

Exploring the Relationship between Binge Watching, Narrative Transportation and the Affective Responses - A Literature Review

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Abstract

Streaming services allow audience to watch programmes at their convenience and at any time. These technological transformations encourage the audience to spend more and more time in front of their screens and popularized the concept binge-watching. This study sought to determine that apart from the technological changes whether narrative transportation of the audience played any part in promoting the binge watching phenomenon. It can be surmised from the reviews that the relationship might be bidirectional in nature, where narrative transportation can be the antecedent and consequence of binge watching. The studies also indicate that binge-watching can elicit both negative and positive emotions. The motives, viewing behaviours and the content they consume influence the peoples' affective states. The present study offers the organized examination of the reviews showing the linkage between binge watching behaviour, narrative transportation and different affective responses. However, these studies are not enough to establish a consistent relationship between these constructs as some of the results are contradictory to each other. This indicates a need for further research on these topics using diversified demography to get more profound understanding of these relationships.

Keywords: Affective responses; Binge watching; Narrative engagement; Narrative transportation; OTT platforms.

Binge watching is becoming an increasingly popular way for audiences to engage with media narratives with the arrival of streaming platforms. However, the concept of 'Binge Watching'- in which a performance or narrative is continuously watched for an extended amount of time with-

out a break, does not appear to be entirely new. In fact, the traditional theatre forms of India like Koodiyattam, Jatra, Raslila or Nautanki, are typically performed from dusk to dawn. These composite forms indulge viewers thoroughly and people used to enjoy the performance for a long period. But the experience is highly distinguished from bingeing in terms of technological advancement, the scope of content and its expression. Folk performances generally have themes derived from mythological stories and are performed live on a stage. Meanwhile, OTT platforms are designed to match the instant culture of today. The platform allows viewers to watch programmes at their convenience and at anytime, anywhere at their pace. A plethora of viewing options are available at a single click. They redefined content creation, packaging and dissemination by intertwining the narratives with the technological advancements. Above all, the binge watching has challenged traditional linear models of narratives with the power of audience autonomy.

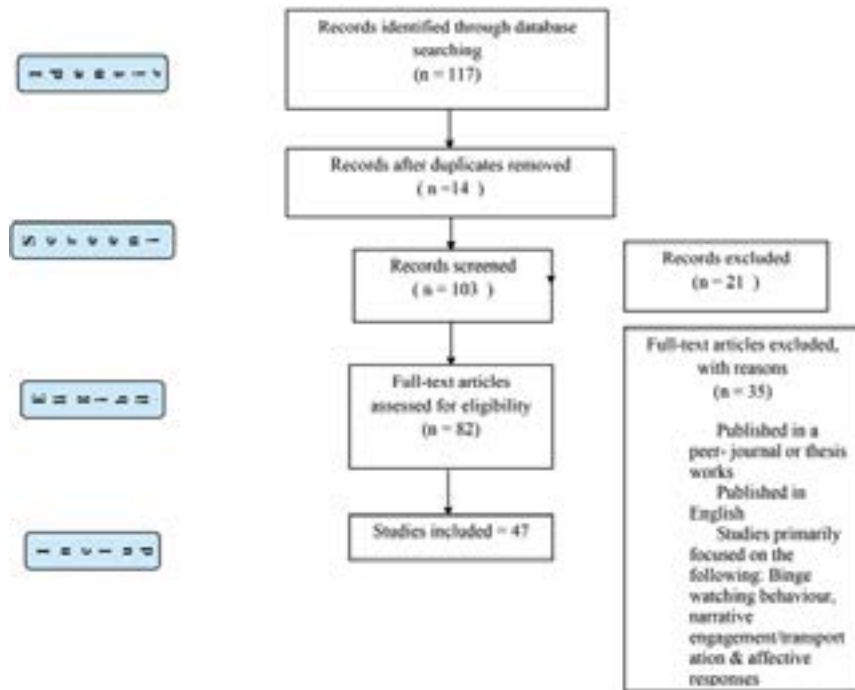
The most popular web series content features complex and intricate narration, multiple story contexts, genre mixing conventions, contemporary and historical themes, as well as the presence of conflicts and suspense elements. They have flexible narrative patterns and structured with cliff-hangers at the end of every episode to constantly engage the viewers and keep them guessing into the next episode.

