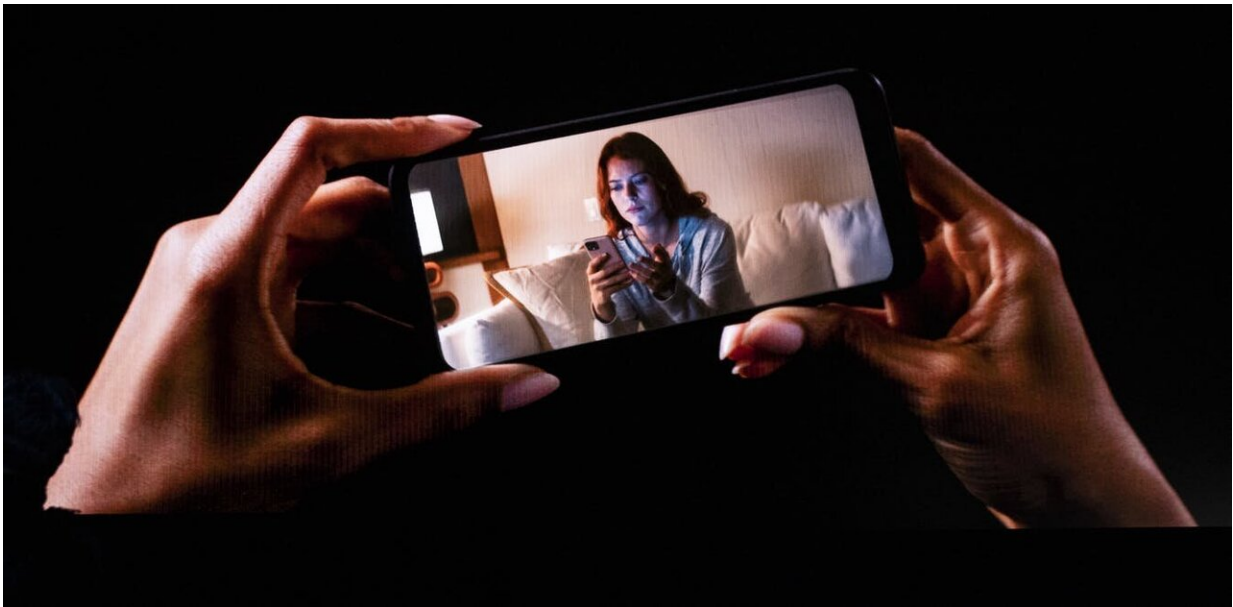


'One more episode, please?' Why we can't stop binge-watching on Netflix

February 13 2020, by Yearry Panji Setianto



Watching an entertainment video on the Quibi platform, watchable horizontally and vertically, during the Quibi (short for Quick Bites) press conference at the 2020 International Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Nevada, US earlier this year. Credit: Etienne Laurent/EPA

The increasing popularity of global media content like American TV series has been considered as [one notable factor](#) associated with binge-watching practices, or continuously consuming media content in a single session.

With the massive global expansion of streaming platforms like Netflix—which had more than [154 million subscribers](#) in [over 190 countries](#) in 2019—this practice of marathon viewing of televised content has gradually become a "new ritual" for many viewers.

But not without a price.

Indeed, an American Academy of Sleep Medicine survey in 2019 found [88% of American adults](#) reported a lack of sleep due to binge-watching television and streaming series.

As the use of online streaming services to consume televised content is becoming more common globally, the problem of binge-watching behavior may also become a global phenomenon.

Binge-watching is commonly viewed in parallel with [media content](#) addiction, mostly in the case of televised content. For example, when people spent ever more time [watching multiple episodes continuously, such as five episodes in a single viewing](#), this might [lead to a greater content addiction](#) in the long run.

