

THE BEHAVIORAL EFFECTS OF THE BINGE-WATCHING MEDIAMORPHOSIS

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in communication.

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ABSTRACT

The introduction of the Internet changed most media. Newspapers moved online and onto social media, music moved to streaming services, and television moved to streaming video on demand. As television moved online, people have begun to binge-watch television shows. Binge-watching is the process of watching two or more episodes of a television show in a single sitting. This study explores how television-viewing habits have changed due to the digital mediamorphosis of television. Surveys and focus groups gathered data to find what motivates people to binge-watch television and how these motivations differ from watching television weekly. The research was based in uses and gratifications theory and cultivation theory. 127 undergraduates enrolled in introductory communication courses at Wichita State University took place in the study. The survey found statistically significant differences between binge-watchers and traditional watchers, and the focus groups explored if and how the two watching experiences differed. The study found that binge-watchers reported higher levels of entertainment, relationships with character, escapism, and basis for social interaction than traditional watchers. Because binge-watching involves watching a television show quickly, binge-watchers consume stories more quickly and find higher levels of entertainment, relationships with characters, escapism, and basis for social interaction through the narrative of the television show.

Keywords: *binge-watching, television, streaming video on demand (SVOD), digital mediamorphosis, linear television.*

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TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS/NOMENCLATURE

Abbreviation/Nomenclature	Meaning
SVOD	Streaming Video on Demand
VHS	Video Home System
DVD	Digital Video Device
DVR	Digital Video Recorder
PSI	Parasocial Interaction

Chapter 1: The Digital Mediamorphosis of Television Culture

What's interesting about the shift from an industrial age to a technological age is that we keep inventing new media...and one of the things that's most interesting about the invention of a new medium is watching it reinvent itself as it penetrates the culture.

--David Gerrold, "Future Tense: The E-book Also Rises," *Maximum PC*, April 1, 2011

The Internet, like many forms of preceding new media, changed the ways cultures communicate, play, and work. This transformation of culture through new media has been seen throughout history numerous times, tracing as far back as the movement from oral to written society.¹ These media-centric shifts continue to be easily seen historically as the printing press made the written word more accessible to the public, the radio moved information and entertainment to an auditory medium, and television expanded information and entertainment to a visual and aural medium. Each of these mediums not only changed the culture of the time, but also changed the pre-existing media. For example, newspapers stopped wire service availability to radio stations during the 1930s because "the newspapers feared that

¹ Early texts on communication such as Plato's *Phaedrus* discussed the movement from oral to written society in terms of usage, claiming "this discovery of yours [writing] will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories...you give your disciples not truth, but only the semblance of truth; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing" (360 B.C.E., p. 91). More recent literary and communications scholars have explored the movement in terms of semiotics, media effects, and psychology.² Walter Ong writes, "Many of the features we have taken for granted in thought and expression in literature, philosophy and science, and even in oral discourse among literates are not directly native to human existence as such but have come into being because of the resources which the technology of writing makes available to consciousness" (2012, p. 1).

² See Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*, Jack Goody's *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, Marshall McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, and Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy* for more on the movement from oral to written society.

news on the radio would siphon off advertising and sales revenue” (Larson, 2002). The newspapers worried about becoming an obsolete form of media, so the newspaper industry adapted to survive. As seen with the continued existence of the newspaper, radio, and television, new media does not kill old media; instead, the introduction of a new medium influences the reinvention of old media. Roger Fidler deems this process a mediamorphosis, or “The transformation of communication media, usually brought about by the complex interplay of perceived needs, competitive and political pressures, and social and technological innovations” (Fidler, 1997, pp. 23-24)

The introduction of the Internet, itself, brought about a mediamorphosis because the public once again gained less constricted access to information (a perceived need) and old forms of media changed by moving online (a technological innovation). The digital mediamorphosis can be seen through myriad old media. Newspapers expanded beyond print journalism to begin live-tweeting events, posting articles online throughout the day, and creating multimedia news stories to better cover new stories. Music changed from physical formats like vinyl records, cassettes, and compact discs to free digital streaming services like Spotify, Pandora, and Apple Music. Television moved from weekly programming to continuous access of television through the introduction of Digital Video Recorders (DVRs) and Streaming Video on Demand (SVOD) services like Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime.

As all of these forms of mass media gathered and advanced online, the lines of the Internet, news media, social media, television, and radio collapsed. In the seminal book *Technologies of Freedom*, Ithiel de Sola Pool wrote, “A process called

the ‘convergence of modes’ is blurring the lines between media...such as the post, telephone and telegraph...and mass communications, such as the press, radio and television” (Pool, 1983, pp. 23). Thus, convergence (the blurring of lines between media) and mediamorphosis (the transformation of communication media through technological advancement) are closely related but different. The convergence of media recently occurred because the old media adapted to the Internet age. Thus, the digital mediamorphosis converged pre-existing media. In *Convergence Culture*, Henry Jenkins writes about how convergence and mediamorphosis drastically shift media industries and consumer behavior. He writes:

Convergence requires media companies to rethink old assumptions about what it means to consume media, assumptions that shape both programming and marketing decisions. If old consumers were assumed to be passive, the new consumers are active. If old consumers were predictable and stayed where you told them to stay, then new consumers are migratory, showing a declining loyalty to networks or media. If old consumers were isolated individuals, the new consumers are more socially connected. If the work of media consumers was once silent and invisible, the new consumers are now noisy and public. (Jenkins, 2006, p. 18-19)

Because Jenkins suggests that convergence and mediamorphosis requires media industries and consumers to review and update past knowledge on media, the digital mediamorphosis provides an important new era of research for media industries. While the effects of the Internet’s introduction have been researched in

many forms of media,³ little academic research has looked at the changes the Internet caused in television consumption culture. Most of the research that currently exists on television's digital mediamorphosis explores the consumer's source of digital consumption (i.e. Netflix, Hulu, DVR, etc.) and the demographics of the consumers. However, the need for studying both the professional and consumer effects of the Internet on television is clearly outlined in Jenkin's commentary; the television industry and the ways in which people view television are drastically changing because of the digital mediamorphosis.

Digital culture gave consumers more options than ever before on when and where to watch television shows through DVRs and SVOD. While this change in media has been acknowledged, no research has explored how or why DVRs and SVOD changed consumers' television consumption habits. Despite little research existing on the topic, much can be gleaned through the vernacular used to discuss these new television technologies in news media. An extremely common word found in news headlines today is "Binge-watching," a word that was not seen until the rise of SVOD technology. A Google Trends report on "binge-watch", "binge watch", "binge-watching", and "binge watching" shows that the term first appeared in 2012 but began to grow at a strong rate beginning in February of 2013 and

³ See Kevin Kamawato's *Digital Journalism: Emerging Media and the Changing Horizons of Journalism*, Guy Kawasaki's *The Art of Social Media*, and Stephen Witt's *How Music Got Free: The End of an Industry, the Turn of the Century, and the Patient Zero of Piracy* for more on these subjects. While these suggestions are professional books on the subjects, many academic research articles have also been published on the changes in the corresponding fields.

continues to grow today⁴ (Google Trends: Binge-watching, 2015). Binge-watching is not the only change the Internet had on the television medium,⁵ but binge-watching is an apparent change that has not been properly researched. Because binge-watching is a popular new form of television consumption that emerged after the digital mediamorphosis, understanding its differences and similarities to previous television consumption patterns is essential to the cultural understanding of television today and the convergent relationship between the Internet and television.

Defining Binge-Watching

Although binge-watching has become fairly common vernacular, the term has a variety of definitions. In 2013, binge-watching was the runner-up for Oxford Dictionary's word of the year, which defined binge-watch as "watch[ing] multiple episodes of a television programme in rapid succession, typically by means of DVDs or digital streaming" (Oxford, 2013). While this definition accurately describes the phenomenon, it does not properly operationalize the term because it lacks any quantifiable measure.

Two definitions of binge-watching currently exist that quantify the term. In the 2015 TiVo Spring 2015 Binge Viewing Survey, TiVo stated that binge viewing is "defined as viewing more than three episodes of a series in a day" (Badagliacco,

⁴ "Binge-watching" has not been placed into the MLA, APA, or AP stylebook as of November 2015. Publications from the AP have formatted the word as "binge-watching," so the current paper is following their example. All forms of the word are currently correct though.

⁵ For example, the creation of SVOD is a major change in television.

2015). Netflix offered a different definition of binge-watching in a 2013 study conducted with Harris Interactive, finding that 73% of respondents “defined binge watching as watching between 2-6 episodes of the same TV show in one sitting” (Netflix, 2013). This study will use Netflix’s definition of binge-watching because Netflix is the most popular medium in which consumers binge-watch⁶ (Marsh, Ferra, & Anuseviciute, 2014).

While Netflix’s definition of binge-watching is quantifiable, it still lacks operationalization of a key element of the definition—television. The lines of what qualifies as television blurred during the digital mediamorphosis of television. People can now watch television programming on traditional TV sets, computers, phones, and glasses through SVOD media. Because of television’s expansion, a precise definition for television remains unclear and varies between media analysts. Clive Henry, a senior business development manager for Adobe and writer for the Overdigital blog, writes:

The term “television” is truly a reference to the traditional video entertainment companies that once dominated our living room, the ecosystem of backend delivery companies and measurement providers that supported them. Everything else falls under the category of “video”. There are now many flavors of video – we have “Streaming video on demand”, “IP Video”, “User Generated Video”, “Live Streaming Video” etc. (Henry, 2014)

⁶ A media study looking at demographics and mediums of binge-watching found that 50% of their respondents binge-watched through streaming services, 43% through broadcasts (i.e. marathons), and 31% through DVRs (Marsh, Ferra, & Anuseviciute, 2014). 37% of the total number of respondents streamed through Netflix, followed by HBO Go and Showtime Now (17%), Hulu (11%), and Amazon Instant Video (9%).

While Henry views television as solely the traditional form of the medium, other media analysts have expanded their definition of television to include new forms of media. Robert Lloyd, a television critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, suggests:

I am inclined to define television as any moving picture — at all — watched on any sort of screen not located within a movie theater. From a 30-second clip of a baby wombat to a fancy long-arc drama starring people whose other job is being a movie star, whether it was made by unionized professionals or rank amateurs, for fun or for profit, for crass reasons or noble purposes, art, garbage or garbage-art — I am happy to call it all TV. (Lloyd, 2014)

Henry's definition of television vastly differs from Lloyd's, highlighting the large gap between what media analysts consider and do not consider television.

