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Sprinting a media marathon: Uses and gratif of binge-watching television through Netflix

by Matthew Pittman and Kim Sheehan

Abstract

"Binge-watching" represents a radical shift for twenty-first century media consumption. Why do people select this method of television viewing? A survey administered to 262 television binge-watchers identified factors that influence binge watching, several of which are somewhat different than factors impacting other types of television viewing. Factors salient for regular bingers are relaxation, engagement, and hedonism. For those who plan ahead to binge, program quality (aesthetics) and the communal aspect (social) also come into play. Those who binge on an entire series in one or two days value engagement, relaxation, hedonism, and aesthetics. We also discuss the theoretical implications and future development of uses and gratifications.

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Introduction

Michelle Obama admits to doing it. More than half of us like to do it with another person in the room. It was almost Oxford's "Word of the Year" for 2013. This relatively new trend is "binge-watching": the experience of watching multiple episodes of a program in a single sitting. Because of advances in technology and the relatively low cost of unlimited bandwidth, more people are binge-watching their favorite television shows and movies than ever before, so much so that some suggest it is becoming the new norm (West, 2013). The 1990s notion of appointment television has given way to the digital experience of streaming media through televisions, computers, video game consoles, and portable hand-held devices. Online video platforms "have finally entered a rapid stage of growth in the United States" (Cha and Chan-Olmsted, 2012). The year 2014 saw broadcast and cable television audiences decline and an increase in people turning to online streaming services to access entertainment content. With streaming video, viewers have the opportunity to watch multiple episodes of programs in a single sitting or an entire season over the course of a few days, a phenomenon known as binge-watching (Hirsen, 2015).

To "binge" on something is typically negative, as with binge drinking or binge eating disorders, and some scholars are calling for a term with more positive connotations such as "marathon-viewing" (Perks, 2014). Calling it a media "marathon" simultaneously harkens back to a time of networks broadcasting marathons of television shows while also eschewing binge's language of unhealthy excess. However, the phrase binge-watching has been embraced by the popular press, and the rapid growth and availability of streaming platforms have influenced this increasingly standard consumer behavior. The institutional rise of Netflix as not only a platform for viewing but also a producer of content has led

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to what is colloquially known as the "Netflix effect" (Roxborough, 2014; Lehrer, 2014; Smith, 2014), and it has changed the way television is written, produced, and consumed. With almost 30 million subscribers, Netflix is among the leading providers of streaming media. Netflix is not only aware of the increase in binge-watching but seems to be encouraging (or at least facilitating) it as a viable consumptive activity. In 2013, it produced two original series — the critically acclaimed *House of Cards* and a highly anticipated fourth season of *Arrested Development* — and released every episode simultaneously.

For individuals who choose to binge-watch, the availability of streaming video through services like Netflix is changing the way they consume television. Producers of television content are also paying attention, as early studies indicate that binge-watching creates more viewers overall for a program (Graser, 2013). Thus, program executives and scholars alike require a deeper understanding of uses and gratifications of binge watching to better motivate viewers to binge watch in a way that fits with new and emerging ecommerce business models (Stafford and Gonier, 2004). If Netflix has indeed risen "to become America's most influential TV service" (Lehrer, 2014), then it is important to understand why and how individuals are using it instead of the traditional alternatives.

As streaming media services like Netflix become a serious alternative to cable (Fowler, 2015), scholars need to study consumptive activities, such as binge-watching, that maximize the Internet's vast streaming potential. This study examines the reasons why individuals binge-watch and considers what personal and social antecedents are salient for binge-watching. We employ the uses and gratifications perspective to explore whether traditional measurements — for example, those used for television and for the Internet — apply to this type of viewership. In the absence of traditional gratifications, we will explore what new types of gratifications may be necessary to best understand this viewing behavior.

Literature review

The uses and gratifications approach

The uses and gratifications approach is robust and unique in its assumption of autonomy and agency on behalf of media consumers. It began with the idea that "audience members are seen as having goals and needs and as seeking to satisfy them through various mass media activities" [1]. The advent of ubiquitous digital media and devices has led to a recent resurgence in popularity of the uses and gratifications (U&G) approach. A survey (Potter, 2012) of 336 articles revealed U&G to be the fourth-most salient theory currently in use within the field of communication. As technology continues to provide new media through which audiences may seek gratification, uses and gratifications will continue to be of great importance in helping scholars understand why people use certain media, and what effects those media might have.