There are various ways in which researchers define binge watching, some are focused on the amount of time spent where some definitions consider the number of episodes consumed. Netflix (2013) defines binge-watching as "the consumption of 2-6 episodes of the same TV show in one sitting". Though the phrase binge watching holds the negative connotation, it was concluded from prevalent studies that binge watching can affect the state of mind both positively and negatively. (Exelmans & van den Bulck, 2017; Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020; Sun & Chang, 2021)

Method

Relevant studies for this review were identified by searching academic databases and Google Scholar. The keywords used here are "Binge watching", OR "Binge-viewing" AND "Narrative transportation" "Narrative engagement" "Affective effects", "Emotional gratification" etc. Articles or thesis were selected depending on the following criteria: (1) Published in a peer-reviewed journal or thesis submitted in the particular period 2) Published in English language only (3) Focusing the practice of binge-watching of streaming video series. The reviewed studies primarily

explain the relationships between following constructs: Binge watching behaviour, narrative engagement/transportation and identified affective responses of binge watching. The most studies selected for this review were conducted in the U.S, whilst the remaining studies were carried out in different countries such as Germany, Australia Netherland, UK, Belgium, Indonesia, Italy, Hungary Romania and Croatia.



Result

Binge Watching

Television has been the most popular medium for the decades and TV soap operas were considered as the most significant cultural product. However, the rising popularity of OTT platforms have led to a considerable shift toward web series as they offer a different experience in terms of technology and content to the audience. "Web series are audiovisual forms on the Internet that are serial, fictional, and have the basic structures of a narrative. They are series which are produced exclusively for

Internet platforms (and can, therefore, be watched online)" (Alber, 2014).

Studies of bingeing usually consider three factors: "the number of episodes watched during a single sitting, the frequency of watching, and the sort of TV content consumed" (Starosta& Izydorczyk, 2020). The popular definition for binge watching is, watching multiple episodes at one time of any TV show. Pittman and Sheehan (2015) and Merikivi et al. (2017) have explained binge watching behaviour by defining it as "viewing more than one episode of the same television programme in one sitting". This review tried to understand how binge watching is related to narrative transportation. Many studies suggest, binge watching may come from a need to escape, relaxation, social interaction or entertainment and it may have some addictive qualities. Furthermore the findings by Podgorelec (2020) imply that hedonistic motives such as relaxation, effortlessly watchable storylines, entertainment, habit, escape, and excitement also motivate bingeing. This study also found eudaimonic motives of character engagement and empathic sadness have a slight role and the prominent motives for binge-watching are easier following of intricate storylines (Podgorelec, 2020).

The binge-watchers could have the following motives for binge-watch: catching up, relaxation, sense of completion, cultural inclusion, and enhanced viewing experience. This new consuming behaviour provides a better viewing experience and gives a sense of completion as compared to linear TV viewing (Steiner & Xu, 2018). Narrative completion requires a conscious, self-aware effort. Similarly, Rubenking et al. (2018) find that the main motive of binge-watching is the continuous cycle of anticipation of further events by the viewer. The research pointed out that elements which contribute to binge watching are attractiveness from the very start, multifaceted narratives and innovative serial structure. This engaging experience even could be explained on the basis of Indian aesthetics concepts, specifically Rasa theory which is concerned with the different kinds of emotion that can be portrayed, inferred, and transmitted by art. In essence, binge worthy shows consist of a range of "emotional flavors crafted by the creator and relished by a 'sensitive spectator' or sahrdaya".

Narrative transportation

Green (2008) defined narrative transportation as a "Process by which individuals enter mentally a world evoked by a story, a narrative". It can be experienced by the consumers of different media. This concept has shared a few resemblances with the other types of narrative involvements like

character identification, narrative immersion or narrative engagement. "The Extended Transportation-Imagery Model: A Meta-Analysis of the Antecedents and Consequences of Consumers' Narrative Transportation" Van Lear et.al, (2014) identified "affective and cognitive responses, beliefs, attitudes, and intentions as potential consequences of narrative transportation". It helps the viewers to escape into a fancy world where viewers can experience different kind of emotions.

Binge watching and Narrative transportation

Many of the findings from the previous researches indicate that binge watching and narrative transportation is positively correlated. Binge watching can produce wide range of emotions in the audience which increases the media engagement activities like Para social relationships, narrative transportation and character identification (Tukachinsky & Eyal, 2018; Ericson et.al, 2018). Rasa also denotes the equal spirit as it says, when engulfed in the craft of narrative, a person is likely to relate to the work on a deeper level (Kalpagam, 2007). Moreover, watching media a number of times as well as watching for longer periods of time, results in more transportation that is capable of affecting the viewer's emotions (Green, 2004; Mikos, 2016; Warren, 2020). From the point of view of mental models, transportation into a narrative occurs when a viewer becomes completely focused on the activity of comprehension, building and updating mental models that represent the narrative. This requires a high level of involvement and these engaging narratives lead to more enjoyment and better results (Busselle and Bilandzic, 2008 & 2009). Hence, watching a series in sequential order helps the audience to get acquainted with the established fictional world and it helps them to follow the actions of protagonists effortlessly. In contrast to this, study by Durfee (2018) on the variables specifically rate of binge-watching, transportation, and motives shows a very weak connection between binge watching preference and transportation. Plateau effect also questions the relationship between the time and level of engagement. As the viewers engage in lengthier viewer sessions the relationship between binge watching and transportation gets faded. It is similar to the assumptions of some media effects studies that the more they watch (and immerse themselves) the more desensitization may develop in their minds (Carnagey et.al., 2007).