Because there is not an industry consensus on the definition of television, this study will look at Netflix's definition of binge-watching and the Netflix medium to operationalize the term. Because the definition mentions a specific number of episodes, this study first requires television to be episodic. Episodic television is a series of loosely connected events broadcast as a series of installments (Episodic, N.D.). Since Netflix only supports professional commercial productions, the study secondly requires video to be professionally created and supported through a commercial medium to qualify as television. For this study, binge-watching is defined as watching two or more episodes of a professionally produced television show in one sitting. This definition excludes movies, sports, user-generated video, and live streaming video from the discussion of television in the context of binge-watching.

The History of Binge-Watching

Although the term binge-watching only recently appeared in the English lexicon, binge-watching behavior has been possible (yet not easily accessible) for many years. Binge-watching traces its historical roots back more than 30 years to another period of changing television culture and emerging technologies (Giuffre, 2013). Since television's beginning in the 1950s, television programming has largely been linear, meaning "encoded video content that is credited to a specific linear telecast (content that airs at a specific date and time)" (NPower, 2013). Linear programming traditionally airs one episode of a television show at a time, often once a week, on a specific date and time. This programming standard controlled television media until the 1980s when television programming began to change and new technologies allowed people to watch television in their homes differently. Two platforms drove the initial ability for consumers to binge-watch—marathons and video home systems (VHS) (Giuffre, 2013; Oxford, 2013).

In 1985, the Nick at Nite network introduced a new type of programming by showing episodes of *The Cosby Show* back-to-back (Nick at Nite explained, 2009). The idea was generated from the rating success of radio marathons playing single artists, and became a ratings booster for television networks for many years. Since marathons showed multiple episodes of a single television show back-to-back, binge-watching became possible at this time. The difference between marathons and binge-watching lies in their definitions. In her 2014 book *Media Marathoning: Immersions in Reality*, Lisa Glebatis Perks writes, "Adults dedicate their weekends

(and weekdays) to watching full seasons of shows like *Breaking Bad*, *Arrested Development*, and *Mad Men*. Friends have parties for viewing all *Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter* movies. Teenagers read *The Hunger Games* trilogy or *Twilight* in one weekend. I consider all these behaviors ‘media marathoning’” (2014, p. ix). Since marathons are not medium specific, they differ from binge-watching, which solely occurs through the television medium. Because of this, binge-watching can take place during a marathon, but participating in a media marathon does not require binge-watching. The introduction of the marathon into television programming did ultimately offer consumers their first chance to binge-watch television. Consumers were still reliant on the network to program marathons, so there were still strict time restrictions on the availability of binge-watching consumption.

Binge-watching consumption quickly became more available through the popularity of VHS technology around the same time period. VHS tapes had been around since the 1970s, but were becoming cheaper by the mid-1980s due to increased availability and the ability to rent videos (Marcus & Schaefer, 2011). The ability to watch TV shows at a different time than they originally aired continued to evolve in the 1990s and early 2000s as Digital Video Devices (DVDs) and Digital Video Recorders (DVRs) replaced VHS technology (Giuffre, 2013; Rutledge, 2014; Shannon-Missal, 2013). DVDs worked in the same way as VHS tapes, but a single DVD was able to hold more data (and thus more episodes) than a VHS tape. DVRs allowed consumers to record shows to watch on their own time, letting people stockpile new episodes to watch in a single sitting. All of these technological

advancements allowed consumers to break away from watching television on the broadcaster's schedule.

Although binge-watching became much more accessible through the introduction of the VHS, DVD, and DVR, the ability to binge-watch shows exponentially increased through the introduction of SVOD during the digital mediamorphosis. Since Netflix is the largest SVOD service,⁵ the historical growth of binge-watching culture was looked at primarily through the lens of Netflix's growth in the digital age.⁷ NetFlix, which was spelled differently before a company rebrand in 2002, opened in 1998 as a supplemental DVD service that allowed consumers to order DVDs online (Avalos, 1998). Since traditional rental stores were just beginning to carry DVDs, NetFlix provided an alternative that complimented rental stores' access to television shows on DVD. Thus, NetFlix was a provider of the binge-watching experience from the beginning. Since consumers were required to choose and pay by individual DVDs and DVD technology was new and expensive, NetFlix's early history did not solve the accessibility issue of binge-watching for everyone.

By 2002, DVDs were becoming more accessible to the public and Netflix had gained a larger audience. Netflix had rebranded (from NetFlix to Netflix), grown to 857,000 subscribers, and added the addition of a monthly flat rate for DVD rentals by the end of the year (Stepleman, 2003; Keri, 2003; "Netflix Q4 02 Earnings Release," 2002). This flat rate would become the norm for SVOD services today. At this point, Netflix underwent an initial public offering (IPO), which met mixed reactions due to a lack of major commercial success for Netflix (Stepleman, 2003;

⁷ Matrix claims that binge-watching and Netflix are interchangeable terminology because of the prevalence of binge-watching culture in Netflix's subscribers (2014).

“Company Overview,” 2015). Despite the mixed reactions to Netflix’s IPO, Netflix continued to grow until Netflix added SVOD in 2007, changing the organization forever (Alexander, 2008; Liedtke, 2008; “Company Overview,” 2015). SVOD gave audiences more choice than ever before on when and where to watch programming. Before the introduction of streaming, consumers needed access to a television, DVD player, or DVR player. Netflix’s addition of SVOD allowed people to watch television whenever they wanted on televisions, computers, and phones. While marathoning required users to plan ahead to access television programming through the purchase of DVDs or recording programs through a DVR, SVOD services allowed users to stream multiple seasons of shows for an inexpensive price (Jurgenson, 2012). By the end of 2007, Netflix had 7.5 million subscribers (“Netflix Q4 07 Earnings Release,” 2007). From 2008 to 2014, Netflix grew outside of the United States, adding service to Latin America and the Caribbean, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Nordic Countries, the Netherlands, Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland (“Company Overview,” 2015). Netflix ended 2015 with 74.76 million subscribers worldwide and expects to gain more than 5 million subscribers in the first quarter of 2016 (“Netflix Q4 15 Letter to Shareholders,” 2015).

During this time, Netflix also expanded its programming and began releasing original shows. The production of original programming made Netflix a competitor to traditional cable networks and pushed the binge-watching experience onto consumers because Netflix released an entire season of this original content to stream at once. (Brown, 2013; McDonough, 2013). The past’s linear format of

releasing new episodes of television shows greatly differed from Netflix's model of releasing a mass of new episodes at once. Gennedy Kolker, the media relations manager for *The Guardian*, wrote about binge-watching the popular Netflix series *House of Cards*. He writes:

The show is clearly and cleverly structured for binge-consumption. Each episode is labeled as a "chapter". There are no introductory flashbacks, common in traditional series, that trickle out over time. And at the end of nearly every episode, the cliffhanger is so unsettling and juicy that the temptation to witness some sort of resolution only leads to further decay [urges to continue watching]. (2013)

Kolker's comments harken back to Henry Jenkin's discussion about the industry and consumers changing through mediamorphosis; not only does Netflix release their shows as a block of television to be binge-watched at once, but they also write television differently than the traditional television industry. The popularity of this new style of television writing and consumption became apparent as Netflix garnered 31 primetime Emmy nominations for original programming in 2014 (Kleinman, 2014). *House of Cards* won three Primetime Emmy Awards, making Netflix the first Internet TV network to win a primetime Emmy award ("Company Overview," 2015).

Cultural Significance of Binge-Watching

Because of the massive growth of Netflix's subscribers and popularity of SVOD programming in the past five years, understanding binge-watching culture is

essential to understanding the digital mediamorphosis and will add significantly to the academic study of media effects. Because of changing consumer viewing habits, media practitioners also need to understand binge-watching culture. A 2013 study by Edelman Insights found that 88% of consumers now prefer to watch more than one episode of a television series at a time. Since Netflix defines binge-watching as watching two or more episodes at a time, the Edelman survey suggests that four out of every five people now prefers a form of television consumption not used by the majority of traditional linear television programming media.

The television industry is already feeling the effects of binge-watching. *The New York Times* reports that Kevin Reilly, Fox Entertainment's chairman, alluded to the problem of consumers binge-watching television instead of using traditional television consumption methods at a news conference in 2013. Reilly said, "If I bump into one more person that was doing a 'Breaking Bad' marathon in the middle of our fall launch..."⁸ (Stetler, 2013). Dave Nemitz, senior editor for Yahoo TV, wrote in his analysis of fall 2015 television ratings that, "Ratings are down across the board for the broadcast networks (thanks a lot, Netflix)" (2015). While both of these quotes are somewhat comical in nature, they hint at a more serious conversation going on within the media industry about the effects of binge-watching.

From 2012 to 2014, Nielsen reports that the average amount of time spent watching linear television programming dropped from four hours and 50 minutes to four hours and 32 minutes per day. In that same time period, the average amount of

⁸ Reilly's quote corresponds with data on the most popular shows to watch on Netflix. *Breaking Bad* is the most popular show on Netflix in the United States followed by *Family Guy*, *How I Met Your Mother*, *Supernatural*, and *The Walking Dead* (Jenkins, 2013).

media that is binge-watched (SVOD, DVDs, and DVRs) increased from two hours and 39 minutes to three hours and 34 minutes per day (“Total Audience Report, 2014”). Because Netflix alone has grown by 3.62 minutes a day in the past three months, the amount of time watching through SVOD per day is likely to increase because of increased popularity in the medium (Liedtke, 2015). The drop in traditional television media combined with the rise of SVOD media comes to fruition in the industry’s fear of cable-cutting. Media companies like HBO are now experimenting with new forms of media distribution (HBO Now) because of the concerns with traditional media becoming less relevant due to SVOD.

Binge-watching and the digital mediamorphosis will not only affect the television industry. The effects of binge-watching could be far reaching for both society and the industry surrounding television. Media effects theories like cultivation theory (explored in Chapter 2) suggest people that consume more television view the world as a darker, more violent place (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, Gerbner, et al, 1977, 1978). Since binge-watching has increased the amount of television consumed, the cultivation effects on consumers could increase as well, changing individuals’ world view. Binge-watching could also affect how advertising works in the television industry because Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime all provide programming with no commercials, the platform through which a large amount of television has been funded historically.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

As stated in Chapter 1, research on binge-watching is extremely limited in scope to date. Despite the lack of research on the topic, commercial, non-academic research provides key surface-level insights into binge-watching culture. This chapter will explore the current literature on binge-watching (mostly based in the commercial media industry's research) as well as key theoretical frameworks for the research of binge-watching that will be used as the theoretical backbone for this study.

