



Marathon TV Watching among Emiratis in the Interactive Media Environment

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Abstract

The study investigates the habits of binge TV watching—also called marathon TV watching—among a sample of Emiratis. It refers to watching consecutive episodes of a series in one setting for several hours. The research examines the expected outcomes for binge-watching and the possibilities of anticipating regret after such activity, among a sample of 229 Emiratis living in Abu Dhabi. In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 Emiratis to further understand this recently-developed behavior. The results showed a positive significant correlation between expected outcomes, self-regulation deficiency, anticipating regret, and binge-watching. The findings also revealed that most respondents tend to binge-watch alone rather than with others. While gender, marital status, and education do not affect the level of binge-watching, age was an important variable in predicting binge-watching levels. It was found that the lower the age, the higher the deficiency in self-regulation of binge-watching.

Introduction

Binge-watching is a relatively new behavioral phenomenon associated with intensive TV-watching. Its definition varies among scholars, but it is best explained as “viewing multiple episodes of the same television show in the same sitting.” (Walton-Pattison et al. 2016: 6) Dickinson (2014) defined it as watching two to six episodes of the same show in one sitting or in a 24-hour time period (p. 9). Warren (2016) suggests that five episodes at a time would be a better cutoff point for examining how binge-watching affects viewers (p. 79).

With the emergence of online streaming television services, watching television has never been this easy; consequently, television binge-watching has arisen as a new behavioral phenomenon (Walton-Pattison et al. 2016). Wards (2014) emphasized that TV has always been accused of being a time-waster. Time spent binge-viewing is time taken away from other things, such as family, friends, and activities (p. 2).

Binge-watching has become a daily habit for a large number of teenagers in countries all over the world (Ahmed 2017: 193). It is part of a recent trend of people viewing

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TV shows in an entirely different way than ever before. On-demand platforms such as Netflix are becoming popular among audiences that are incorporating alternative screens, such as smartphones, tablets, or computers, into their TV-viewing experience (Dickinson 2014). The estimated streaming revenue (in millions of U.S. dollars) for Netflix in the United Arab Emirates conveys a notable growth from 2017 to 2020; it reached 0.68 million U.S. dollars in 2017, 2.08 million in 2018, and 3.77 million in 2019. It is expected to generate approximately 6 million U.S. dollars with its Emirati streaming segment in 2020.¹ Binge TV watching has undoubtedly changed daily media habits. Some of the binge-watchers find little sense in watching a weekly one-hour show and wait all week for the next episode, when they can just order a show from one of the on-demand platforms and watch it continuously until they are done (Ward 2014). West (2014) found that 79% of viewers believe television shows are better when binge-watched. A 2013 poll revealed 67% of American television viewers, ages 13 to 49, binge-watch TV shows (MarketCast 2013).

Theoretical background and literature review

Changing TV watching behavior

Developing technologies allow TV viewers more convenience and options to watch programs on their own time. Damratoski et al. (2011) pointed out that the use of new technologies, like digital video recorders and the Internet, affected television viewership and increased the overall amount of time that participants watch television on a given day. Marshall (2009) discussed the role of the Internet in allowing for a more individualized experience than the traditional mode of television consumption. Shortly following their debut broadcasts, many shows are available online; thus, the computer screen is effectively replacing the television screen. Audiences can search for content in an Internet-delivered format and, although they are not directly watching network broadcasts, their choice of what to watch is driven by network-produced content.

In 2007, online DVD rental service Netflix announced the introduction of a Video-on-Demand (VOD) service. Jenner (2014) stated that:

....Netflix not only offers a large online library of film and TV in North and South America, the Caribbean, Denmark, the UK, Ireland, Sweden, Norway, Finland and the Netherlands, but even offers original content in the form of serialized drama and comedy. Eventually, Netflix has moved into territory that sets it apart from familiar structures of production, broadcasting or branding of television (p. 77).

Having all the episodes of a show readily available to viewers increases their opportunities for binge viewership. Netflix automatically plays the next episode and, once the viewer starts an episode, he/she finds it more difficult to turn it off

¹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/612331/netflix-streaming-revenues-uae/>



(Wagner 2016). Binge-watching experiences can be characterized as involving a continuous cueing of subsequent episodes and this supplies a built-in contingent reward mechanism without a need for conscious decision-making, thus leading to more automaticity-driven behavior (Walton-Pattison et al. 2016).

