

Emotional Effects After Binge Watching Netflix on College Students

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### Abstract

This paper will analyze and explore various research on the effects of Netflix Consumption on modern culture. The objective of this paper will inform the reader of the strong effects of modern video on demand service can have on people and show the possible strong emotional responses that could be developed from binge-watching.

*Keywords:* Netflix, binge-watching, emotional response

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## Emotional Effects After Binge Watching Netflix

### **Introduction**

#### **Statement of the problem**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the researchers have observed that television consumption has evolved into more than just sitting at home and watching television. With the development of video on demand programs, such as Netflix, viewers can now watch some of their favorite shows right from their smartphones or computers without any distractions like commercials or having to wait for the next episode. Netflix can provide viewers with the opportunity to watch an entire season from a television series, which may be causing some to dedicate an excessive amount of time watching a series. Because of this, modern society spends more time invested in these shows than in the past, even to the point of developing slight addictions and participating in binge-watching sessions. Our study will take a look at people's perceptions towards Netflix and the possible emotional effects from the strong dependency.

#### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this phenomenology study was to examine the effects of the video on demand culture on modern society. The phenomena were focused primarily on the perception and reaction of people's usage and familiarity with using the particular video on demand service of Netflix.

#### **Research Question**

Do individuals experience an emotional response after binge watching Netflix?

Questions that will be asked of participants:

Initial Question: Do you watch Netflix?

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If Yes,

1. How often do you watch?
2. If you watch Netflix for long periods of time (More than 2 hours at a time), why?
3. Why do you watch Netflix?
4. What is the experience of watching Netflix like for you?
5. Did you develop any attachments to the show after binge watching?

If No,

1. Do you have Netflix?
2. Do you use another type of video on demand instead?
3. Any particular reason why you do not use Netflix?

### **Definition of terms**

Dictionary.com defines binge watching as a verb meaning to watch multiple videos, episodes of a television show, etc., in one sitting or over a short period of time. For the purposes of this study, binge watching is defined as watching multiple videos, episodes of a television show, etc., for a period of two or more hours in one sitting.

According to Mosby's Medical Dictionary, an emotional response is "a reaction to a particular intrapsychic feeling or feelings, accompanied by physiologic changes that may or may not be outwardly manifested but that motivate or precipitate some action or behavioral response" (2009).

Britannica.com states that Netflix, Inc. began as a 1997 as a video rental company before offering an online subscription service through the Internet that allows subscribers access to various movie and television shows on demand.

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### **Theoretical perspective**

This paper applied the Dependency theory to the issue of Netflix consumption and its' possible emotional effects on society. The dependency theory states that a person relies on another party to provide and satisfy the needs of the other. Our research used this theory on the assumed dependency that people have on Netflix to provide some sort of satisfaction.

### **Assumptions**

The researchers assumed that individuals experience some sort of emotional response after binge watching on Netflix and that people are familiar with what services Netflix provides and what binge watching is. The researchers also expected that this sample size is an accurate representation for Netflix's primary target audience. It is also anticipated that the interviewees would have a strong dependency on Netflix usage to invest a significant amount of time to watch their favorite television shows as well as experience some strong emotional attachment to the shows.

### **Delimitations of the study**

Due to time constraints our sample size for this study was limited to 20 participants. The choice for this sample size was representative of diverse opinions that can reflect on the larger scale of varying opinions in the general population. The age group consisted of King's College students between the ages of 18 to 22. This age group was the primary focus of the research for this particular age group, with the assumption that the sample size is an accurate representation of Netflix's target audience.

### **Limitations of the study**

A limitation of this study is the primary focus on Netflix as the sole video on demand provider while there are various different services that exist. Our research data was restricted to the King's

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College campus and therefore was only able to provide a small insight on the effects of Netflix culture on society. Another limitation was that a person owns Netflix but does not personally use it.

### **Significance of the study**

The researchers have observed that Netflix and other video on demand service providers are becoming a more significant part of modern culture. This study helped provide insight on some of the reasoning behind people's consumption of Netflix. It may have also encouraged participants to use Netflix or reflect upon their television consumption habits after the interview and evaluate their emotional response.

## **Literature Review**

### **Introductory argument**

With a relatively new form of media, there is still a surprising amount of publications trying to understand the impact of video on-demand service consumption on modern society. Previous research has found the impact of binge watching from different service providers and the effect the television consumption had on a wide general viewing audience.