Binge-Watching Research To Date

Getting to know binge-watchers. The first insights television media analysts aimed to understand about binge-watching are the demographics of binge-watchers and their consumption methods. Studies have found consistent results analyzing these insights. Binge-watchers are commonly between the ages of 18 and the mid-to-upper 30s (Marsh, Ferra, & Anuseviciute, 2014; Shannon-Missal, 2013). 43% of Americans in this age range subscribe to Netflix, making the group an essential market for binge-watching (Richter, 2013). Outside of the data about age, preliminary research indicates that females are slightly more likely to binge watch than males,¹ and that African Americans are more likely to binge-watch than other ethnic groups.² (Marsh, Ferra, & Anuseviciute, 2014).

¹ 67% of females consider themselves binge-watchers while 59% of males consider themselves binge-watchers.

² 78% of African Americans surveyed consider themselves binge-watchers. The next largest group of self-identified binge-watchers was Caucasians at 61%.

The Marsh, Ferra, & Anusevicuite study from which much of the demographic information is based is now more than a year old, so the data presented in the study is slightly dated despite its insights. The media in which binge-watching takes place have grown since the study was conducted. However, Netflix remains the largest medium (by subscriber) of the SVOD services with 69 million subscribers. Amazon Instant is estimated to be the second largest streaming service; Amazon Prime includes a free Amazon Instant Video account, and Amazon Prime has roughly 40 million subscribers with an estimated 70% of users taking advantage of Amazon Instant Video (Seitz, 2015). Hulu follows Amazon Instant Video with an estimated 9 million current subscribers (Kastrenakes, 2015). HBO Now, the newest major streaming service, has an estimated 970,000 to 1.9 million subscribers (Lafayette, 2015). The shift in numbers suggests continued growth and movement in SVOD media, meaning the nature of binge-culture is continually shifting. The numbers suggest that Netflix still has the largest market share of SVOD technology and provides the key media culture in which binge-watching takes place.

Binge-watching culture. The roots of binge-watching research connect to two different types of study — research on binge cultures and research on watching. Researchers have looked at the effects of binging, defined as a rapid consumption of a large amount of substance in a short time period (Goldsmith, 2013), for years. The extensive catalog of research focuses on the two most common applications of binging in the past: eating and drinking (Devasagayam, 2014). Binge culture, historically, perpetuates lower levels of thinking which result in an urge to continue consuming for continued stimulation. (Vervae, Van Heeringen, & Audenaert, 2004).

The likeliness of bingeing is created from a combination of the overall culture and the social atmospheres of a situation (Bhullar, Simons, Joshi, & Amoroso, 2012). It is no coincidence that binge-watchers use the “addict” terminology to describe their experiences, adding even more reason to understand the effects of binge-watching (Lloyd, 2013; Murphy, 2014).

The creation of binge-watching culture can be explored through both the culture of the medium and the social atmosphere on binge-watching (Bhullar, Simons, Joshi, & Amoroso, 2012). The culture of Netflix perpetuates binge-watching in a variety of ways. In 2014, Netflix added an auto-play feature, which begins the next episode of a television series 15 seconds after the last episode ends. Auto-play features encourage addictive habits in their viewers, but few people seem to see a problem with it, making the culture of binge-watching easy to enter and a social atmosphere that does not view the culture negatively (Devasagayam, 2014). In fact, Netflix reports “nearly three quarters of TV streamers (73%) say they have positive feelings towards binge streaming TV” (2013). Additionally, Netflix uses binge-watching terminology to describe its programming, showing a cultural acceptance of the act through inclusive language (see figure 1.1).

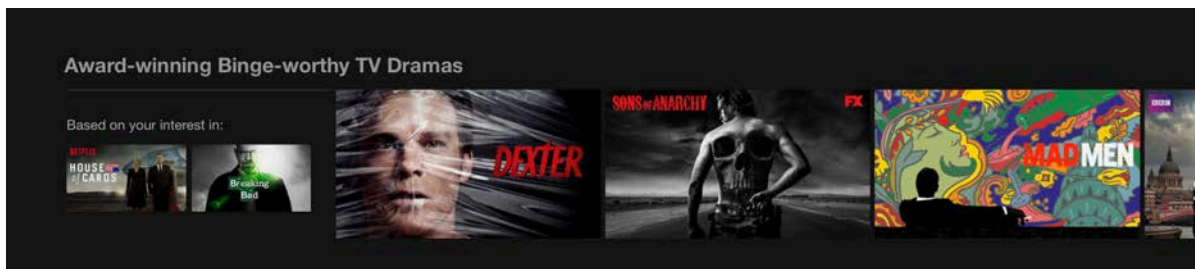


Figure 1.1 Netflix's categorization now implements binge-watching terminology, urging binge behavior to subscribers.

Because of the generally positive view on binge-watching by consumers, media analysts suggest that the introduction of binge-watching influences consumers to change their meaning of the word “binge” (Rutledge, 2014). Jurgensen reports that Netflix executive Todd Yellin finds binge-watching “pathological” and dislikes the terminology. (2014). The connotations of “binging” have been negative historically, but the language is now shifting to include both positive and negative connotations because of the emergence of binge-watching. While past research on binge-consuming food and drinks appears to have similarities to the consumption patterns of binge-watchers, future research will need to clarify how the consumption effects of these products differ.

Effects of binge-watching. Academic research has just begun to look into the motivating behaviors of binge-watching. A recent study looked into how binge-watching behavior is influenced. The study, conducted by University of Texas researchers Yoon Hi Sung, Eun Yeon Kang and Wei-Na Lee, looked into the relationship between loneliness, depression, self-regulation deficiency, and binge-watching. The results of the study were presented at the 65th Annual International Communication Association Conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico, but have not been published yet. The abstract of the presentation claims the researchers found a positive correlation between lonely and depressed study participants and their likelihood to binge-watch (Sung, Kang, & Lee, 2015). The study asserts that binge-watching behavior diverts attention from the feelings of loneliness or depression. These findings will closely compliment the findings of this study.

Additionally, graduate students at the University of Oregon are working on an exploratory study of the uses and gratifications of binge-watching. “The Netflix Effect: Uses and Gratifications of Binge-Watching Television” was presented at the National Communication Association’s 2014 national conference (Pittman & Sheehan, 2014). The paper has not been published and an abstract was not available from the conference. Pittman & Sheehan provided their unpublished manuscript, which did not include a final data analysis. The study looked at a variety of theoretical frameworks to study the uses and gratifications of binge-watching (see McQuail, 2010; Rubin, 1983; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007; Barton, 2013; Baruh, 2013; and Young, 2014)

Theoretical Frameworks For Researching Binge-Watching

Cultivation Theory. Although research on binge-watching is just beginning, future understanding of binge-watching will be based largely in past media effects theory. In the 1960s, communication scholar George Gerbner developed cultivation theory as a means to understanding the long-term effects of television on society (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). The theory looks at how media (specifically television) cultivates the reality of the consumer (Gerbner, 1966). Gerbner writes, “our theories of the cultivation process attempt to understand and explain the dynamics of television as the distinctive and dominant cultural force of our age” (1998). Originally, the theory solely suggested that television influences the beliefs and perceptions of audience members. As Gerbner and other scholars continued

researching and applying cultivation theory, the theory evolved into what it is known as today.

Eventually the theory would state that the more media a person consumes, the more the individual will view the world through the lens of the medium (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980; Signorielli, 1990). This concept provides a key framework for researching binge-watching. If people are watching more of a show in one sitting, cultivation theory suggests they would view the world more through the lens of the media. While the current study does not use much cultivation analysis within the analysis of the data, the theory provides the key framework for the need to research binge-watching.

According to Gerbner, cultivation theory is the process of institutions sending messages to publics and assisting in cultivating the publics' worldview (1998). This makes the base of cultivation theory dependent on the relationship between three items — institutions, messages, and publics (Gerbner, 1996, 1998; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Institutions are the organizations or groups of people sending the messages to the public such as cable networks. As cultivation theory was explored more in depth, messages and publics became the focus of the research. Messages are measured by content analyses, where displays of messages within a television program are counted (Gerbner, 1998). Gerbner and his colleagues have collected samples of weekly television programming and conducted content analyses for messages since 1967. The most important aspect of the relationships existing within cultivation theory is the final part of the relationship — the user. Cultivation theory suggests there is a difference between the cultivation effects on

different types of users based on how much media they consume. The types and frequency of media individuals consume affect their beliefs and opinions. These cultivation effects are not just short-term effects of media consumption. Meta-analyses of cultivation theory have suggested that cultivation has long-term, gradual effects that influence the viewer of media (Shanahan and Morgan, 1999).

Cultivation theory separates viewers of media into different categories. These categories typically include heavy users, medium users, and light users (Gerbner, 1998). Throughout Gerbner's research, common definitions for each type of user indicated heavy users watched 4-24 hours of television a day, medium users watched 3 hours of television a day, and light users watched 0-2 hours of television a day (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner, et al, 1977, 1978). Since binge-watching occurs when people are watching two or more episodes of a television show in a single sitting, their daily consumption would at a minimum fall into the medium user category. Researchers found that heavy users of media had higher levels of cultivation than medium users and light users. This difference in the cultivation effects of media between user groups is called the cultivation differential (Gerbner, 1998). Thus, binge-watching theoretically would bring a higher cultivation differential in consumers than viewers of traditional media.

Early research on cultivation theory focused on the cultivating effects of television violence on consumers. A major cultivation differential appeared between heavy and light users in Gerbner and Gross' research. Heavy users of media are more likely to see the world as a meaner, more violent place, which Gerbner described as mean world syndrome (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, Gerbner, et al, 1977,

1978). More recently, cultivation theory has been applied to new forms of media, like music videos, and portrayals of lifestyles, like drugs and homosexuality in the media (Beullens, Roe, & Van den Bulck, 2012; Minnebo & Eggermont, 2007; Calzo & Ward, 2009). Previous research has shown cultivation effects can be a major force for both positive and negative change, once again suggesting a need for understanding binge-watching.

Cultivation theory was the third most used theory in communication research in the latter half of the 20th century (Bryant & Miron, 2004). Despite cultivation theory's popularity, early research using cultivation theory received a large backlash by researchers because of the methodology used within the research (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). In 1980, two theorists re-examined the work of Gerbner to look for support of his cultivation hypothesis. Hirsch looked at Gerbner's 1978 study and writes, "nonviewers are consistently more fearful, alienated, and favorable to suicide than "light" viewers; extreme viewers are less perturbed than heavy viewers. These findings severely undermine the contention that any relationship between TV-viewing and the provision of 'television answers' to attitude items is linear or monotonic" (1980). Similarly, Hughes found that Gerbner did not use control groups in his early studies, and a control group drastically changed results (1980). Once control groups were added to the data set, Hughes' findings supported those of Hirsch and substantiated Gerbner's research (1980). The main complaints in both Hirsch and Hughes critiques are the methodologies employed by Gerbner (& Gross, 1976; et al, 1977, 1978); because of this, future

studies have implemented the critiques of Hirsch and Hughes to make improvements to methodologies used in testing cultivation theory.