Memcott (2013) has cited Pamela Rutledge, head of the Media Psychology Research Center in Boston, saying: “We associate the word ‘binge’ with being out of control.” She indicates that: “It allows viewers to watch TV the same way they might read a book. Whenever the choice is in the hands of the consumer, it’s a good thing.”

Binge-watching suggests an entirely different media experience than offered by “traditional”, scheduled television. Control over scheduling, traditionally in the hands of the broadcaster, is given to the viewer (Jenner 2015). Binge-watching is a different viewing experience than traditional TV-viewing in that the ability to watch whenever, wherever, whatever, and however has allowed for this phenomenon to become a relied-upon form of consumption for both content consumers and creators (Warren 2016: 78). Peña (2015) looked at binge-watching as an embraced consumer habit, one that might threaten other television practices (p. 4).

This new habit allows viewers to bypass full seasons on linearly scheduled television in favor of watching them all at once at their convenience (Sodano 2012: 28, 32). The binge-watching behavior includes selecting a show, choosing when to watch a particular show, and deciding on how many episodes to watch (Hallinan & Striphos 2014). The Netflix platform was found to be the preferred content delivery network among binge-watchers in the U.S. (Dickinson 2014). Horvath et al (2017) described binge-watching via video-on-demand services as the new “normal” way to consume television programs (p. 1).

Some researchers associated binge-watching to addiction symptoms; Devasagayam (2014) reported that the participants of his early binge-watching study displayed what he equated to addictive tendencies, including losing track of how many episodes were viewed and having an empty feeling when they finished a series. Dickinson (2014) found that Millennial binge-viewers do not differ from TV-viewing addicts of the past as they both engage in spontaneous and habitual binge-viewing rituals (p. 4). Sung, Kang, and Lee (2015) concluded that viewers who reported the highest amounts of binge-watching also demonstrated symptoms of addiction, including higher levels of loneliness, depression, and reduced self-control. Ahmed (2017) found a positive correlation between binge-watching and depression, while loneliness was not associated with binge-watching. However, the causality relationship could not be claimed (p. 204). Horvath et al. (2017) concluded that although it is a preferred viewing style catered to by many internet-based on-demand distribution companies, binge-watching does not appear to benefit sustained memory of viewed content and may affect show enjoyment.



Expected outcomes of binge-watching

The Uses and Gratifications (Us & Gs) approach is valuable in gaining understanding of this new media environment (Rubin 2009). In studying binge-watching, Us & Gs might help to understand the expected outcomes experienced by the bingers. Katz et al. (1973) explained the difference between the gratification sought and gratification obtained, in which the former is the expectation about content formed in advance of exposure, and the latter is the satisfaction subsequently secured from consumption of it.

When Dennis and Gray (2013) studied the satisfaction of television-viewers experiencing an episode-by-episode, they found that program performance was the most significant predictor of audience satisfaction. Expectation was the second-most substantial predictor, and connectedness was another indicator of viewer satisfaction to a limited degree. Binge-watching offers a new option to viewers, a sort of instant gratification (Peña 2015).

Petersen (2016) indicated that university students recognized the benefits gained from binge-watching, but they failed to recognize the dangers and negative components of this new TV-watching habit. Walton-Pattison et al. (2016) indicated that binge-watching may itself have a conflicting and/or facilitating impact on the pursuit of other personal goals (e.g. socializing, household chores, or work).

People reported different reasons for binge-watching. Dickinson (2014) found that 50% of his sample binge-watch TV shows “for fun”. However, Horvath et al. (2017) found that participants who binge-watched reported significantly less show enjoyment than participants with daily- or weekly-viewing habits. The second-most common reason for binge-watching was “to escape” (21%), followed by 13% “to pass time”, and 11.6 % mentioned various other reasons, such as “shows are addicting”, “to relax”, and to “wind-down” at the end of the day (p. 68).