### **Current literature status**

“An exploration of Binge-watching and its effects on college academics” helps address some important facts for our research. This article talks about some of the facts of college students and the amount of time they invest in watching media such as Netflix. This research provides some insight on the population which our study will be based upon, as well as addressing the idea that consuming this online media is providing a distraction from academics (Winland).

“Binge-watching: Video-on-demand, quality TV & mainstreaming fandom” elaborates more on the idea of binge-watching itself. The article discusses how people are more inclined to

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participate in binge watching through a video-on-demand provider rather than watch on television, with services such as Netflix giving viewers more freedom to watch whatever show they desire instead of being stuck just with what is currently being played on television (Jenner, 2015).

This idea of binge-watching becoming a more regular part of society is also supported by “Sprinting a media marathon: uses and gratifications of binge-watching television through Netflix.” This other article helps clarify the definition of binge that we will be using for our own research, but also points out how binge-watching is even considered as “trendy” since people, including First Lady Michelle Obama, even partake in binge-watching (Pittman & Sheehan 2015).

“The Netflix Effect: Teens, binge watching, and on-demand digital media trends” addresses the impact of the Netflix watching culture on the youth, teens in particular. This article supports our assumption that people’s dependency on Netflix, in this case social acceptance, in a way to bring “people together to experience mass-media cultural productions whether collocated or connected virtually” while also inspiring “the phenomenon of ‘FOMO’ or ‘fear of missing out’” (Matrix, 2014).

“The Relationships between Television Viewing Behaviors, Attachment, Loneliness, Depression and Psychological Well-Being” helps our research by addressing the normalcy of Netflix consumption in modern culture. The article addresses the social aspects of watching Netflix as well as describes the idea of a parasocial relationship, which is a one-sided relationship where one person invests a significant amount of time and energy into another person, but in this particular case, the characters they view on Netflix. This research also addresses some of the

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consequences of a strong dependency on Netflix on a person's behaviors and over-all well-being (Wheeler, 2015).

### **Relationship Summary of Literature and Problem**

Previous studies have covered a broader spectrum of the impact of video on demand services have had on society. Our research will help provide insight on the extent of people's dependency on consuming media, like Netflix, especially focusing on college aged students who the researchers are assuming are a significant part of Netflix's ideal target audience. Our focus will provide an analysis of the media consumption habits of college students and how taking part on binge-watching may be affecting them.

### **Research Methods**

#### **Assumptions and rationale for a qualitative study**

The researchers believed that Netflix has a strong impact on the lives of young adults, especially in terms of their emotional well-being. Current literature suggests that Netflix usage does play a significant role in the lives of its consumers.

#### **Type of design used**

The study will be phenomenological and the dependency theory will be utilized. Through this, the researchers will be able to better understand people's perceptions and relationship with Netflix. Interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis with the researchers and the subjects at various public locations at King's College. Researchers asked each individual questions from the pre-determined set of inquiries to gather enough information on their perception of Netflix in their lives.

#### **Role of the researcher**

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The researchers obtained answers from the individuals that agreed to answer the questions. The researchers also observed how participants physically reacted while they answered the pre-determined inquiry. The data collected was then analyzed to see how it supports the initial assumptions going into the research.

### **Data collection procedures**

Data collection consisted of surveying students on the King's College campus by asking questions about their Netflix usage. The subjects were approached randomly with a scripted introduction and with a pre-determined set of inquiries about whether or not they use Netflix. Each researcher had the same set of 3 to 5 questions based upon the response to the initial question to result in honest and descriptive answers to benefit the study. Researchers used a recorder to gather the responses as well as the pen and paper method to take note of the physical responses the subjects may have had while participating in the study.

### **Data analysis procedures**

Analysis consisted of combining the answers and placing them into groups based upon their response to the initial question of yes or no. From the two separate groups of data responses, the responses were divided again based on the responsive or indifferent reaction recorded by the researchers.

### **Methods for quality verification**

The research in this phenomenology was verified by the approach outlined by Dukes in Qualitative Research and Research design: Choosing among Five Traditions. The data was initially submitted to and confirmed by the other researchers to confirm the patterns and themes identified within the research. The observations were organized by common themes within the

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participants' reactions to the research questions. The results from the data were then applied to help inform others about the findings within the study.

### Findings

The research data was reviewed and showed a couple of common themes within the participants' answers.