Although initial attention to the gratifications that media provide came from Lazarsfeld and Stanton in the 1940s, Katz and others (Katz, *et al.*, 1973) concretized the guiding theoretical framework of U&G in 1974. It is not so much a fixed theory as an approach, and it begins with three assumptions: first, U&G assumes that audiences are not passive but actively seek out media in order to gratify certain needs; second, it assumes that audiences are cognizant enough of their own desires to report them after the fact, and that those self-reports are reliable; third, it assumes that the media compete with each other for sources of need satisfaction. Scholars utilize U&G research to explore the dynamic relationship between attitudes, actions, and media effects.

U&G is appropriate for this exploratory research and it has historically been used as a first step in understanding the impact of new media in people's lives. This study is unique because binge-watching can occur using both traditional television platforms (such as watching a marathon of *Breaking Bad* on cable channel AMC) and a digital streaming service like Netflix. As a result, relevant U&G research and methods will be drawn from both Internet and television contexts to optimally understand this phenomenon.

Uses and gratifications of television

Katz, *et al.* (1973), in reviewing the literature on U&G, suggested that this stream of research focused on "the social and psychological origins of needs, which generate expectations of the mass media or other sources, which lead to differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in need gratifications and other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones" [2]. In an overview of how audiences use media, they suggest that audiences tend to look for five basic gratifications: to be informed or educated, to identify with characters of the situation in the media environment, to simply be entertained, to enhance social interactions, and finally, to escape from the stresses of every day life (McQuail, 2010).

Examining specific types of media usage provides a more nuanced look at the specific gratifications linked with specific media. Television viewing, according to McQuail, *et al.* (1972), has media-person interactions,

diversion, personal relationships, personal identify and surveillance as motivations. Greenberg (1974) expanded this typology by identifying seven motivations: habit, relaxation, companionship, passing time, learning, arousal and escape. Rubin (1983) advanced the state of knowledge by using factor rotation statistical analysis to identify five gratifications: pastime/habit, information, entertainment, companionship and escape. Additionally, Rubin argued that specific motivations varied by the amount of television someone watched.

Some research into the U&G of television has focused on different genres of television programming. Gratifications found for watching public television, for example, include relaxation, education, communications utility, forgetting, passing time, companionship and entertainment. Papacharissi and Mendelson (2007), in their study of reality television, found that unless people watch a lot of TV to begin with, reality TV does not have any additional appeal over scripted content. The more a user consumes a medium, the more gratification he or she is likely to obtain from it. Barton (2013) discovered additional gratifications of reality programming when examining users' consumption of talent-based shows (for example, *American Idol* or *Dancing With The Stars*): TV personalities and *schadenfreude* (joy at another's misfortune). This mediated voyeurism is more likely to be a gratification of reality TV than fictional programming (Baruh, 2010). Yet, research has yet to fully explore the relationship between voyeuristic gratifications and other genres or viewing platforms.

Young (2013) found that viewers of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report* reported watching the show because "because it's funny" and "to learn the news" [3]. Young also notes how U&G are important, not only in their own right, but in helping to understand other media effects. Even with a wide range of cognitive models and a wider range of mediums, U&G are helpful to "explain how outcomes of exposure to media content vary as a function of the audience member's reason for consuming that content in the first place" [4]. People find what they seek (LaMarre, *et al.*, 2009).

While many aspects of television U&G are appropriate to consider for this study of binge-watching (such as companionship via watching with friends, arousal due to the high production qualities of programs, and escape given the types of dramatic programs often watched), several other aspects are significantly different. Katz, *et al.* (1973) argued that many uses of television were unintended ones. This may not be the case for binge-watching, as some degree of planning is necessary (finding programs and platforms, identifying time windows for watching multiple episodes, and coordinating with friends for social events). Similarly, it may be possible that the habit factor is inappropriate for binge-watching, as a habitual motivation suggests an automatic decision to watch whatever is on the screen, rather than a more engaged decision to seek out specific series and their multiple episodes.

Uses & gratifications of the Internet

Ruggiero (2000) notes three attributes of the Internet that make it a novel break from traditional media: interactivity (more control), de-massification (more choice), and asynchroneity (more authority over when to consume). These three features greatly increase the number of potential gratifications users may seek though Internet usage in general and Netflix consumption in particular.

The increased interactivity of the Internet has led to a more nuanced understanding of U&G. LaRose, *et al.* [5] noted, "In recent years, the theory has been reformulated to stress comparisons between gratifications sought (GS) and gratifications obtained (GO)." This distinction between GS and GO is the result of recognizing the Internet's vast interactive potential: a user may go online for one gratification but end up with another, since new gratifications "could be triggered by features we experience while using particular media." [6] LaRose and his colleagues took a social-cognitive approach to Internet usage to help develop U&G along these lines. The mediated environment of the Internet influences media exposure "by continually reforming expectations about the likely outcomes of future media consumption behavior" [7].