Despite the early critical response to cultivation theory, the theory is now viewed in a more positive light. In their 2010 analysis of the academic industry on cultivation theory, Morgan and Shanahan suggest that a new meta-analysis on cultivation should be written because recent literature indicates a movement from cultivation being a theory to a paradigm (2010). The movement of cultivation from theory to paradigm suggests an industry-accepted infallibility to the theory and a movement away from the previous critiques of cultivation theory. Because binge-watching is based around the amount of television being consumed, the previous knowledge provided through past research in cultivation theory should be a key basis for research on binge-watching.

Uses and Gratifications Theory. Although cultivation theory provides a framework to examine the possible effects of binge-watching, this study does not aim to study the effects of views on violence, sex, etc. affected through cultivation. The research questions for this study ultimately aim to understand why people are binge-watching, which links to a different type of theoretical research on watching television — uses and gratifications.

Uses and gratifications research explores why people choose to consume media. The research was an offshoot of early empirical communication (Katz & Blumler, 1974). Uses and gratifications research began in the mid 1930s, but Blumler and Katz modernized the concept when they began working on the uses and gratifications of television. (Herzog, 1942; Suchman, 1942; Wolfe & Fiske, 1949;

Berelson, 1949; Blumler and Katz, 1974). Blumler and Katz triggered the reemergence of gratifications research by recognizing the power of the television medium and reintegrating the methodologies of earlier research on the uses and gratifications of radio and newspapers (Blumler & Katz, 1974).

Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch's framework for uses and gratifications research is based in a few key assumptions (1973). First, they suggested that audiences must be active and that media choice lies with the audience. For an audience to be considered active, Blumler writes that mass communication must have uses for people (utility), an audience's media consumption must be directed by prior motivation (intentionality), the selected media behavior reflects prior audience interests and preferences (selectivity), and the audience creates their own meanings from the consumed media (imperviousness to influence) (1979). Active audiences have choices of media because different types of media offer different gratifications (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). When asked, most active audiences are aware of the reason they are consuming a specific medium. Finally, Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch suggest that audience members interpret their own meaning while consuming media.

Later research expanded on the concept of gratification by looking at the difference between gratifications sought and gratifications obtained (Palmgreen, Wenner, & Rosengren, 1985). These key terms signify that the gratifications audiences actively seek are not always achieved. The result, or gratification, of consuming media can often be different than the person's original intention for consuming the media; the gratification the consumer sought did not meet the

gratification that was obtained.

Five meta-categories of uses and gratifications currently exist within the realm of watching television (McQuail, 2010). They are to become educated, to identify with characters, to be entertained, to be social, and to escape from daily life. These meta-categories have a variety of sub-categories branching off from underneath them, but they explain the primary reasons that people watch television. McQuail's five meta-categories will be used as the primary framework for this research. There have been many different uses and gratifications associated with television consumption in previous research. While looking at television quiz show, McQuail, Blumler, and Brown found four uses and gratifications for consumers watching television: self-rating appeals, a basis for social interaction, excitement, and educational appeals (1972). Many of these categories continued into McQuail's later analysis of uses and gratifications (2010). Greenberg looked into the motivations behind television consumption for children and teenagers and found habitually-based, relaxation-based, companion-based, time-based, education-based, arousal-based, and escapist-based motivations (1974). Palmgreen and Rayburn looked at the gratifications obtained by watching public television and found seven findings: relaxation, learning, communication utility, escaping, passing time, companionship, and entertainment (1979). Rubin identified five uses and gratifications for adult television consumers: habit, information, entertainment, companionship, and escape (1983). When looking at the different uses and gratifications for consuming television found in past research, most, if not all, of the categories easily fit into McQuail's five meta-categories of the uses and gratifications of television (2010).

While binge-watching is an area that has not been explored in uses and gratifications research, the research has expanded into the digital age. In a study done in 2000, Leung and Wei researched the gratifications of cell phone usage and concluded that people use cell phones for social, entertainment, psychological, fashion, and accessibility purposes. Studies conducted by Stafford, Stafford, and Schkade in 2004 show that people use the Internet for access to information content, the ability to process ideas, and for social connections. The uses and gratifications research on Internet usage and television consumption share crossover categories, and provide an interesting basis for the beginning of research on binge-watching.

Uses and gratifications research has received a lot of scrutiny since its revival in the 1970s. The largest concern many researchers share about uses and gratifications research is that the results of uses and gratifications theory are self reported and subjective (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). The gratifications pronounced by audience members are also difficult to categorize because the research is based around individual's usage of media instead of a group of people's interpretation, a limitation of the current study. Despite criticism, researchers agree that audience members do use media for specific, personal reasons. Because of this, uses and gratifications theory has remained popular amongst communication researchers despite its issues with methodology.

Research Questions

This study aims to answer how and why consumer television viewing habits have changed in the past five to 10 years to provide a better academic and professional understanding of the effects of SVOD technology. The study is mostly based in the uses and gratifications framework, but some cultivation effects are analyzed in comparison with the uses and gratifications. The study does not seek to answer questions about the industry changes on the writing, production, promotion, or placement process of television. This study aims to answer the following six research questions:

RQ1: Is binge-watching the preferred method of television consumption amongst respondents?

RQ2: What motivators influence binge-watching behavior?

RQ3: What gratifications do people receive from binge-watching?

RQ4: How do the motivators for binge-watching differ from traditional television media consumption?

RQ5: How do the gratifications obtained from binge-watching differ from the gratifications obtained from traditional television media consumption?

RQ6: Do the uses and gratifications of binge-watching differ amongst light and heavy binge-watchers?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Sample

Participants ($N=127$) in the study were drawn from current undergraduates enrolled in Wichita State University's introductory communication courses.

Although this convenience sample would not normally be ideal for representative data, Marsh, Ferra, & Anuseviciute viewed the age range of 18-35 as the most common binge-watching age range, making the sample appropriate for the current study (2014). The participants ranged in age from 18 to 51 ($M = 21.85$, $SD = 5.92$). Depending on the course the students were enrolled in, the students either fulfilled a university research requirement for the course or earned extra credit for participating in the study. All participation was voluntary. The study includes both quantitative and qualitative measures. Students were able to participate in both measures because of a lack of time to complete the study and a lack of large pool of participants to draw from. 9.4% ($n=12$) of participants provided data in both the quantitative and qualitative portion of the study.

Research Design

Survey. The study electronically administered a survey to $n=121$ participants.¹ The participants in the quantitative section of the study ranged from 18 to 51 years old ($M=21.85$, $SD =5.92$) with 49.6% male and 50.4% female, exactly matching the gender make-up of the United States from 2011-2015 (World Bank, 2016). The majority of participants were white (64.5%, $n=78$), followed by Asian

¹ A sample of $n=121$ is generalizable to a population of 10,000,000 with $\pm 10\%$ error.

(15.7%, n=19), Other (9.9%, n=12), Hispanic (5.8%, n=7), and African American (4.1%, n=5). 61.2% of participants (n=74) were single, 31.4% (n=38) in a relationship, 5.8% (n=7) married, and 1.7% (n=2) divorced. Participants electronically answered questions about their demographics, weekly television consumption, and their reasoning behind watching television. Students registered to complete the survey through ElliottSchool.info, a Wichita State University website that uses Lime Survey, an open source software built into the system, to gather survey data. Upon registering, students were informed that the study was designed to investigate television consumption patterns and that they would be asked about their consumption behaviors throughout the survey. The students were informed that their information would remain anonymous, that participation in the survey was entirely voluntary, and that they did not have to answer any questions that made them uncomfortable. All students signed the consent form before completing the survey.

At the beginning of the survey, students answered questions about their demographics and detailed the total hours of television they consumed each day in the past week. After answering these questions, participants were given the definition of binge-watching (as stated earlier) and asked whether they are a binge-watcher. If yes, the survey respondents answered questions on the uses and gratification of binge-watching scale, which was constructed for the study. If no, the survey respondents were given the same scale with a semantic differential. For example, binge-watchers would see a statement such as "I connect with characters and form personal relationships with characters while *binge-watching*."

Traditional watchers would see a similar statement with a semantic differential such as “I connect with characters and form personal relationships with characters while ***watching***.”² By using the same scale with minor vernacular changes, the two groups could be compared during statistical analysis.

Although the uses and gratifications of binge-watching scale was developed for the study, pre-tests of the scale done within the current study showed strong reliability ($\alpha = .921$). The scale consisted of 30 items measured on a 10-point Likert scale; the Likert scales were flipped randomly throughout the survey, but the data was cleaned during analysis so responses rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree). The survey used the five categories found in McQuail’s uses and gratifications of television to determine reasons why consumers binge-watch (2010). 15 items measured gratifications sought by binge-watching, and 15 items measured gratifications obtained by binge-watching. For example, sample items for McQuail’s educational use and gratification category include “I binge-watch television so I can learn more about the world”(gratification sought) and “I feel more educated after binge-watching” (gratification obtained). The four remaining categories asked about relationships with characters, entertainment, escapism, and social aspects of television.

The results from the uses and gratifications of binge-watching scale were analyzed by calculating the mean for each of McQuail’s categories. Since each category had measurements from three items, the items were combined to calculate a mean score on a 30-point scale. Higher scores provided a good indication of a

² The bold and italic formatting was not included in the survey. The formatting was added to make the semantic differential more easily visible to readers.

more prominent uses and gratifications category ($\alpha = .716$). Additionally, Independent Sample T-tests and ANOVA tests looked for statistically significant differences between binge-watchers and non-binge-watchers, cultivation groups and demographics within the means for each uses and gratifications category.

Focus Groups. Three focus groups ($n=18$), ranging in size from four to seven participants, were held to discuss television consumption habits, the uses and gratifications participants receive from binge-watching, and how the binge-watching experience differs from linear television consumption. Participants ranged from 18 to 50 years old ($M = 22.33, SD = 8.25$) with 78% males and 22% females. The majority of participants were white (72%), followed by Asian (10%), Black (6%), Latino (6%), and Multi-Racial (6%).