Avoiding advertisements that interrupt TV shows and distract from viewing enjoyment was a significant reason (60%) stated for enjoying binge-watching (Staff, 2014). Peña (2015) revealed that binge-watching serves as an escape for viewers. A pastime gratification allows viewers to forget their life’s troubles for a while; this gratification is best obtained for television-viewers when binge-watching, which is intuitive because binge-watching requires prolonged periods of time spent viewing a show in front of a screen and away from everyday activities, essentially becoming immersed in the show’s setting. In Wagner’s (2016) study, participants mentioned various binge-watching motivations, such as background noise for multitasking, avoiding spoilers, maximizing social currency, and escapism. Pittman and Sheehan (2015) concluded that factors salient for regular bingers are relaxation, engagement, and hedonism. They added that those who binge on an entire series in one- or two-days value engagement, relaxation, hedonism, and aesthetics.



Anticipated regret

One major unexpected outcome from binge-watching that is frequently cited in U.S. press articles is guilt (Wagner 2016: 2). Walton-Pattison et al. (2016) proposed that anticipated regret is one of the factors that might represent potentially useful constructs to help understand binge-watching.

Sandberg and Conner (2008) conducted a meta-analysis exploring anticipated regret as an additional predictor in the Theory of Planned Behavior, which demonstrated that anticipated regret significantly adds to the prediction of both intentions and behavior. This was shown to be the case for a variety of different health-affecting behaviors, including junk food, alcohol, and tobacco consumption.

As with binging on anything—food, sweets, alcohol—there are often feelings of guilt that result and a sense that the person doing the act has done something wrong or bad after they have indulged in it. Binge-watching TV is no different (MarketCast 2013). The unplanned shift from casual watching to bingeing has some unintended and uncomfortable consequences for bingers that may reinforce the choice to do it by themselves (MarketCast 2013). Peña (2015) reported that many viewers who binge-watch see it as the new normal with no guilty feelings.

Similarly, Walton-Pattison et al (2016) stated that binge-watching may generate feelings of regret, such as when this activity extends into the early hours of the morning, influencing sleep and the day ahead. They explained that, given that prolonged binge-watching may lead to regret, the anticipation of this emotion prior to binge-watching might be a relevant explanatory factor.

Dickinson (2014) concluded there are a number of habits and routines of binge watchers that can be classified as rituals: spontaneous binge-watching, binge-watching after dark, bed binge-watching, personal binge-watching, unrestricted binge-watching, unproductive binge-watching, and dramatic binge-watching.

Panek (2014) studied the association between self-control and feeling guilty after watching TV. He explained that students with lower self-control spent more time watching leisure media such as television than doing their school work. Consequentially, they felt guilty for that decision after they experienced the ramifications of choosing media over the long-term benefits of studying.

In the same context, Reinecke, Hartmann, and Eden (2014) found that those suffering from stressful workdays who used media as a stress-reducer tended to feel guilty for doing so. The authors highlighted that those who used television as a stress-reducer due to their overworked lives paradoxically experienced guilt more frequently, as media usage felt like a form of procrastination rather than attempted relaxation. In this case, busy work schedules caused media relaxation to backfire and guilt to grow.



Self-regulation deficiency

A MarketCast (2013) study found that 71% of binge watchers admit that their binge-sessions are mostly unplanned. They start out intending only to watch one or two episodes, but then get “sucked in” to a much longer viewing session.

Bandura (1991) notes that self-regulation plays a critical role in influencing human behavior; it is a person’s ability to direct his/her behavior instead of being passively affected by external influences.

Three interactive stages are usually involved in the self-regulatory process:

- **Self-monitoring:** People pay attention to or observe their own performance as well as the various effects caused by their conduct.
- **Self-judgment:** People evaluate a given performance either using personal standards or comparing it with the performance of others. Based on the outcome of self-judgment, people either reinforce the behavior that is positively evaluated or abstain from pursuing an action that results in negative self-judgment.
- **Self-reaction:** It directly affects a person’s behavioral change.

Liu and Peng (2009) investigated self-regulation in the context of massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs). They examined whether MMOG players can avoid negative consequences on their own through self-monitoring, self-judgment, and self-reaction. They found that deficient self-regulation increases the negative consequences associated with MMOG playing.