Response to Initial Question	Responsive Physical Reaction	Indifferent Physical Reaction
"Yes, I do watch Netflix."	11	4
"No, I do not watch Netflix."	1	4

Just based upon the participants' initial response to the first question, the researchers were able to divide the physical reactions while responding to the questions into a positive or negative category as seen in the chart above. One finding showed that for those who do consume Netflix, they incorporated Netflix viewing into their regular schedule at least twice a week. Another common theme we recognized is that people who do watch Netflix tended to not actually own their own Netflix account but still tried to use the video-on-demand service regularly through the use of other people's accounts. The research also did confirm the researchers' initial assumption that people use Netflix as a means of relaxation. This theme proves that within this sample size, Netflix users have a dependency on the video-on-demand service to provide a relaxation method to deal with the stresses of everyday life. The data did also prove the assumption that people who use Netflix do develop an emotional attachment to television shows on Netflix and feel a variety of strong emotions after watching for periods more than 2 hours. The participants' emotional attachment was developed further by the ease of access to episodes to continue watching the show.

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### Conclusions

#### Overview of significant findings

The data did prove the initial assumption of the researchers which anticipated an emotional response from the sample size after binge-watching on Netflix. The data seemed to be consistent with the current literature available on the topic of Netflix and emotions. The results proved that people who use Netflix do develop some emotional attachments to television shows on Netflix. The expectation of the media dependency being applicable in this study was verified by the themes interpreted by the researchers from the resulting data. The study showed that the participants do rely on Netflix to satisfy particular needs, in this case the common themes of relaxation or curiosity satisfaction, which is the main concept behind the media dependency theory.

#### Conclusions drawn from findings and existing literature review

The findings from this research do go along with Winland's research that addressed that amount of time college aged students spend in watching various media, especially Netflix (An Exploration of Binge-Watching and Its Effects on College Academics).

The participants' answers also did prove Jenner's (2014) theory of Netflix being used due to its' ease of access and the provision of freedom to viewers to watch a cluster of their favorite shows instead of having to sit through commercials that other media, such as regular television shows or other video on-demand services like Hulu, might provide to their customers.

The results also showed that Netflix consumption can be considered more of a regular part of everyday life, with a common theme of participants making sure to include at least two hours of viewing into their regular weekly routines which seems to directly go with Pittman and Sheehan's study (2015).

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Matrix's concept of 'FOMO' being a factor in why young people watch Netflix was not proved by our research (2014). The results from the questions did not reveal any college student feeling pressured or the need to watch being provoked by keeping up with trends or other societal norms. Despite the results proving that the studied sample size does have a dependency on Netflix, it just isn't for the reasons that Matrix argues for.

Wheeler's belief that Netflix is considered a regular part of society was proved through the research (2015). The resulting theme of college students' dependency did seem to fall into be caused by Wheeler's mention of the parasocial relationship. The data showed that the participants' moods were responsive when asked about Netflix usage, even so far as some people getting excited and more animated the more they discussed the shows or reasoning for watching Netflix so much. Some participants' moods did seem to show that watching Netflix improved their mood being that their answers seemed genuinely disappointed that they had to either cut back on time spent watching Netflix or were just currently unable to continue watching certain shows.

### **Implications for further study**

The questions used in this particular study were opened ended and allowed for a variety of different answers. Further studies could centralize on this specific target audience on a larger scale or try to see if the types of shows being watched, situation comedies vs. action/dramas, result in more viewers participating in binge-watching. Since the sample size was random, there could have been a variety of different lifestyles that could have had a possible correlation with how much time, effort or reasoning with why the participants used Netflix for binge-watching. Other future research could focus on seeing if different types of college lifestyles, athlete vs. non-athlete, resident vs. commuter, honors vs. regular, or even science majors vs. arts majors, to

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see if these different group lifestyles might influence a college student's ability to consume Netflix to the binge-watching capacity.

### **Limitations that may have affected validity**

Some limitations that may have affected validity are the size of the college, the time some of the interviews were conducted, and what mood the interviewee's were in. According to Forbes the student population at King's College is 2,391 students. Out of that number 20 were interviewed at random. King's College is made up of commuters as well as residents, if an interview was conducted in the late afternoon, it is a possibility some of the commuters have gone home. What type of mood the interviewee was in is also a limitation that may have affected validity. If the interviewee was in a bad mood when the interview was conducted this could change their reactions.

### **Recommendations for further study**

Future research could look into possible correlations between type of television shows viewed and people's need to binge-watch. Another possibility for better results would be use of a larger, more diverse group to serve as a sample size to provide more insight on this particular demographic.

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