Hoffman and Novak (1996) first developed the concept of interactivity that many subsequent research efforts utilize. Their interactivity centered on the notion of "flow" where users begin to enjoy the process of browsing the Web even while searching for content. Once interactivity was factored into Internet U&G, "an important new social gratification" [8] was recognized for Internet consumers. Modifying an approach that tested for uses and gratifications of television, they found content and process gratifications, which are present with television, but also discovered a potential gratification of social interactivity. Users can share mediated experiences that were not possible before the Internet.

As these new online activities lead to new digital behaviors it is important to note some key gratifications (such as social interactivity) that could apply to binge-watching. As with any exploratory research, it is paramount to be open to new theoretical developments (such as discovering new gratifications) (Ruggiero, 2000; LaRose, *et al.*, 2001; Sundar and Limperos, 2013).

Uses & gratifications for binge TV

Despite scholars' ongoing attempts to develop it, existing typologies of U&G theory (*i.e.*, television and Internet) are not yet sufficient to examine binge-watching behavior. Binge-watching is arguably different from other types of viewing since it gives users a degree of control over their viewing activities that they have never had before. Even activities that might have once been considered binge consumption — where a network would broadcast many episodes of the same show for hours or days on end, *i.e.*, "Catch the James Bond marathon this weekend on TNT!" — bears almost no resemblance to modern binge-watching. By comparison, traditional forms of television consumption are, in the words of Netflix C.E.O. Reed Hasting, "artificially regulated," meaning viewers can generally only see what the networks want to make available at a given time (Garling, 2014).

In contrast, streaming video sites like Netflix allow unfettered access to seasons and episodes of myriad programs and films. Matrix (2014) reports that in the popular press, binge viewing and Netflix have become synonymous. Netflix, which began as a DVD rental company, now also offers through its streaming service full seasons of series produced for traditional television networks. In addition, it offers exclusively to subscribers its own produced content, building on its own consumer-centered philosophy that television viewers rather than networks should be able to choose what, how, and when to watch in their own free time (Elkawy, *et al.*, 2015). As a result, Netflix not only rivals traditional network and cable providers in terms of viewership (Cook, 2014) but is actually projected to surpass them in the next few years (Spangler, 2015). In addition to simply implementing gratifications from television and the Internet, understanding binge-watching may require additional theoretical development to account for the potential issues of agency and engagement as audiences have clearly adopted online streaming videos to replace some, if not all, of their television viewing (Hirsen, 2015). Is this simply because of the wealth of content available? Are reasons for binge watching television akin to reasons for watching television in any format, or does the ability to stream multiple episodes via the Internet change traditional notions? Clearly there are opportunities for extended analysis using U&G. While a few studies have examined binge-watching of college students particularly in terms of emotional motivations (Wheeler, 2015), as well as what activities binge watching replaces (Winland, 2015), no study yet exists of demographics beyond this narrow range. This study aims to expand research on these kinds of gratifications for binge-watchers of all ages.

When television goes online, potential gratifications abound. No medium occupies Americans' hearts, minds, or free time like television. Postman (1985) famously declared it to be our "cultural command center" because it dictates our use of other media. However, few could have predicted the way that digital video recording (DVR) devices, Video-on-Demand (VOD) services, and the Internet itself has transformed the ways in which people consume television. This transformation is primarily due to "digitization, transmission networks, convergence, relaxation of traditional viewing constraints, and increasing user production of content" [9]. No longer are viewers beholden to a network's live broadcast schedule. Now they can watch what they want, when they want, how they want. In some ways, this reflects a traditional notion of gatekeeping, except today anyone can serve as a content gatekeeper on the Internet. While access to programs is still determined by myriad contracts, modes of production, and tiers of service, the proliferation of streaming services provides significantly more content today than ever before, available asynchronously whenever an individual wants to access it. In deciding which gates to open for binge-viewing, individuals may be motivated to connect with new communities — or draw upon existing ones — to learn about options and opinions for their viewing (Sundar and Limperos, 2013).

