	-0.013	0.013	-0.035
<i>Coping strategies</i>									
Problem solving	0.012	0.009	0.055	-0.010	0.008	-0.045	-0.005	0.008	-0.021
Seeking social support	-0.008	0.007	-0.045	0.005	0.006	0.030	0.030	0.006	0.167***
Avoidance	0.022	0.009	0.088*	0.008	0.008	0.030	0.011	0.009	0.043
S-anxiety	-0.001	0.004	-0.014	-0.007	0.003	-0.079*	-0.010	0.003	-0.122**
Anxiety as a concern (R)	0.035	0.037	0.035	0.014	0.032	0.014	-0.071	0.034	-0.071
R <sup>2</sup>	0.032			0.268			0.158		
F	2.415**			26.616***			13.596***		
Variables	Fantasy			Art			Realism		
	B	SEB		B	SEB		B	SEB	
Gender	-0.231	0.080	-0.110**	0.031	0.080	0.015	0.215	0.080	0.103**
<i>Personality traits</i>									
Extraversion	-0.026	0.014	-0.074	-0.047	0.014	-0.133***	0.039	0.014	0.111**
Agreeableness	0.045	0.017	0.097**	0.021	0.017	0.045	0.008	0.017	0.018
Conscientiousness	-0.035	0.014	-0.096*	-0.028	0.014	-0.079*	0.010	0.014	0.028
Emotional Stability	0.018	0.014	0.056	-0.009	0.014	-0.028	-0.004	0.014	-0.011
Openness	0.034	0.014	0.090*	0.086	0.014	0.226***	0.032	0.014	0.085*
<i>Coping strategies</i>									
Problem solving	-0.004	0.009	-0.017	0.000	0.009	0.000	0.014	0.009	0.063*
Seeking social support	0.009	0.007	0.048	-0.004	0.007	-0.020	-0.017	0.007	-0.093*
Avoidance	0.008	0.009	0.034	0.009	0.009	0.037	0.010	0.009	0.040
S-anxiety	-0.004	0.004	-0.046	-0.002	0.004	-0.025	-0.004	0.004	-0.049
Anxiety as a concern (R)	-0.071	0.037	-0.071	-0.002	0.036	-0.002	-0.099	0.037	-0.099**
R <sup>2</sup>	0.048			0.061			0.052		
F	3.367***			4.726***			4.023***		

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Note. R = reverse-scored.

In addition, movie preferences are determined by personality traits. Extroversion is a positive predictor of the choice of films belonging to the Power, Lightness, and Realism genre preferences and a negative predictor – Art. Agreeableness is positively associated with Lightness and Fantasy factors. Conscientiousness is positively associated with the Lightness factor but negatively connected with the Fantasy factor. Openness to experience is a negative predictor of preference for Power genres and a positive predictor for Fantasy, Art, and Realism.

Coping strategies also have an influence on the choice of films. Problem solving strategy is positively related to the Realism movie preference factor, and avoidance strategy is positively related to Emotional Tension. Seeking social support strategy is a positive predictor of Lightness movie preferences and a negative predictor of Realism.

A higher level of anxiety negatively influenced the choice of films belonging to the Power, and Lightness genres. Anxiety, reflecting the levels of concern about the pandemic, was positively associated with the Realism factor.

### **Discussion**

In the present research, we studied the relationship between the psychological characteristics of the individuals, the specifics of their psychological response, and their movie preferences in the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the course of this study, it was discovered that during the first wave of restrictions (April – May 2020) people started to watch movies and series more often. On the one hand, such a phenomenon is attributed to the fact that during the quarantine people were forced to stay at home, and were left without their usual forms of diverse entertainment, so, they turned to movies to fill the void. On the other hand, more frequent viewings than usual were noted by those who expressed more concern about the pandemic and who were characterized by an avoidance strategy. This strategy implies that “a person tries to avoid contact with the reality around him, to get away from solving problems” (Kupriyanov & Kuzmina, 2012, p. 110). Being one of the leading behavioral strategies in the formation of maladaptive behavior, it is “aimed at overcoming or reducing distress”; such a strategy may also be adequate “depending on the specific stressful situation” (Ibid.). In times of an unfolding pandemic, it is very likely that watching movies allowed people to cope with negative emotions and traumatic psychological experiences and escape the daunting reality. The fact that people started to watch movies more during the pandemic and turn to this form of entertainment more frequently than before to escape from the reality is also demonstrated by other studies (Boursier et al., 2021; Pisarek & Zabielska-Mendyk, 2022).