Before beginning the focus group, participants were given an informed consent form to read and sign. The researcher informed participants that their personal information would remain anonymous, their participation in the survey was entirely voluntary, and that they did not have to answer any questions that made the students uncomfortable. All students signed the consent form before participating in the focus group.

The focus groups were audio recorded, transcribed, and thematically coded using axial coding and theory-driven coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Axial coding recognizes categories identified by past research, in this case McQuail's analysis of uses and gratifications. While McQuail identifies the five uses and gratifications categories, he does not outright define the categories. Thus, theory-

driven coding was used to develop the categorical codes. Theory-driven coding takes place in three stages: (1) designing the study with the theory in mind, (2) developing themes and a code, and (3) validating and using the code. Since uses and gratifications theory and cultivation theory provided the theoretical framework for the study, stage one of the theory driven coding was completed through the axial coding of McQuail. Second, themes and codes were developed. Since McQuail already provided the uses and gratifications categories, initial codes were drawn from the data and prior research. As the data was coded, the thematic codes' definitions were adapted to match the raw data. During this stage, sub-categories were developed.

The initial coding in the study used McQuail's five main categories of uses and gratifications, defined as:

1. Education: The television media was used as a way to gain knowledge about a topic or about the world. Typical forms of television media included in this area would be documentary shows and news programs.
2. Entertainment: The television media provides excitement, amusement, and arousal through the narrative or action in the show.
3. Social: The television media provides a basis for/against social interaction outside of the media; the media is either used to avoid interacting with others, to interact with others (by bonding through common media consumption experience), or through suggestions from other individuals.

4. Character: The characters present in the television media displace actual human interaction through identification with characters (Horton and Wohl, 1956; Rosengren and Windahl, 1989).
5. Escapism: The television media provides a way to unwind and escape from other aspects of life.

Some of the categories can cross over since television consumption does not only occur because people are looking for a single usage of the media. For example, an individual might watch television because they want to escape from a bad day at work as well as be entertained. The individual's consumption can be multi-purposed. The data was analyzed by each individual code as well as through a relational view of the codes.

Chapter 4: Findings

Survey

Demographics of binge-watchers. 62.5% (n=75) of total respondents (n=121) reported binge-watching behavior and answered the survey questions on binge-watching. Binge-watchers averaged 21.43 years of age (SD=5.29). Binge-watchers are commonly between the ages of 18 and the mid 30s (Marsh, Ferra, & Anuseviciute, 2014; Shannon-Missal, 2013), so the respondents were split into two groups (younger than 35, and older than 35) for an independent t-test to examine whether age affected likelihood to binge-watch. No statistically significant difference existed between age groups. An independent t-test was conducted to examine whether there was a significant difference between biological sexes in relation to the likelihood to binge-watch. The test revealed a statistically significant difference between males and females' likeliness to binge-watch ($t = 2.24, df = 115.7, p = .027$). Females ($M = 1.28, SD = .45$) reported a higher likelihood to binge-watch than males ($M = 1.47, SD = .5$).¹ One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests were calculated to see if ethnicity, school class (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior), or marital status affected an individual's likelihood to binge-watch. No statistically significant differences existed between any ethnic, class-based, or marital groups. The binge-watching population of respondents reported binge-watching an average of 14.64

¹ If a person was a binge-watcher, the data was coded as a 1. If the person watched television traditionally, the data was coded as a 2. Thus, a lower mean equals a higher likelihood of being a binge-watcher.

hours ($SD=11.01$) of television within the last week with an overall range of zero hours consumed to 55 hours consumed.²

The uses and gratifications of binge-watching. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the mean responses of binge-watching participants ($n=74$) on the 10 categories of gratifications sought and obtained while binge-watching. Each category consisted of three 10-point Likert scale items combined to have a maximum mean of 30 and a minimum of 3. The five gratifications sought from binge-watching ranked (from highest to lowest ranked gratification) to be entertained ($M = 26.86, SD = 4.21$), to escape from daily life ($M = 22.69, SD = 7.39$), to identify with characters ($M = 22.46, SD = 8.02$), to be social ($M = 21.26, SD = 6.74$), and to become educated ($M = 11.49, SD = 6.61$). The five gratifications obtained from binge-watching ranked (from highest to lowest ranked gratification) being entertained ($M = 23.76, SD = 5.89$), identifying with characters ($M = 22.01, SD = 7.98$), sociability ($M = 20.57, SD = 7.1$), escaping ($M = 18.49, SD = 7.47$), and becoming more educated ($M = 14.58, SD = 6.82$).

Independent t-tests and ANOVA tests were run to analyze between group differences amongst the uses and gratifications of binge-watching in regards to gender, age, ethnicity, class in school, and marital status. While most differences were not statistically significant, a few statistically significant differences stood out.

By testing ethnicity as the independent variable and the 10 uses and

² Future studies should include GPA within the demographic breakdown. If a student is spending one third of their week binge-watching (55 hours), their GPA might suffer.

gratifications of binge-watching categories as dependent variables in an ANOVA test, a significant difference was noted in regards to the entertainment gratification obtained category ($F(4, 69) = 2.509, p = .05, \eta^2 = .348$). In a follow-up to this test, a Tukey HSD post hoc was conducted. The Tukey HSD post hoc indicated that there was a significant difference between the entertainment gratification obtained between people of White ethnicity ($M = 24.88, SD = 5.46$) and the Other ethnicity ($M = 16.5, SD = 4.65$).

The only other statistically significant difference was found by testing class in school as the independent variable and the 10 uses and gratifications of binge-watching categories as dependent variables in an ANOVA test. A significant difference was found in regards to the social gratification obtained category ($F(3, 70) = 6.68, p < .001, \eta^2 = .24$) and the relationship to character gratification obtained ($F(3, 70) = 2.92, p = .04, \eta^2 = .173$). In a follow-up to this test, a Tukey HSD post hoc was conducted. The Tukey HSD post hoc indicated that there was a significant difference in the relationship to character gratification obtained between freshmen ($M = 25.04, SD = 5.84$) and juniors ($M = 17.88, SD = 10$). The Tukey HSD post hoc also indicated that there were significant differences in the social gratification obtained between freshmen ($M = 24, SD = 5.1$) and sophomores ($M = 15.94, SD = 7.15$) as well as sophomores and juniors ($M = 21.94, SD = 7.05$).

The uses and gratifications of traditional watching. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the mean responses of binge-watching participants ($n=45$) on the 10 categories of gratifications sought and obtained while binge-watching. Each

category consisted of three 10-point Likert scale items combined to have a maximum mean of 30 and a minimum of 3. The five gratifications sought from traditional watching ranked (from highest to lowest ranked gratification) to be entertained ($M = 24.38, SD = 5.59$), to escape from daily life ($M = 21.18, SD = 6.39$), to be social ($M = 18.87, SD = 7.87$), to identify with characters ($M = 18.71, SD = 7.73$), and to become educated ($M = 17.38, SD = 7.84$). The five gratifications obtained from traditional watching ranked (from highest to lowest ranked gratification) being entertained ($M = 21.33, SD = 7.08$), escaping ($M = 18.64, SD = 7.34$), identifying with characters ($M = 18.53, SD = 8.17$), becoming more educated ($M = 17.84, SD = 6.78$), and sociability ($M = 16.96, SD = 7.77$).

Independent t-tests and ANOVA tests were run to analyze between group differences amongst the uses and gratifications of binge-watching in regards to gender, age, ethnicity, class in school, and marital status. While most differences were not statistically significant, a few statistically significant differences stood out.

A statistically significant difference was found in regards to the education gratification sought category ($F(2, 42) = 3.98, p = .008, \eta^2 = .489$), the entertainment gratification sought category ($F(2, 42) = 3.99, p = .008, \eta^2 = .492$), and the education gratification obtained category ($F(2, 42) = 3.36, p = .018, \eta^2 = .438$) when using ethnicity as the independent variable and the 10 uses and gratifications of traditional watching categories as dependent variables in an ANOVA test. In a follow-up to this test, a Tukey HSD post hoc was conducted. The Tukey HSD post hoc indicated that there was a significant difference in the education gratification sought category between people of the White ethnicity ($M = 14.24, SD = 7.55$) and African

American ethnicity ($M = 28, SD = 0$). The Tukey HSD post hoc also indicated that there were significant differences in the entertainment gratification sought category between different ethnic groups of people. People of the White ethnicity ($M = 25.28, SD = 5.75$), African American ethnicity ($M = 28, SD = 1.73$), Asian ethnicity ($M = 25.71, SD = 3.77$), and Hispanic ethnicity ($M = 27.5, SD = 3.54$) were more likely to watch for entertainment than people of Other ethnicities ($M = 18.25, SD = 3.45$). Finally, the Tukey HSD post hoc indicated that although there was initially a statistically significant difference between groups in the education gratification obtained category, there were not significant differences. People of Asian ethnicity ($M = 23.57, SD = 5.83$) and Hispanic ethnicity ($M = 10, SD = 9.9$) neared statistically significant difference ($p = .06$).

Lastly, by testing marital status as the independent variable and the 10 uses and gratifications of traditional watching categories as dependent variables in an ANOVA test, a significant difference was found in regards to the entertainment gratification sought category ($F(2, 42) = 11.37, p < .001, \eta^2 = .541$) and the escape gratification sought ($F(2, 42) = 6.23, p = .004, \eta^2 = .576$). In a follow-up to this test, a Tukey HSD post hoc was conducted. The Tukey HSD post hoc indicated that there was a significant difference in the entertainment gratification sought between single people ($M = 24.84, SD = 4.53$) and married people ($M = 12.33, SD = 8.5$) as well as married people and people in a relationship ($M = 26.15, SD = 3.76$). The Tukey HSD post hoc also indicated that there were significant differences in the escapism gratification sought between single people ($M = 21.66, SD = 5.07$) and married

people ($M = 10, SD = 6.25$) as well as married people and people in a relationship ($M = 22.69, SD = 7.01$).

Comparing binge-watching and traditional watching. The means of the 10 uses and gratifications sought and obtained while binge-watching and watching traditionally were compared through an independent sample t-test (See figure 1.2 for a side-by-side comparison of the means of the uses and gratifications for binge-watchers and traditional watchers). Many statistically significant differences on the gratifications sought and obtained were found between the two groups.