Distraction and escapism

In 2013, I was involved in a research project with graduate students at the School of Media Arts and Studies at Ohio University, US to explore why people binge-watch. We found at least three factors contribute to binge-watching:

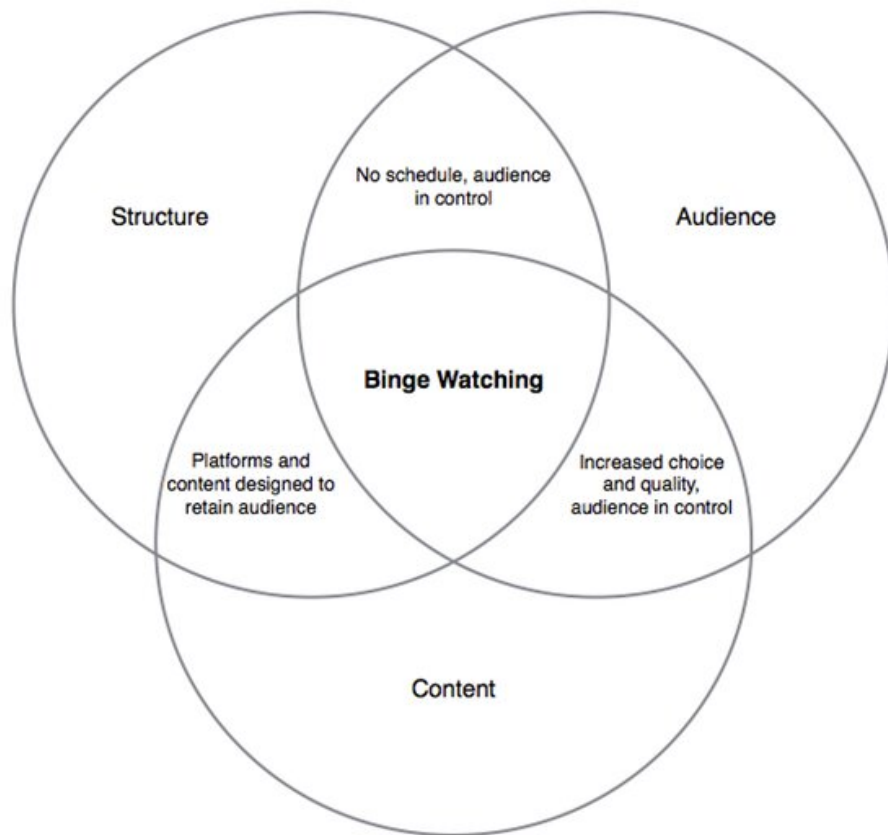
1. the audience's motive
2. content that provides continuous storylines
3. platform structures that release a whole series of episodes in one go and autoplay the next episode by default.

In our research, we explored the motives of 34 American students between 18 and 24 years old when they watched back-to-back episodes of TV series from streaming services like Netflix, Hulu and Amazon Prime.

We found their motivations vary. Yet two most common themes emerged from the focus group discussions: distraction and escapism.

Those who felt being under pressure from their workloads tended to find binge-watching as a way to distract themselves from their responsibilities.

Others used the same mechanism to help them escape boredom, especially when they did not have anything else to do. This is why [young people](#) represented in the research tend to binge-watch during their weekends, sometimes even by sacrificing their social life.



Binge watching can occur if audience, content and structure come together.

Addicted to drama

Based on my research, drama is the most appealing genre for binge-watching. The continuous storylines with intriguing endings make people want to watch more and more episodes.

They immersed themselves within the world of the story, the experience becoming so pleasurable that they were unable to remove themselves from their seats willingly.

Structure

Before the advent of streaming, people had to wait for a week before a new episode of a TV series was released. But streaming platforms now often release whole series of episodes in one go. Their system also automatically plays the teaser of the next episode. This strategy changes the way people watch series, encouraging them to binge-watch.

For instance, in 2019, Netflix released the entire six episodes of South Korean zombie-drama [Kingdom](#) at once.

It [gained](#) international success and was [recommended](#) as one of 15 international series to binge-watch in 2019.

The [inheritance effect theory](#) considers the audience as a passive entity that becomes unmotivated to switch the channel to other shows as the structures of the platforms encourage them not to do so.

This kind of passivity further encourages tuning inertia, a condition where we tend to stick to watching the same channel.

What's next?

Binge-watching can occur if the audience has time to view content they like through a platform such as Netflix. I argue that this might become the norm in the next few years due to the increasing popularity of the service.

The content industry also seizes this opportunity.

This relationship between the media industry's strategy to produce and distribute their content and the audience's consumption patterns will

impact popular culture, especially when the phenomenon of binge-watching is not going to be slowing down any time soon.

It is inevitable that [binge-watching](#) has become a new normal among today's audiences. Yet, given the negative health ramifications associated with it, can we move beyond that? We could try savoring one episode at one time in a slow watching practice.

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