It was also discovered that even though the situation of watching movies alone was still preferable, the number of those who watched movies together with other people during the quarantine increased. Since no correlation with the emotional state of anxiety and anxious attitudes was found, the more frequent co-viewing sessions are more likely caused by the changes in the routine of people’s daily life as

people started to spend more time together rather than it being caused by the changes in their psychological state.

The influence of gender and individual psychological characteristics on the choice of films was revealed. Stable characteristics (personality traits), relatively stable characteristics (coping strategies), and dynamic characteristics (emotional state, and attitudes to the pandemic) were significant predictors of movie preferences. However, their impact on the turn to certain films was different. Gender was a strong predictor: a significant association was found between gender and five of the six genre preference factors. This is consistent with other studies, which, for example, found that men prefer to watch thrillers, action, and horror films, and women prefer romantic movies (Oliver et al., 2006; Oliver & Krakowiak, 2009; Clasen et al., 2020).

Our results showed that emotionally tense movies were more favored by men. Such movies were also chosen by those who demonstrated distinctive avoidance strategy that probably allowed them to live through the emotions, including the emotions related to the anxiety about the uncertainty of life, fear, or the expectancy of a disaster, in a safe environment at the beginning of quarantine restrictions and such specific movies helped them to get through strong emotions. So, in a way, it taught them to be calmer about threatening situations (Shurick et al., 2012). As we mentioned above, the avoidance coping strategy, in some situations, helps to deal with negative experiences. There is already evidence that people who like to watch horror movies demonstrated that they were able to withstand the psychological challenges of the pandemic better (Scrivner et al., 2020). It is also in line with our own results which showed that people who liked movies of that specific genre didn't consider the pandemic to be something of critical proportions ( $r = -0.072, p < 0.05$ ).

Gender was the major predictor of the choice of films related to the Power factor as well. Men more often preferred such "male" films. In addition, their attractiveness was determined by stable personality traits, higher extroversion, and lower openness, as well as a less stable characteristic – lower anxiety. Other researchers also noted that extroverts were interested in films with aggressive content (Krcmar & Kean, 2005). Viewers who chose dynamic and even violent films were active and conservative people, and they were quite stress-resistant in the pandemic situation. Previous findings showed an association of the Power factor with higher extraversion and lower neuroticism (Kubrak et al., 2017). It is likely that, in general, emotional stability determines such movie preferences regardless of the situation.

Predictors of the choice of light films were gender (female), higher agreeableness, extraversion, and conscientiousness. These results are generally consistent with previous findings on the relation between personality traits and such genre preferences (Kubrak et al., 2017; Cantador et al., 2013; Krcmar & Kean, 2005; etc.). Viewers who watch uncomplicated entertainment movies that evoke positive emotions are generally characterized by kindness, sociability, and organisation. It was also found that the strategy of seeking social support had the most impact on the choice of such films under quarantine restrictions. It is possible that comedies and

melodramas that engage viewers with their simple, unpretentious, and yet quite realistic stories with happy endings, provided people with emotional support during the development of the pandemic, especially those who utilize this coping strategy, (that is, highly social people for whom the quarantine restrictions could have been an enormous stress to live through, as the new reality could be too harsh for their personality type). There was also a negative correlation with such a dynamic characteristic as state anxiety. Despite the fact that, according to other studies, light genres are more likely to be chosen by emotionally unstable and neurotic people (Kraaykamp, 2001; Kraaykamp & van Eijck, 2005), the need for such movies was not detected in the state of current anxiety. Perhaps the light mood of entertaining movies was not consistent with the anxiety state.