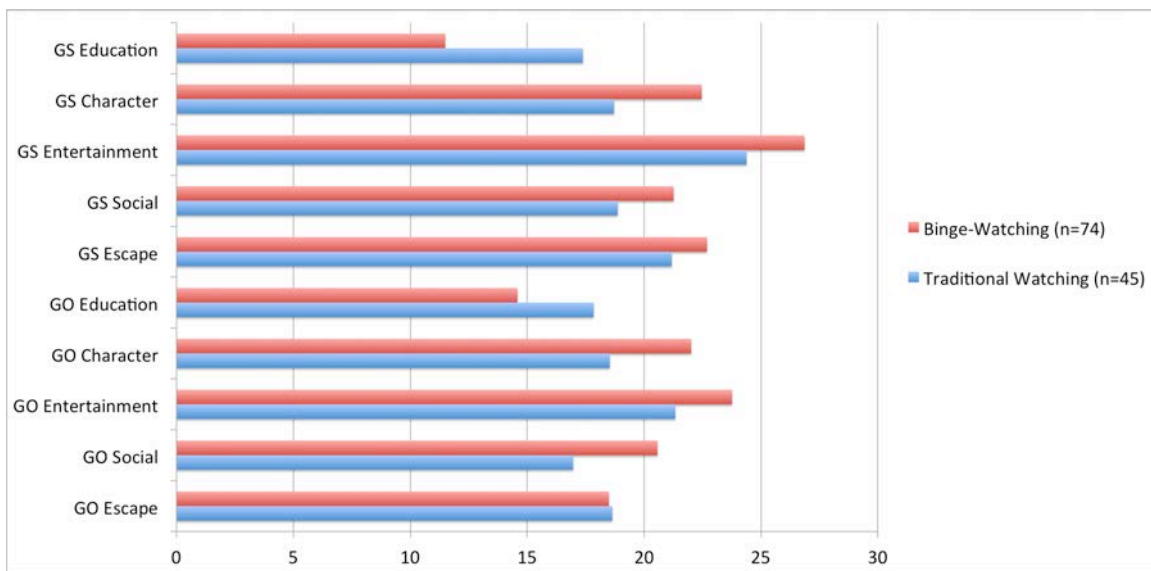


Figure 1.2 A comparison of the mean scores for each uses and gratifications sought (GS) and obtained (GO) category by the type of television consumer.

The test revealed a statistically significant difference on the education gratification sought ($t = -4.21, df = 81.16, p < .001$), the relationship with characters gratification sought ($t = 2.53, df = 95.75, p = .013$), the entertainment gratification sought ($t = 2.575, df = 74.33, p = .012$), the education gratification obtained ($t = -2.54, df = 93.59, p = .013$), the relationship to character gratification obtained ($t = 2.27, df = 91.35, p = .025$), and the social gratification obtained ($t = 2.54, df = 86.65, p$

= .013) between binge-watchers and traditional watchers. Traditional watchers ($M = 17.38, SD = 7.84$) were more likely to consume television to seek out educational information than binge-watchers ($M = 11.49, SD = 6.61$). Binge-watchers ($M = 22.6, SD = 8.02$) were more likely to seek out relationships with characters than traditional watchers ($M = 18.71, SD = 7.73$). Respondents were looking for more entertainment while binge-watching ($M = 26.86, SD = 4.21$) than watching traditionally ($M = 24.38, SD = 5.59$). Traditional watchers ($M = 17.84, SD = 6.77$) reported obtaining a higher level of education through watching than binge-watchers ($M = 14.58, SD = 6.82$). Binge-watchers ($M = 22.01, SD = 7.98$) reported obtaining a stronger relationship to characters than traditional watchers ($M = 18.53, SD = 8.17$). Binge-watchers ($M = 20.57, SD = 7.1$) also reported obtaining a higher level of sociability through watching than traditional watchers ($M = 16.96, SD = 7.77$)

Cultivation differentials between binge-watching and traditional watching. Respondents were also binned based on the total amount of hours consumed weekly. SPSS automatically binned the respondents into two groups based on the median, breaking the groups at the 12 hours of weekly consumption mark. Respondents who reported binge-watching less than 12 hours of television in the past week were considered light binge-watchers, and respondents who reported binge-watching more than 12 hours of television in the past week were considered heavy viewers. The 10 uses and gratification categories were analyzed for between

group differences with light and heavy binge-watchers. There were no statistically significant differences between light and heavy binge-watchers.

Focus Groups

Each focus group began by participants ($n=18$) filling out a questionnaire detailing their consumption behaviors. The questionnaire was multi-purposed: first, to put people in the mindset to discuss their consumption habits; second, to create common ground amongst participants in regards to shows watched; and third, to detail episodic preferences for consumption. After filling out the questionnaire, the group discussed what shows they've been watching recently, how they were watching the shows, and how many episodes they usually watched in a single sitting. The participants listed 69 shows/types of programming and discussed the shows for a few minutes at the beginning of the focus group.³ Discussions ranged from people excitedly talking about the new seasons of *House of Cards* and *Daredevil* to suggestions of new shows to watch.⁴ The types of programming ranged from sources of news media (CNN, Al Jazeera, BBC, ESPN etc.) to anime (*One Punch Man*, *Sword Art Online*, *Naruto Shippuden*) to comedies (*Parks and Recreation*, *The Office*, *Master of None*, etc.) to dramas (*Grey's Anatomy*, *One Tree Hill*, *Gossip Girl*, *Californication*, etc.) to cartoons (*Family Guy*, *Simpsons*, *Steven Universe*, etc.). Most of the programming being binge-watched was fictional.

³ Multiple participants had to pull up their Netflix accounts to view what television shows they had recently watched.

⁴ Before the focus group began, all participants were asked not to mention spoilers for any television episodes released in the past year. There is not an academic consensus on what is and is not considered a spoiler, so the year limit was chosen subjectively.

Nearly every person in the focus groups watched television through SVOD.⁵ When asked their favorite medium for watching television, the vast majority of participants preferred SVOD, specifically Netflix, more than traditional mediums. A variety of reasons played into the participants' preferences. Colleen⁶ stated, "I'd rather wait an extra day until it [a new episode of a television show] comes online just to watch it without the commercials." Michael agreed with Colleen, stating, "I'm too busy. I don't have time to watch commercials." Additionally, respondents enjoyed programming differences between Netflix and traditional media. Robert stated, "Netflix has a lot more freedom, a lot more creativity." Jonathan agreed and said, "I like that freedom, too. Everything on cable is censored, but language isn't censored on Netflix." The lack of commercials and censorship introduced into television by the digital mediamorphosis provides a major difference between SVOD and traditional media. SVOD also allowed people to watch programming that was previously unavailable to participants. Jennifer noted that shows she enjoys like "*Daredevil* and *Jessica Jones* are only on Netflix." Kevin said, "There are a lot of shows that have a lot of buzz around them, like *Game of Thrones*...that are on a specific network...and I'll probably never watch it unless it comes on Netflix or something." Despite preferring SVOD, roughly one third of the participants watched television via cable.

⁵ The one exception didn't have enough time to watch television shows for entertainment and usually watched news programs in the background while working on other projects.

⁶ All of the names present in this chapter have been changed to protect the identities of the focus group participants.

Respondents wrote on the questionnaire that they commonly prefer to watch between one and five episodes of television at a time. Two respondents wrote they enjoy watching up to 20 episodes or an entire season in one sitting. Respondents suggested that the number of episodes they watched largely depends on their schedule. If people don't have anything to do, they're more likely to binge-watch. Jake said, "If I really like a show, I'll watch as many as I can." Connor agreed by saying, "I just watch until I need to go somewhere or until I get tired." Katie noted that the ability to watch as many as you want greatly differed from traditional media. She said, "You can't just watch a whole season on TV unless there's a marathon going on." While the number of episodes people like to watch depends on their schedule, the majority of respondents said they preferred to watch more than one episode when they have the time to watch more.

After the initial icebreaker discussion about shows, preferred medium for watching television, and the number of episodes watched, the focus group began to focus on the five uses and gratifications sought and obtained categories. Since the categories are not exclusive, the data was transcribed and coded based on the initial definitions provided in Chapter 3. As the coding continued, subcategories were developed within the main uses and gratifications categories.

Entertainment. Television is naturally a source of entertainment, so the focus group focused less on answering if binge-watching provided entertainment and more on how binge-watching television provided entertainment. The majority of focus group respondents talked about the story being a major motivator for binge-watching. Michael said, "It's a story, and it always tries to hook you. You

always want to know more, and it's the next episode where you'll see it." Katie said, "If it's an intense show, I don't want to wait to watch the next episode. I'll watch an episode and if something intense happens at the end, I have to watch the next one. It just keeps going. ... I'll stay up all night to finish something. I'll avoid doing stuff to finish." Katie later continued by saying, "I think of it [binge-watching] like a book. You're going to read the whole thing in a progression. You're going to watch it all in a progression like a movie. It's like a super long movie."

Respondents showcased how narrative plays into binge-watching by discussing the difference in shows that tell stories episodically versus serially. Jake said, "For shows like *That 70s Show*, I won't binge-watch that because there's not really a plot to it. There's a plot for each one, but it doesn't follow along with all the episodes." Michael agreed, saying, "If I watch a show like *Chopped* where the thing is different every time with different characters except the judges... I know I'm typically not going to watch more. If it's the same characters, I'm going to be more apt to follow the story."

Respondents also noted major differences between binge-watching the episodes and watching the episodes week-by-week. Robert said, "I don't like the anxiety of watching it week by week. They're like 'up next,' and you're like 'I gotta wait a whole week for this? No!'" Colleen said, "I don't like watching episode-by-episode; I like to know what's going to go on next. That's what I do with my other shows that I'm already caught up on. ... I've completely stopped watching them. ...I take a break every couple months and catch up with my other shows because that way I can catch up and there's more than one episode." Overall, respondents

overwhelmingly preferred to binge-watch television because they can progress through the story faster and have to worry less about the outcomes of the story. John said, "I think it's way more entertaining [to binge-watch]. Whenever you're watching, the suspense is still the same, but it's over and over and over again. It's not just for 20 minutes, and then the build up of the week. In the 20 seconds of loading on Netflix, you're rushing around your room getting a drink or getting a snack so you can be at your computer by the end of that 20 seconds." The preference to binge-watch carries over into participants' consumption habits. Rachel said, "Netflix has made things so available, it's like, 'yeah, now I can watch all of it and be done with it instead of waiting week by week.' Like, *The Walking Dead* I got so caught up that I didn't want to wait until Sunday night. I thought, 'Okay. I'm just going to wait for it to come out on Netflix and binge-watch all of it.'"