A recent poll by Harris Interactive (Shannon-Missal, 2013) described demographics of binge-TV watchers, suggesting that about 25 percent of respondents watched an entire 13-hour season in two days. While Pang (2014) suggests some may see this as mindless recreation, others see it as a restorative experience. Restorative experiences (Kaplan, 1995) are ways people can mentally recharge themselves. These experiences hold our attention with effort, providing a sense of taking one outside of his or her normal world into a different one. These worlds are rich and fully realized, complex yet compatible with one's own ability to understand the world. Pang suggests that binge-watching has all the features of a restorative experience: often the programs selected have complicated plots that play out over the course of the season, and strong characters appearing in a fascinating world very unlike their own. This explains why popular series that are binge-watched include *Breaking Bad* (with the main character of a chemistry professor turned meth cooker), *House of Cards* (political intrigue set in Washington, D.C.) and *Game of Thrones* (a power struggle set in an invented fantasy world). Yet, the relationship between these gratifications sought (relaxation, escapism, etc.) and the binge-watching of specific programs remains unclear.

Stafford, *et al.* (2004) segmented audiences into Lone Wolves and Social Animals. The Lone Wolves would suggest that an individual might be binge-watching to assuage loneliness and for companionship. The Social Animal segment might binge-watch to enjoy the program with others, either in person or digitally (Pittman and Tefertiller, 2015). Regardless of whether they watch alone or with others, most people feel positive about

binge-watching (Shannon-Missal, 2013). Feeney (2014) attributed this feeling to people using binge-watching as a reward, suggesting that after a hard work week they look forward to and plan in advance their binge-watching experience.

This can be associated with what Stafford, *et al.* (2004) identified as "hedonic consumption". As first detailed by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) and Hirschman and Holbrook (1982), hedonic consumption is the behavior, often missed by researchers and marketers, where a user derives pleasure from feelings of fun and fantasy — this latter aspect clearly associated with restorative experiences. For some, there is a certain guilty, voyeuristic pleasure involved with spending a whole day watching one's favorite program. Sociologist Grant McCracken interpreted binge-watching as a 'special pleasure' (Fallon, 2014). As Skipper [10] notes, "Binge-watching a TV series might not be the greatest use of such large portions of our time, every once in a while it can make for a brilliantly indulgent day". Does the association of one's viewing with a pejorative term like "binge" (with its connotations of guilt, shame, and enervation) mitigate the pure escapist pleasure he or she might be seeking?

Binge-watching necessarily requires a significant amount of time. While no academic research has yet to explore binge-watching per se, studies have taken into account the duration and frequency of media consumption. Papachirissi and Mendelson (2007) noted that a single medium will "cater to different gratifications for regular versus periodic viewers" [11]. This attention to the timing aspects of media use is increasingly salient as more technology becomes a part of daily life. "Time is an important variable to consider. Effects studies consistently have observed the impact that time spent with a medium has on its users" [12]. Anecdotal evidence supports that binging can lead to loyalty toward a program: 73 percent of people who stream season one of *Breaking Bad* finish every episode, and the percentage goes up for subsequent seasons (Jurgensen, 2012). However, research has yet to explore why and when users chose extended television viewing (binge-watching) over "normal" viewing.

In order to establish a foundation for understanding the uses and gratifications of binge TV watching, two research questions are proposed:

> *RQ1*: What are salient motives for binge-watching TV?
>
> *RQ2*: What motivates people to plan ahead to binge-watch and to be 'heavy' binge watchers?

Sample and procedures

Social media was used to recruit participants for this exploratory study using a snowball sampling technique. Messages were posted to the researchers' Twitter and Facebook accounts in mid-February 2014, asking if anyone was binge-watching the Netflix program *House of Cards* (its second season had just been released on Netflix) and inviting responses to a survey (with a link included with the post). We chose *House of Cards* because Netflix developed it and released all episodes at once, thereby inviting viewers to binge them all. Subsequent messages named different programs that have been mentioned in the popular press as those that are binge-watched. People who saw these posts also shared and retweeted, starting the snowball sample. While snowball sampling will not lead to a representative sample of the population, it is appropriate for this study since we are only interested in exploring the concept binge-watching and do not wish to compare these data to other types of watching. Since there are no specific ways to determine this, asking via social media and tapping into networks of people interested in specific programs can identify respondents. Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) found that tapping into social networks was an excellent way to tap into groups of people who know other people who fit into specific populations. Using social media for snowball sampling can act as a legitimate proxy between researcher and participants, which helps to ensure privacy (Raissi and Ackland, 2012).

Because there is no single established definition for binge-watching, we used initial definitions from Netflix's own survey of its customers (West, 2013) to established a range of possible television-viewing activity that might constitute binging in respondents' own estimation. Respondents clicking on the link to the survey site were provided this statement: Television binge-watching can be defined as watching two or more episodes of the same series in a single sitting, or watching one or more episodes of the same series for several consecutive days — behaviors that are simple to accomplish when streaming video. Respondents were then asked if they had ever binge-watched television. If respondents did not binge watch, they were thanked for their participation and data collection terminated. Those people that indicated they had binge watched completed the survey. Of the 272 responses collected, 263 were people who binge-watched.