The predictors of the attractiveness of fantasy films were only stable characteristics: gender (male), higher agreeableness and openness, and lower conscientiousness. We could not identify the influence of other, less stable psychological characteristics, on the choice of such films, which did not allow us to make any assumptions about particular interest in them during the quarantine. It is likely that the audience of such films is quite steady.

The films belonging to the Art factor were the only ones whose choice turned out to be unrelated to gender and was determined only by personality traits, primarily higher openness, and lower extroversion and conscientiousness. People who are open to new experiences generally choose more sophisticated, “aesthetic” genres and show no interest in traditional genres in contrast to those who are conscientious (Xu & Peterson, 2017; Rentfrow et al., 2011). Curiosity, a propensity for reflection, and unconventional behavior explain the attractiveness of “movies not for everyone,” often attributed to artworks. The influence of less stable characteristics was not found, as in the choice of fantasy films.

In contrast, turning to realistic movies was determined by gender (female) and it wasn't only defined by the set of stable characteristics like personality traits, which was also revealed in other studies (Xu & Peterson, 2017; Rentfrow et al., 2011), such as openness to new experiences and extroversion, but that it was also caused by less stable ones. A low tendency to seek social support and, on the contrary, a focus on solving problems as well as higher levels of concern about the pandemic influenced the choice of documentary or feature movies with realistic content which could probably give answers to the current issues. An assumption can be made that films about the pandemic began to be perceived more as realistic, and not just as disaster films with their usually fictional plots. This can explain the sharp increase of interest in such movies, when turning to them was, perhaps, one of the ways to implement the problem-solving strategy, when a person “tries to use all personal resources to find possible ways to effectively solve a problem.” (Kupriyanov & Kuzmina, 2012, p. 117). It is also worth noting that the combination of such a strategy with high levels of reflection on the threats from coronavirus is consistent with the idea that people with problem solving strategies are more likely to have a differentiated perception of difficult situations (Alperovich, 2020). As a result, using adequate coping strategies generally helped in lowering the levels of stress caused by the pandemic (Kryukova et al., 2020; Li et al., 2022).

It should be noted that there are limitations associated with the resulting regression models. Further research could include improving them by identifying new predictors of film choice related to other psychological characteristics and states.

### **Conclusion**

In the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, the turn to watching movies was determined by psychological and situational factors. More frequent viewings compared to the pre-pandemic period were revealed for those who expressed more concern about the pandemic and who were characterized by avoidance strategies. People began to watch movies more not only because they had more time during the quarantine restrictions, but also in order to help escape the frightening reality.

The specific genre preferences identified in the study (Emotional Tension, Power, Fantasy, Lightness, Art, Realism) were determined by a certain set of characteristics. Significant predictors were stable psychological characteristics (personality traits), relatively stable psychological characteristics (coping strategies), and dynamic characteristics (emotional state, attitude toward the pandemic), but their contributions differed. The choice of movies was more determined by stable characteristics and was less likely to be affected by situational influence. Gender and personality traits were strong predictors of most genre preferences. Action films were primarily chosen by men, while auteur and classic films attracted people who were open to new experiences and introverted. Apparently, the pandemic situation did not affect the audience of “art” films, as well as fantasy films, whose appeal was determined by stable psychological characteristics. The choice of emotionally tense, realistic, and entertaining movies was also influenced by less stable characteristics. These movie preferences were related to coping strategies and levels of anxiety. Associated with the avoidance strategy, the choice of thrillers and horror films allowed people to escape from reality and experience intense emotions in a safe environment. Problem solving strategy and higher levels of concern about the pandemic influenced the choice of films with realistic content that could provide answers to topical issues. Light films attracted those who needed support but were also emotionally ready to watch entertaining cinema, having lower levels of anxiety. During the quarantine, people turned to such genres due to their psychological characteristics and guided by their current needs.

The study has an important practical significance, as it expands ideas about the available tools for coping with stress. According to the received data, their use can have a personalized orientation. The results can be applied in the development of psychological assistance programs in order to improve the psychological well-being of people in various emergency situations.

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