Although people binge-watch for entertainment purposes, one of the focus groups had a discussion about how binge-watching and traditional watching affects memories of the television shows, a long-term subcategory of the entertainment gratification. Nathan noted, "If I watch it week-by-week, I forget what happened last week, so I have to rewatch the episode again to figure out what happened. If I binge-watch, everything just happened so I don't forget." Nathan preferred to binge-watch because his short-term memories aided in his recollection of the story. Bill had a similar experience. He said, "You get a little more out of it [binge-watching]. I miss a lot of the subtleties that are in the dialogue and stuff like that if you're just focused on that episode and you're watching other things." Both Nathan and Bill found binge-watching enhanced their ability to note details in the story and remember

minor details. Kevin, however, noted differences between short-term and long-term memory with binge-watching. He said, "I think it's easier to remember week-by-week, where as if you binge-watch you only think about the season as a whole or specifically the last episode for the next year. ...You forget minor characters." This dichotomy provides an interesting entertainment subcategory. Binge-watching allows people to follow the narrative more closely and to become more invested in the minor plot points of a show. However, binge-watching makes it more difficult to remember the minor plot points long term; viewers only remember the overarching story after a long period of time has passed.

Relationship to characters. The relationship to characters uses and gratification category ties closely with the story narratives found in the entertainment category. The majority of respondents reported building close relationships with characters while binge-watching. The majority of the discussion on characters was based around the differences between binge-watching and watching weekly. Katie said, "I read a lot of books. I don't start another book while I'm reading one book. When I'm reading it, I get really attached to the characters. So when it's over, I'm like, 'what do I do with my life? Where are these people?' ...That's why I do it [binge-watching] all at once. I feel like I get closer. If I watch once a week, I'm going to watch other things in between." Nathan agreed with Katie, but spoke about the relationship with characters from a week-by-week perspective. He said, "I don't feel attached if it's week by week... I didn't feel any attachment to them [the characters]. I'd get a little click, but it'd be gone by the time it [the show] came back on." Participants reported growing close to characters through binge-watching, but

also recognized that they spend less time with the characters they've grown close with. The majority of respondents admitted to missing characters after they've completed binge-watching a show. Rachel said, "I finished *The Office* a month and a half ago, and I just want to watch it all again even though I'm watching other shows." Others reported being sad and depressed after finishing a show because they missed both the characters and their story. Regardless, the relationship to character category ties extremely closely to the entertainment category. People become involved with the lives of the characters, and binge-watch because they want to know what happens in the character's story.

Escapism. Another category that ties closely with entertainment is the escapism category of binge-watching. People become invested in a story and watch the story for a long period of time to escape. Katie said, "If I want to zone out, I'll watch Netflix. My friends will text me, and three hours later I'll be like, 'sorry, guys. I was watching *Dr. Who*.'" William noted that binge-watching provides a longer amount of time to become invested in a story. He said, "One [binge-watching or traditional programming] generally lasts longer than the other...you go for the longer one because you can go for a while." Thus, the entertainment the story provides gives people a block of time in which they can escape from their reality. Bill said, "Even if you know you have other things to do, you binge-watch instead even though that's in the back of your mind as you're watching. It's nice to take some time out of your day to do something for yourself." Binge-watching has allowed people to escape for a longer period of time and become more vested in alternate realities.

The escapist aspect of binge-watching also ties closely with the ability to control when and where someone will watch television. Jake said, "Usually someone trying to escape wouldn't time it. You wouldn't say, 'I need to escape Friday night at 5:00.' You have the choice to watch it [binge-watch television] when you want it." Connor expanded on the ability to watch television when and where a person wants by talking about controlling how to binge-watch. He said, "binge-watching lets you have control. You can pause it, play it, say, 'I don't want to watch this next episode' where if you're watching some syndicated program you don't have any control." Thus, SVOD technology allowed people to escape for longer periods of time through unlimited access to the programming at their own convenience of time and space.

Basis for social interaction. The focus group discussion on binge-watching socially was one of the most complex discussions that took place within the focus groups. The discussion broke into multiple social sub-categories: watching socially, societal pressure to watch television, and the digital communities that have emerged from watching. Many of these sub-categories spoke to each other, but deserve to be looked at individually.

Participants reported binge-watching shows with friends and family. Some of these binge-watching sessions took place together physically, but many did not. Jake said, "Me and my girlfriend watched *Prison Break*. We didn't watch all the episodes together, but we made sure we were on the same episode." Multiple people binge-watch shows with their friends from far away because of the digital mediamorphosis. Katie said, "I have friends that don't live near me, so we'll FaceTime and say, 'press play right now' so we can watch all together." Jennifer

reported that she frequently watches *Supernatural* with her mom while talking on the phone together. A large reason people are watching shows together is because they can talk about the shows, make jokes, and predict what will happen in the show together. Even if they did not watch the show at the same time or with each other, people are watching to connect with each other. Jake later said, “Most of my friends have watched the same shows. We might not have watched them together, but it was around the same period of time. We’d talk about it.”

The need to discuss television shows was viewed as societal pressure to many within the focus groups. Kevin said, “I feel like there’s a societal pressure that you don’t want to miss out on anything. You want to keep caught up so you can talk about it with other people. ...It feels like a chore sometimes...watching the latest TV shows.” Many reported that they felt pressured or were urged by friends and family to watch shows. Jennifer said, “I’m not really into *Supernatural* anymore, but I feel like I have to watch it because my mom watches it and I got her into it.” Jake said that, “Most of the shows that I’ve watched my friends have binge-watched, too. They’ve been like, ‘hey, this is a really good show, and you should watch it.’” These suggestions were both positive and negative. While some felt pressured to keep up, others fell in love with the shows their friends suggested binge-watching. Connor said, “Someone recommended it [*Scandal*], and I watched the first episode and was hooked.” The pressure from peers to watch television drives binge-watching behavior. Respondents reported quickly watching television because they wanted to catch up with peers and join the conversation. Matthew said, “I’ll go smoke cigars with friends...and they’ll say, ‘Hey. Did you watch this series?’ I’ll say, ‘what are you

talking about? What series?' Then there's a fourth season I haven't seen, so I'll do that every day for a week and get caught up." Kevin said he feels like he often has "to watch something to be a part of this group."

Group membership does not just tie to connecting with what friends and family are watching. Digital communities have also emerged around television. Digital communities range from people talking to their friends via FaceTime while binge-watching a show to being involved in a message board. Kevin said, "It [binge-watching] is a reason to connect with other people. Some people like *My Little Pony* [commonly referred to as Bronies], and they probably wouldn't be into that show without the subgroup of people. ...the subculture. The reason they watch is to be a part of that group I think." Kevin reported that these fan groups are extremely active on social media. Large digital communities now discuss television shows via social media. Hashtags for shows trend on Twitter alongside releases of Netflix original shows because there are so many people discussing their binge-watching experience with the digital community. These digital communities also influence what people will watch and how they talk about the shows. Jennifer said, "I heard about the series finale of *Hannibal*...from social media...and I thought, 'oh, I kind of want to watch this now.'" Katie followed up to Jennifer's comment by saying, "I don't think it's why we binge-watch, but I think it helps tell us what we binge-watch." Kevin is active in a digital community for *Daredevil*, he said, "I go on message boards for like the new season of *Daredevil* and people talk about how bad or good it is." Kevin also used to be a participant in a digital binge-watching community through X-Box. He said, "X-Box used to have a thing, they don't have it anymore, where you

watch Netflix at the same time with other people. It's called Party Room.⁷ You're watching and talking on the mics. You're all watching at the same time." The digital mediamorphosis has allowed people not only to watch television digitally, but also to connect over digital communities while binge-watching to discuss their consumption.

Although people rarely binge-watch television shows with a large group of other people, binge-watching is clearly a very social experience. People talk about the shows they are watching with their friends, family, and digital communities. These same groups of people also influence what shows people watch through suggestions and societal pressure. However, people are not just watching shows based on their friends' suggestions; the majority of respondents said they had to enjoy a show to binge-watch it.

Education. Education was the least influential motivator for binge-watching within the focus groups. Most reported never specifically binge-watching shows to become more educated. The few that did report watching specifically for educational purposes watched because of a pre-existing interest in a topic. Nathan said, "I like ocean documentaries a lot...I was looking for documentaries on them, and I found the show [*Oceans*]." William said, "I'm fascinated with magic, so I watch a lot of *Penn and Teller*. ...I binge-watch that all the time because I experience the fascination, and I really enjoy it." Unless people have a fascination in a non-fictional topic, they are unlikely to binge-watch solely for an educational experience.

However, the majority of participants enjoyed learning while watching a fictional

⁷ The feature was actually called Party Mode, and Netflix discontinued the mode of watching through their app in 2011 (Narcisse, 2011).

show. Connor said, "I'd be more inclined to watch something with a story line that still conveys an educational point than watching a documentary." Rachel gave an example of learning while watching for entertainment by discussing binge-watching *Masters of None*, which was mentioned in her introductory communication course as a show with a social commentary. Connor later discussed learning about nonverbal communication by watching *Lie To Me*. Adding educational messages to entertainment programming made learning fun for participants. John said, "Even with shows like *Acts of Science*, *Mythbusters*, it's fun to watch. It's entertaining." This discussion ultimately suggests that people are still interested in binge-watching television for entertainment purposes, but they find an unsought added benefit if they learn while being entertained.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The current study highlights that the digital mediamorphosis has drastically changed television culture. People are changing their consumption patterns from weekly viewing in front of their box television to watching online when they want, where they want, and for how long they want. The results of this study found that binge-watching differs from traditional watching in many ways. While there were many findings in the current study that go beyond the initial research questions asked, data was found to answer the study's six initial research questions and propose future areas of research.

RQ1: Is binge-watching the preferred method of television consumption amongst respondents?

62.5% of survey respondents considered themselves binge-watchers using this study's definition of binge-watching. While the majority of respondents were binge-watchers, the survey data does not ultimately suggest that binge-watching is the preferred method of consumption amongst survey respondents. However, data from the focus groups suggested that people prefer to watch more than 2 episodes of a television show at a time, supporting that binge-watching is the preferred method of television consumption. The number of episodes that individuals prefer to watch at a single time largely depends on the amount of time they can devote to watching. Many respondents reported watching as many episodes as they could in one sitting. The binge-watching preference is largely influenced by a perceived enhanced

viewing experience. This enhanced viewing experience is fully explored in research questions four and 5.

RQ2: What motivators influence binge-watching behavior?