The sample breakdown was 62 percent female with an average age of 29. Shannon-Missal (2013) suggests that those under age 40 were more likely to binge watch TV than people age 40 or older. Approximately 41

percent were married, 46 percent were single and never married. The sample was well educated with 27 percent completed high school, 41 percent earning a bachelors degree, and 27 percent achieving an advanced degree.

Measurement

The first section of the survey assessed what types of programs and platforms were used for binge-watching. We provided a list of programs that were cited in various news reports about binge-watching (*e.g.*, *Breaking Bad* and *Orange is the New Black*), and provided an opportunity for respondents to list other shows that they viewed. We also provided a list of popular platforms for respondents to indicate how they accessed content to binge watch (*e.g.*, via Netflix or via rented DVDs), and again respondents were able to provide additional means of accessing the content. Table 1 indicates which top programs (provided in a list to respondents) were watched. The list was developed based on various news reports about binge-watching. Table 2 indicates the platforms used to watch the programs. These tables indicate that Netflix was the primary and preferred way that people binge-watched television, which confirms industry data (Spangler, 2015).

Table 1: Programs binge watched.

Program	Original airing source	Percent watching
Breaking Bad	AMC	52%
Arrested Development	Netflix	45%
Orange is the New Black	Netflix	35%
House of Cards	Netflix	34%
The Walking Dead	AMC	33%
Game of Thrones	HBO	31%
Friday Night Lights	NBC/Satellite	23%
The Killing	AMC	4%
Lillihammer	Netflix	3%
Derek	Netflix	2%

Table 2: Platforms to access content.

	Have used	Prefer to use
Netflix	83%	63%
Marathon airing	50%	3%
Hulu	47%	3%
Rent DVD	40%	6%
On demand	39%	6%
DVR	34%	9%
Network Web site	31%	3%
Other	21%	6%
Amazon	17%	2%

Motives are the dispositions that influence the actions that people take to fulfill a need or want. Nine different motives for television use have been identified (Rubin, 1983). These include relaxation, companionship, entertainment, social interaction, information, habit, pastime, arousal and escape. Additional motives such as surveillance and voyeurism (Bantz, 1982) have been identified for different genres of television. Papacharissi and Mendelson (2007) combined several of these scales for their study of reality TV, which was used for the basis of this study. We began with 19 of the statements from Papacharissi and Mendelson's study, and added eight additional statements that elements of binge watching discussed in the popular press. Two statements were derived from commentary on the recent Harris poll (Shannon-Missal, 2013), and addressed the degree to which program quality and interesting content were motivations to binge watch. Three statements discussing engagement in the series, the characters and complex story lines as motivators were added. The popular press has also described binge watchers as people who are stuck in the house due to bad weather or illness; these two were also added as motivators. A final statement

regarding the motivation of being the first to see the whole series was included. In total, 27 different statements were provided to respondents, who provided their levels of agreement to each of the statements, which were randomized in their presentation order to respondents. The five-point scale was anchored with 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'.

As there is currently no unified definition of what precisely constitutes binge-watching, the survey sought to capture different motivations for different types of binge-watching. Rubin (1981) found that increased identification with certain motivations results in greater quantities of viewing. The respondents indicated how often they binge-watched TV using a scale from never to frequently. This was preferred over actual minutes since it gives an indication of an individual's perception of their own binge viewing related to other types of viewing. The respondents also asked if they had ever watched a series over one or two days. Finally, individuals indicated the degree to which they planned ahead to binge watch, suggesting that binge-watching could be a highly intentional behavior. Demographic information was collected at the end of the survey.

Results

RQ1: Binge TV watching motivations

The 27 statements about binge watching were assessed using factor analysis. The initial factor analysis of the statements yielded seven interpretable factors. However, five of the 27 statements were eliminated at this point of the analysis as these statements had communalities below 3.0; two additional statements loaded on one factor, and these were eliminated since it is necessary for a factor to consist of at least three statements. The remaining 20 items were analyzed using a Varimax rotation to result in five factors. These factors are: engagement, relaxation, pastime, hedonism and social. Table 3 summarizes the factor analysis that produced these factors.