LaRose et al. (2003) argued that the essential problem of Internet dependency was a deficit in self-regulation regarding Internet usage. Dickinson (2014) found that binge-viewing results in bargaining, aggression, lethargy, neglect, sleeplessness, and isolation. He added that Millennials’ new sense of control through technology use makes excessive TV-viewing, renamed “binge-viewing”, an accepted ritual (p. 120). People might want control over their media consumption, but, for some, binge-viewing signals a loss of control (MarketCast 2013). However, little is known about binge-watching habits in the Arab region. There is one recent piece of research that found that new technologies played a key role in encouraging binge-watching behavior among Arab residents in the Emirates. Laptops and smart phones are dominant devices in binge-watching using various websites, mainly YouTube and downloaded Torrents (Ahmed 2017: 203).

The aims of this study are to provide firsthand information about the frequency of binge-watching, the media and devices used for binge-watching, and the context in which people binge-watch. In addition, some important variables will be investigated - anticipated regret and self-regulation deficiency - to better understand new TV-watching behaviors.



Research questions and hypotheses

(1) Research questions:

These are to assess Emiratis' binge-watching habits. Six questions were identified as follows:

1. What are the TV-watching habits among Emiratis?
2. What are the frequently used media platforms for binge-watching among respondents?
3. What are the programs that Emiratis tend to binge-watch?
4. With whom are Emiratis binge-watching?
5. What media do Emiratis use for binge TV-watching?
6. Where do Emiratis undertake binge-watching?

(2) Research hypotheses:

H1: There is a significant positive correlation between binge-watching and

1. Binge-watchers' expected outcomes,
2. Anticipating regret of binge-watching,
3. Self-regulation deficiency.

H2: There are significant differences in level or extent of binge-watching among those who binge-watch alone and those who watch with others.

H3: The devices used for watching correlates positively with the level of binge-watching.

H4: There is a positive correlation between the media channel used and the level of binge-watching.

H5: Emiratis differ according to their demographics in:

1. Level of binge-watching
2. Binge-watchers' expected outcomes
3. Anticipating regret of binge-watching
4. Self-regulation deficiency.

Methodology and measurements

The research applied qualitative and quantitative methods to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses.



(1) The quantitative methodology:

A survey was designed to collect the data as follows:

Sampling and data collection

A questionnaire of 18 questions, measuring the research variables, was constructed. The questionnaire was written in Arabic as it is the mother tongue of the respondents. A pretest on 10% of the total sample was conducted that resulted in making some modifications on the phrasing and the order of the questions. The data was collected in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates. Five mass communication students at Abu Dhabi University assisted in data collection from May to June 2018 from Abu Dhabi. The sample included 229 Emiratis. The following table includes the characteristics of the sample.

Table (1)
Characteristics of the sample (n = 229)

Characteristic	number	%
Gender:		
• Males	117	51.1
• Females	112	48.9
Education:		
• Less than Univ. level	110	48
• Univ. level and above	119	52
Marital Status:		
• Single	155	67.7
• Married	74	32.3
Age:		
• Less than 20 years	33	14.4
• 20–25 years	117	51.1
• More than 25 years	79	34.5

(2) The qualitative method:

The researcher applied the in-depth interview technique, using seven items to gain better understanding of marathon TV-watching habits in Emirati society. These items are:

1. The binge-watching habits among Emiratis (duration, frequency, medium used, number of episodes, etc.),
2. Methods used in binge-watching,
3. Preference of binge-watching alone or with company,
4. Motivations for binge-watching,
5. Types of TV programs and dramas the respondents tend to binge-watch,
6. Anticipating regret during and after binge-watching,



7. The binge-watcher's ability to stop watching when he has something else to achieve.

Data was collected from 20 binge-watchers living in Abu Dhabi and Al Ain, a city in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. All the respondents are Emirati and their ages range from 16 to 41 years old (mean 24.8), and included (7) males and (13) females. As for the education level, the interviews were conducted with (12) high school students, (4) university graduates majoring in Law, Business, Media Studies, and IT, and (4) are at the undergraduate level. The interview duration ranged from 20 minutes to 51 minutes, for a total of 534 minutes, or almost 9 hours (mean = 26.7 min). The interviews were conducted in the respondents' homes and work places.