The survey data found that binge-watchers look for entertainment, escapism, identification with characters, sociability, and education while binge-watching (ranked from highest to lowest motivator in order of importance). The largest motivator for binge-watching behavior was individuals' desire to know what happens within the narrative of the show. The focus groups suggested a close relationship between the entertainment, escapism, and identification with characters categories. Participants were drawn to characters because of the events within the larger narrative of the show. The narratives also provide an escape from the real world. The focus group found many reasons why people binge-watch for social benefit. First, people watch because they want to socially interact with friends, family, and digital communities that are also knowledgeable in specific television shows. Few people binge-watch television for educational purposes, but enjoy educational programming if it is secondary to an entertainment use. For example, shows that provide social commentary within the drama of a narrative were extremely popular amongst respondents. Overall, people are most commonly binge-watching because they are invested in the stories of television shows. The stories provide entertainment, a relationship with characters, an escape from daily life, a basis for social interaction, and occasionally educate viewers.

RQ3: What gratifications do people receive from binge-watching?

Per the survey data, the five gratifications received from binge-watching ranked (from highest to lowest ranked gratification) being entertained, identifying with characters, sociability, escaping, and becoming more educated. People are largely receiving the gratifications they sought while binge-watching, so the data found in RQ2 carries over to RQ3. Binge-watching provides a highly entertaining escape through the story characters. The focus groups also reported that binge-watching allows them to quickly catch up on shows to discuss with their friends, providing an added social gratification obtained to watching the stories quickly.

RQ4: How do the motivators for binge-watching differ from traditional television media consumption?

The survey data found three statistically significant differences between the gratifications sought by binge-watching and traditional watching. First, traditional watchers are more likely to watch for educational purposes. Although this information was not provided in the focus groups, the difference in likelihood to watch for educational purposes is likely partially based in the type of programming consumed. SVOD does not have a news component, so people are still going to traditional television media to gain educational information from the news. Secondly, binge-watchers expect closer relationships with characters and higher levels of entertainment from their experience than traditional watchers. The focus groups found that people become more invested in the story when they can spend

more concentrated time with the show. Binge-watchers want to know what happens in the story and to the characters, so they continue to watch. Minor details about characters and the story are easier to remember short-term while binge-watching, which most focus group respondents claimed enhanced their viewing experience.

RQ5: How do the gratifications obtained from binge-watching differ from the gratifications obtained from traditional television media consumption?

The survey data found three statistically significant differences between the gratifications obtained by binge-watching and traditional watching. Traditional watchers reported obtaining a higher level of education through watching than binge-watchers. This, once again, can likely be partially attributed to SVOD not having a news media component. Binge-watchers reported obtaining a stronger relationship to characters than traditional watchers. Because they are learning more about characters in a shorter period of time, their connection to the characters grows stronger. Many binge-watchers reported missing characters after they finished viewing the programming. Binge-watchers also reported obtaining a higher level of sociability through watching than traditional watchers. Binge-watchers are able to quickly catch up on television shows to knowledgably speak with their friends about the programming. People talk about shows consumed traditionally, but binge-watching allows more unrestricted access to media and, thus, more access to knowledge on popular television shows.

RQ6: Do the uses and gratifications of binge-watching differ amongst light and heavy binge-watchers?

Since binge-watching amplified many of the uses and gratifications found in RQ2 and RQ3, binge-watching itself could be a cultivation effect because people are consuming a larger amount of media in one time and receiving amplified effects from the media. Future research should explore cultivation differentials between binge-watchers and traditional television watchers. This study looked for cultivation differentials between light and heavy binge-watchers. The survey found no statistically significant difference between the uses and gratifications of light and heavy binge-watchers, and the focus groups provided no additional insight. Light and heavy binge-watchers share similar viewing experiences, which differs from previous research on cultivation. Gerbner's research on cultivation categorized light users as less than 2 hours of television a day and heavy users as more than 4 hours a day (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). The split between light and heavy binge-watchers in the current study occurred at 12 hours a week. If a light binge-watcher watched 12 hours in a week, they are consuming 1 hour and 42 minutes of television a day, nearing the edge of Gerbner's proposed difference between light and heavy watchers. Thus, it is likely than many binge-watchers fall within the medium user to heavy user category for television. Future research should also explore if there is a cap to the amount of cultivation effects and explore whether there are significant differences between a person watching 4 hours of television a day or 12 hours of television a day. This research could provide insight into the findings on cultivation differentials in the current study.

Limitations.

The current study faced multiple limitations. First, since the sample was only drawn from Wichita State University undergraduates, the convenience sample could be more representative. Since 18 to 35 years old is the most common age of binge-watchers, the data collected from the sample still provides key insights into why people are binge-watching (Marsh, Ferra, & Anuseviciute, 2014). Also, since only 127 participants took place in the study, the data is only generalizable to 10,000,000 with a $\pm 10\%$ error. A higher number of participants would have increased the overall strength of the data, made the research more generalizable, and decreased the potential percentage error. Secondly, since the current study is one of the first academic attempts to understand binge-watching, no previous scales or precedents have been used to research the topic. The quantitative scale used in the study shows good reliability ($\alpha = .716$), but using a previously tested, stronger scale could have provided more insight into the binge-watching phenomenon. Finally, all of the research methods used in the study relied heavily on self-reporting and could include participant bias. Participants could have misreported data because they incorrectly remembered their binge-watching experiences, attempted to make themselves look better by exaggerating data, or by attempting to predict what the research was trying to explore and answering based on what they believed the researcher wanted to hear.

Implications for Future Research

Academic research on binge-watching is just beginning. The current study found a multitude of changes that occurred in television culture due to the digital mediamorphosis. These changes have far-reaching implication for the television industry, television consumers, and media effects researchers. This study began to explain how television has changed for consumers and provides a framework for future research on the consumer aspect of binge-watching. As stated in Chapter 1, the digital mediamorphosis affected both the consumers of television and the television industry. Research on the digital television media industry will also provide key insights into the digital mediamorphosis of television culture. Future research should continue to explore frameworks developed within the current study and should explore the digital television industry.

Before any further studies begin on binge-watching, a more concise definition of what it means to binge-watch needs to exist. Many focus group participants questioned and pushed the proposed definition of binge-watching throughout their discussion. Participants wanted to include digital video like YouTube and Vine into the binge-watching discussion. Many people claimed to binge-watch YouTube videos for educational purposes, and the educational uses and gratification of binge-watching would have looked much different with the inclusion of these digital videos in the original definition. When trying to learn to do something new, Connor said, "Typically I just go to YouTube and type 'how to.'" Additionally, participants wanted to include movies into the binge-watching definition. Kevin noted, "If you think about it, the Marvel cinematic universe has

more episodes than *Freaks and Geeks*.” Since binge-watching is defined as episodic, movies like Star Wars, which are released in episodes, were a major point of contention on whether to include in the discussion of binge-watching. Rachel proposed a new definition for binge-watching. She said, “I think it [binge-watching] is when Netflix asks you if you’re sure you want to keep watching.” The focus group discussion about how to define binge-watching highlights the need for an academically conceived, quantifiable definition of binge-watching. Future research should look into how people define binge-watching and create a definition based on the results.

After binge-watching has been academically defined, research needs to look at how the television industry is adapting to binge-watching preferences. Many focus group participants discussed the lack of commercials while binge-watching as a major benefit of their digital consumption experience. Since advertising revenue has been a major component of the television industry for many years, the non-commercial sentiment of binge-watchers shows a disconnect between consumers and the traditional television media industry. Netflix, HBO Now, and Amazon Instant Video provide an interesting new business model for the television industry. Future research could look into the financial reports of traditional television channels as well as SVOD services to explore how the business models of television are differing in the digital age and connect the models to consumers’ preferred usage of television media.

Future research can also expand on the information found within the current study to further explore the consumer binge-watching experience. The current

study supported previous data that women are more likely to binge-watch than men (Marsh, Ferra, & Anuseviciute, 2014). Since multiple studies have now reported this phenomenon, the difference in consumption between genders should be further explored. While the current study did not find statistically significant differences between the uses and gratifications of male and female binge-watchers, future studies should look at the types of programming available for binge-watchers (to see if the programming caters toward a specific gender) and should separate male and female binge-watchers to talk about their binge-watching experiences separately.

Additionally, the current study found that people expect to be more entertained through binge-watching. Future research should continue to look at the differences between the entertainment value of binge-watching and traditional watching. Psychophysiological methods would provide interesting insight into the arousal of the consumers and give insight into their entertainment levels. In “Television Viewing and Physiological Arousal,” Zillmann explores the concept of excitation transfer, in which the arousal state from one media carries over to the real world (1991). During the second focus group, Michael notes that while binge-watching “the suspense is still the same, but it’s over and over and over again,” suggesting a possible connection to the excitation transfer of physiological arousal explored in Zillmann’s work. This relationship could be tested by exploring the difference in physiological arousal gained through consumption of a television show by binge-watching and watching week-by-week.

Because there was not a statistically significant difference between heavy and light binge-watchers, understanding the relationship between cultivation and binge-watching is an area that should be examined in future studies. Since heavy users of media see the world as a meaner, more violent place, binge-watching could still support this claim (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, Gerbner, et al, 1977, 1978). The current study found no difference between light and heavy binge-watchers, but did not explore how binge-watching affected world views in comparison to traditional watchers.

Lastly, the current study's survey data suggests that binge-watchers both seek out and obtain closer relationships to characters than traditional watchers. Previous research has explored parasocial relationships, but no research has explored how parasocial relationships differ between binge-watchers and traditional watchers. In future research, Austin's parasocial interaction (PSI) scale could be adapted to test for differences in PSI between binge-watchers and traditional watchers (1992).

The Future of Digital Television Culture

The current study looks at how people are changing their consumption methods due to the digital mediamorphosis of television. People are becoming more invested in stories and watching episodes back-to-back because they want to be more immersed in the consumption experience. By binge-watching these episodes, people perceive enhanced viewing experiences. Because the binge-watching experience differs so greatly from traditional consumption, television culture is

likely to continue to adapt to consumers' preferred methods of watching television. Additionally, the digital technology around television is continuing to develop and immersive viewing experiences are likely to continue to grow across entertainment media.

During the 2016 NCAA Basketball Final Four Semifinals and National Championship, Turner Sports, Facebook, CBS, and Oculus Rift partnered to provide a free virtual reality live stream of the basketball games (Spangler, 2016). While sports are not included in the list of binge-watchable media proposed in the current study's definition of binge-watching, the inclusion of virtual reality in television media could once again drastically change television culture. Respondents to the current study reported that they enjoyed binge-watching because they became more invested in the story. Virtual reality television will allow people to mentally take part in the story themselves by experiencing an alternate reality directly in front of their eyes. Since binge-watching culture emerged due to increased access to television media and the motive to become fully engaged with the television media's story, virtual reality could take the motivations for binge-watching and further engage consumers in the gratifications sought and obtained for binge-watching. Binge-watching has become an essential part of digital television culture and will continue to exist as the digital mediamorphosis of television culture grows.

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