Table 3: Factor analysis.
Note: Principal component analysis with varimax rotation, eigenvalues of 1 or higher and communalities above WHAT IS THIS? were used for the present factor solution; all factors met the 60/40 criterion. The retained five factors explained 56.62 of the total variance after varimax rotation. The first factor had an eigenvalue of 5.752 and explained 23.01% of the variance. The second factor had an eigenvalue of 3.018 and explained 12.07%. The third factor had an eigenvalue 2.442 and explained 9.768%. The fourth factor had an eigenvalue of 1.557 and explained 6.23%. The fifth factor had an eigenvalue 1.386 and explained 5.542%.

ENGAGEMENT: I binge watch TV because:	1	2	3	4	5
It is more interesting that way.	**.646**	.163	-.008	.132	.121
It is very entertaining.	**.336**	.292	-.056	-.128	.006
I feel more engaged when I binge watch.	**.812**	.188	.027	.115	.052
I feel more engaged with the characters when I binge watch.	**.785**	.084	.025	.109	.094
Binge-watching helps me follow the intricate story lines.	**.712**	.032	.122	.006	.041
RELAXATION I binge watch TV because:					
It is more relaxing.	.47	**.800**	.138	-.017	.120
It helps me to unwind.	.276	**.747**	.143	-.027	.014
It is restful.	.007	**.846**	.093	.254	.145

PASSTIME: I binge watch TV:					
Because it is there.	-.047	.028	**.670**	.325	-.011
Because I have nothing better to do.	.065	.119	**.842**	-.043	-.014
Because it gives me something to do to occupy my time.	.086	.101	**.782**	-.006	.177
HEDONISM I binge watch a series:					
Because of the sexual content.	.063	-.016	-.021	**.871**	.042
Because of the violent content.	.159	.043	.070	**.842**	.042
Because I want to be one of the first people to see the entire series.	.238	-.038	.206	**.608**	.238
SOCIAL I binge watch TV:					
Makes me feel less lonely.	.086	.119	.073	.103	**.864**
Means I won't have to be alone.	.013	.088	.261	.132	**.804**
When there is no one else to talk to or be with.	.019	.118	.543	.013	**.874**
With family and friends.	.122	.054	-.151	-.212	**.708**
When friends come over.	-.063	.263	.053	.334	**.703**
So I can talk with others about it.	.276	.017	.113	.176	**.711**

These factors show some variation from some of the traditional interpretations of factors in uses and gratifications study. The first factor, engagement, includes some of the statements found in the 'entertainment' factor previously used in studies (*e.g.*, Papacharissi and Mendelson, 2007), including statements about binge-watching being a more interesting, entertaining, and engaging way to watch television. Additionally, statements regarding engaging characters and the ability to follow intricate story lines also loaded on this factor. The mean score for this factor was 3.21 on a scale of 1–5, with a Cronbach's alpha of .89. This factor had the highest mean level of agreement as well as the highest eigenvalue of all factors. The second factor, relaxation, is a factor found in traditional television uses and gratifications studies. This factor had a mean score of 2.96 with a Cronbach's alpha of .87. Some of the other statements appearing in other entertainment factors (such as watching being amusing and enjoyable) loaded on the relaxation factor in this study.

The third factor, the pass time factor, captured the traditional television measurements of having "nothing better to do", "because it is there", and "because it is something to do." The mean score was 2.40 (Cronbach's alpha of .87), representing a slight lack of agreement that these factors will motivations. The fourth factor, hedonism, captures different aspects of pleasure that one can experience. First is the aspect of voyeurism, in that someone choses to binge watch programs explicitly because of the sexual or violent content available in such programs. The second type of pleasure is pure pleasure in being the first to hold 'bragging rights' to seeing an entire series. The mean score was 1.39 (Cronbach's alpha .91), meaning a low level agreement overall that these elements were motivating elements. The social factor, with a mean of 2.15, encompassed group viewing and/or interactions around a particular program, with a Cronbach's alpha of .88.

RQ2: Frequency, premeditation, and intense binge-watching motivations

Three regression analyses were conducted in order to assess different types of viewing behaviors that could be considered binge watching. The first of the three different types assessed included a general perception of frequency using a scale from never to frequently, allowing respondents to reflect on binge behaviors relative to other television watching behavior. The second one was premeditated behavior: whether they planned ahead to binge watch a program. The third was a highly intensive behavior, watching an entire series over the course of one or two days. In addition to the identified factors, age and gender were also included as possible predictor variables. The results of these regressions are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4: Regression analysis.
Note: *Significant at .05; **Significant at .01.