Binge watching and Affective responses

Binge watching could be "a highly rewarding and pleasurable experience that may drive deliberate and harmonious significant viewing involve-

ment performed in response to various needs and desires” (Flayelle et al., 2020). It reduces user anxiety and empowers them with complete control and this behaviour is typically associated with more relaxed and happy feelings (Troles, 2019). For instance, an act of watching one’s favorite television show is an enjoyable activity. Enjoying an activity like this can help to buffer the effects of depression, denial and isolation (Snyder, 2016). The binge watching can also alleviate the emotional turmoil caused by the gap between episodes. Using sentiment analysis, Boca in the study points out that most viewers refer to binge watching as a positive experience that no longer holds the usual negative connotations. The study identified binge-watching appears as a form of social capital, an activity that people take pride in using to represent themselves in their online interactions (Boca, 2018).

On the other hand, it causes undesirable changes which elicit negative emotions (Panda & Paney 2017, Mehra & Gujral, 2018; Anozie 2020). Clearly, streaming services are powerful because they offer freedom, but they also come with a downside. As streaming is continuous, it creates potential conflicts between entertainment consumption and other duties. This can lead to feelings of guilt and even diminish the benefits of using entertainment for physical and psychological health. Sometimes, heavy binge watchers even feel trapped, mentally exhausted and lonely (Mehra &Gujral, 2018; Granow et al., 2018; Gangadharbatla, 2019).

Flayelle et al. (2019) categorize passion, pleasure, gratification and satisfaction as positive emotions obtained from web series viewing. At the same time, feelings like guiltiness, loss of control and addiction are categorized as negative emotions. Walton-Pattison et al. (2018) found that automaticity, regretfulness, goal conflict and facilitation all to be positively correlated with binge-watching behaviours. De Feijter et al. (2016) moreover verified the association between binge-watching time and feelings of negativity. The study says nearly three to five episodes in a single sitting gives an optimal binge-watching experience. It seems that watching more than five episodes in a row heightens guilt and lessens pleasure. But due to the restricted awareness of their own media consumption behavior and inability to control their viewing time, viewers would spend more time watching than they had planned. “The binge-watcher’s journey: Investigating motivations, contexts, and affective states surrounding Netflix viewing”, a study conducted in Portugal highlights that after watching series spectators’ levels of valence (unhappy-happy) have dropped significantly. The reason for this, according to some is that going back to reality after having absorbed oneself in a narrative world can be unsatisfying

(Castro et.al, 2019).

Studies found that the level of regret can be varied based on the motivation for binge-watching. It also depends on the type of show, whether the show comes in the higher degrees of viewer attentiveness or lower degrees of viewer attentiveness spectrum (Steiner and Xu, 2018). It is substantiated that individuals with greater motivation to justify binge-watching time are less likely to regret their time spent binge watching.

Conclusion

Streaming platform has revolutionized style and pace of series watching and popularized the term binge watching. This new media consumption behaviour offers a highly engaging experience which is capable of producing high cognitive and emotional involvement with the narrative (Flayelle, et.al, 2020). The outcome of the systematic review shows linear relationship between binge watching and narrative transportation. People with higher transportability are more likely to binge-watch a series because they can follow the storyline and watch the latest episodes as they are released (Chang, 2009; Conlin 2015). Bingeing helps these viewers to identify the nuances of plotlines and characters. Subsequently, allows the viewers' to enjoy the subtle aspects of the story and gives a positive gratification (Podgorelec, 2020). But technology often leaves people unprepared for the changes it brings. Studies show that excessive viewing affects the physical and mental health harmfully. Negative feelings such as regret and sadness may also arise as a result of spending a lot of time in front of the device. These differences in the emotional consequences are related to the motives and personality traits.

Limitations

The research papers selected for this review were carried out in western countries primarily. Most of these studies have taken demographic factors as independent variable and the participant groups were in the twenties. Since the behaviour is influenced by the personal traits and culture, the studies conducted on different population would bring new findings and relations. Moreover, defining the concept of binge watching is complex. Many of the selected studies show a disparity in defining binge watching behaviour. Some definitions are based on the number of the episodes watched where some are based on the time of sitting or frequency. The difference between healthy binge watching and excessive bingeing is also unidentified. There is a need for further studies on the nature of viewing

pattern, engagement or transportation factors and corresponding affective responses.

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