Type of binge behavior	**How frequently**		**Plan ahead**		**One or two days**	
Factor	Beta	T	Beta	T	Beta	T
ENGAGEMENT	.255	3.867**	.261	3.998**	.156	2.319*
RELAXATION	.079	1.181	.001	.010	.113	1.650
PASS TIME	.035	1.264	.102	1.593	.032	.493
HEDONISM	.116	1.773	.211	3.248**	.276	4.118**
SOCIAL	.089	1.307	.225	3.341*	.324	.746
AGE	-.108	-1.576	.070	1.020	.038	.590
GENDER	.051	-.069	.122	1.894	.132	1.998*

The first regression analysis measured whether motivations related to perceptions of viewing frequency (how often the individual binge watched, on a scale from 'never' to 'frequently'. The engagement factor was the only one of the five factors related to perceptions of frequency (R=.417, rsq=.182, F=7.622, p=0). For planning ahead to binge-watch, the factors of engagement, hedonism and social were significant (r=.457, rsq=.208, F= 8.842, p=0). For watching an entire season over one or two days, the factors of engagement and hedonism were significant, along with gender (r=.391, rsq=.153, F=.6.1279, p=0). Specifically, being a woman was a stronger predictor of watching an entire season than being a man.

Discussion

This exploratory study provides an interesting snapshot of a burgeoning type of viewing that differs from traditional methods. The platform of choice for the binge-watchers in this study was Netflix. Many of the respondents (83 percent) had used Netflix to binge-watch, and 63 percent of people prefer it for binge-watching. The second most preferred platform was DVR at nine percent. Netflix's dominance can be attributed to several factors. First, unlike Hulu Plus, it has no commercials. When one program is nearing the nearing the end of its running time, Netflix will automatically cue up the next episode in that series for you. The user has to opt out when he or she wants to stop. It requires very little effort to binge on Netflix; in fact, it takes more effort to stop than to keep going. Moreover, Netflix's complex recommender systems and algorithms, while not without their drawbacks, will steer consumers toward content they are likely to enjoy (Pittman and Eanes, 2015), thus diminishing time spent deliberating over new movies or shows to watch. This confirms that binge-watching is indeed a blend of traditional television watching and Internet usage, which will result in unique motivations. These motivations seem to match up with the previously established gratifications of both Internet and TV use while at the same time not completely conforming to either one; they extend U&G into hitherto uncharted territory.

The results of this study formalized motivations identified from anecdotal evidence in the popular press; these factors are somewhat different than factors found in previous studies. For binge-watching, the idea of engagement as a different factor than entertainment as conceptualized by other researchers including Papacharissi and Mendelson (2007). In this study, the engagement factor included statements which indicated a much more active involvement in the viewing activity, such as "binge-watching is more interesting than other ways of watching" and "binge-watching is exciting." Additionally, individuals are highly engaged in the characters and the story lines when they binge watch. This may because the programs are of higher quality, warranting a higher level of engagement, or that individuals make a strong commitment to this type of viewing behavior, limiting outside distractions they binge-watch.

The three regression analyses show different motivational factors for different types of viewing behaviors: frequency of binging, planning

ahead to binge, and watching a series over one or two days. However, all three analyses indicate that engagement is the strongest motivation for those three different viewing behaviors. In fact, engagement is the only motivation to predict frequency of viewing: the more engaged one feels with the story lines and the characters, the more frequently they will binge watch. It is also important to note that the motivations of using binge-watching for either a pastime or for relaxation were not significant in any of the regressions. This supports the importance and strength of the engagement factor, and suggests that binge TV watching could be a more involved and interactive type of viewing behavior than other types of viewing. While this may leave them wanting more when they have completed their binge, it is also likely that this may stimulate demand for binge-watching in the future. Procera Networks, a company that analyzes bandwidth data, suggested that between six and ten percent of Netflix subscribers watched at least one episode of *House of Cards* on its opening weekend, which they estimated was four times the number of people who watched the first *House of Cards* series on Netflix. On average, subscribers watched three episodes the first weekend (Cullen, 2014).

The social factor was significant to predict planning ahead to binge watch, which could suggest that binge-watching certain programs might become more of an event like the Super Bowl for some viewers, somewhat like a ritual of viewership previously described in Winland (2015). While the Procera report discussed earlier did not indicate whether the release of *House of Cards 2* was seen as an opportunity for a social occasion to binge watch, it is quite possible they did. Additionally, Harris (2013) suggested that our current recap culture and the use of social media to share recaps is creating a push to binge watch programs so one is not alienated from the social discourse on programs. As a result, a different type of motivation — to keep up with others — might be a salient factor to investigate in the future.

Finally, there is evidence that people use binge-watching as a type of restorative experience, as indicated by the influence of hedonism on planning ahead and watching an entire series over one or two days. As envisioned by Kaplan (1995), restorative experiences can be experiences where an individual is removed either physically or psychologically from their obligations and daily life. The environment must be accessible but provide the opportunity to engage in thoughts and activities distinct from the every day. The environment must also be rich enough so the individual feels he or she is an entirely other world, and binging a whole season in a day or two would certainly contribute to such narrative immersion. The engagement factors begin to suggest that respondents may be engaging in something distinct from their everyday world when binge-watching, and the aesthetic factors suggest that their interest in the content of the programs they binge watch is providing a rich landscape of this other world. This related to Smith's view of a TV binge watcher as a connoisseur: someone who loves to present in the moment, savors the engagement, and sees how 'everything ties into a beautiful package' (Smith, 2014).

Limitations and future research

As an exploratory study, this study is limited in that few definitive conclusions can be drawn about the nature of the phenomenon under observation. Generalizability to a larger population cannot be made at this time; however this study does indicate that future quantitative research to expand and refine the notion of different types of motivations to binge watch television are warranted.

Similarly, a snowball sample is limited in its ability to generalize to the population at large, although the method was successful in identifying people who participate in the behavior of binge TV watching. The snowball sampling technique may have resulted in some specific biases that may not accurately represent perceptions of other people who binge watch television. Future research using a randomized sample and comparing binge watchers to those who do not binge would help to clarify this.

While this study attempted to identify different types of television viewing behaviors that are types of binge-watching as discussed in the popular press, the lack of a firm definition makes this entire category of viewing a somewhat vague construct. While we used several definitions appearing in the popular press to identify people who indeed did binge-watch, it is unclear whether these individuals perceived their own behaviors as distinct from other television viewing behaviors. Additionally, the screening question did not indicate any temporal constraints, and thus any differences between someone who binge watched a program in the past week and someone who last binge watched five years ago could not be detected.

Future research will need to further examine the motivations, gratifications, and effects of binge-watching. How different to binge-watchers perceive their behavior to be from traditional appointment viewing? Congruent with the third-person effect (Davison, 1983), do most bingers see their own viewing behavior as moderate compared to others who binge? Furthermore, do certain programs lend themselves to binging? Are specific genres better to binge-watch in a group or alone? Do binging preferences change over time? Are programs structured or written differently when producers know it is likely to be binged on?

This study also did not account for the possible motivations of viewers who want to "keep up" or "catch up" with what shows are being talked about. The immediacy with which shows can go from new to commonplace creates an atmosphere of eagerness to watch shows in their entirety. The first to finish the new season of *House of Cards* are able to tweet or Facebook about it, and the rest are left to catch up. This intersection of social media and binge-watching is also fertile ground for future research. How does, say, Twitter activity change surrounding the release of a new series on Netflix, and how does that activity influence other viewers' decision to watch?

Finally, the term "binge" typically has negative connotations. Binge-eating and binge-drinking are legitimate societal and individual problems, so it is curious that the idea of binging on a medium has also become connected to television viewing. Does this term contribute to any sort of shame on the part of bingers? What is the relationship between binging, pleasure, and guilt? Do viewers prefer alternative terms like "media marathon"?

Conclusion

Given the continued evolution of new ways to access program content and people's growing dependency on their digital devices, it is likely that binge TV viewing is going to be part of our vocabulary for years to come. Indeed, it is part of the rise of what many have called the "New Golden Age" of television (Carr, 2014), often citing shows like *The Sopranos, Breaking Bad*, and *Mad Men* as exemplars. As binging becomes more popular, people are devoting more time to shows and are thus able to follow more complicated plot and character development: in other words, "increasingly complex narrative structures demand our attention in a way scheduled television rarely can" [13]. Knowing what factors influence different types of binge-watching — from consistent solo viewing to planning ahead with others — may help shed some light on what has become a very popular trend. This study is among the first to investigate this phenomenon from a uses and gratifications perspective to better understand how this behavior is like and unlike other types of TV viewing behaviors. FM

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Notes

1. Elliott and Quattlebaum, 1979, p. 61.

2. Katz, *et al.*, 1973, p. 510.

3. Young, 2013, p. 160.

4. Young, 2013, p. 155.

5. LaRose, *et al.*, 2001, p. 396.

6. Sundar and Limperos, 2013, p. 510.

7. LaRose, *et al.*, 2001, p. 397.

8. Stafford, *et al.*, 2004, p. 280.

9. Bondad-Brown, *et al.*, 2012, p. 473.

10. Skipper, 2014, paragraph 5.

11. Papachirissi and Mendelson, 2007, p. 358.

12. Davies, 2007, p. 146.

13. Jenner, 2014, pp. 13–14.

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