Three Mass Communication students of Abu Dhabi University helped in conducting the in-depth interviews. All interviews were in Arabic (the mother tongue of the interviewees). They were recorded and transcribed by the researcher.

Research variables

1. Binge-watching:

This is the independent variable that is defined as watching more than two back-to-back episodes of the same TV show in one sitting. Three questions adopted from Walton-Pattison et al. (2016) and Sung et al. (2015) were used to measure binge watching. 1) How many hours per session did the respondent spend watching back-to-back episodes? 2) How many episodes from the same program did the respondent watch in one sitting? 3) How many days in the past week did the respondents watch back-to-back episodes in one sitting? Cronbach's alpha = 0.876.

Respondents were divided into three groups according to their answers to binge-watching questions: high binge-watcher 23.6%; moderate 56.8%; and low 19.7% (Mean 7.65, SD 2.23).

2. Anticipating regret

This variable was defined as the feeling of guilt and regret of binge-watching when determining that it was not the right choice at that time. Anticipated regret was measured using five-point scale, from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree, with two items adapted from O'Carroll et al. (2012) and Walton-Pattison et al. (2016): "I usually feel guilty after watching many episodes of the same TV show in the same sitting," and "I always feel that I should have spent my time in a better manner." Cronbach's alpha = 0.815

Based on respondents' answers to the anticipated regret questions, the respondents were divided into three groups: high 25.8%; moderate 59.4%; and low 14.8% (mean 5.92 and SD 2.16).



3. Expected outcomes

This variable was defined as the satisfaction the respondents might expect to gain from binge-watching. The outcome expectations variable was measured by five items using a five-point scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The items measured expected physical, affective, and social outcomes adopted from M. Liu & W. Peng (2009). These are: “Watching back-to-back episodes of the same TV show in the same sitting makes me...”: “feel more relaxed,” “feel happier,” “reduce my stress,” “have something to talk about with other people.” Cronbach’s alpha = 0.819.

Respondents were divided into three groups according to their answers to the expected outcomes questions: high expectations 30.6%; moderate expectations 39.7%; and low expectations 29.7% (mean 17.5 and SD 4.17).

4. Self-regulation deficiency

This variable was defined as the respondent’s ability to control his or her own TV binge-watching behavior, instead of being passively affected by unwanted consequences of binge-watching. It was measured using four statements covering the three components of self-regulation; monitoring, judgment, and reaction, using the 5-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. These statements were adapted from previous studies of Internet use and video games studies by Caplan (2002), LaRose et al. (2003), Suhail and Bargees (2006), and M. Liu and W. Peng, (2009). The statements were rephrased to serve the objectives of the current research. These are: “I would go out of my way to satisfy my urges to watch back-to-back TV episodes;” “I lose track of time when binge-watching;” “It is difficult for me to keep myself away from watching back-to-back episodes for many hours;” and “All my efforts to control, cut back, or stop TV binge-watching were unsuccessful.” Cronbach’s alpha = 0.768.

Respondents were divided into three groups based on their answers to self-regulation deficiency questions: high 31.4%; moderate 40.2%; and low 28.4%.

The questionnaire also includes many other questions to find out the binge-watching habits in terms of accompaniment while watching, the places of binge-watching, the media devices used, and the types of programs the respondents are binge-watching, in addition to demographic questions (age, gender, education level, and marital status).

Data analysis

SPSS was used to analyze the research data. Frequencies, Pearson correlation, T-test, ANOVA, and Post Hoc Test were used to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses.



Results

(1) Results of the survey

Binge watching habits among Emiratis

The results showed that the Internet is the most used method by respondents for binge-watching. More than half (55%) of respondents used it for watching back-to-back TV programs in the same session, followed by the TV set (37.5%), and 7.4% of respondents stated that they were equally likely to use both the TV and Internet.

Also, 84% of the sample stated they binge-watch TV programs for four hours per session a day, which indicates that this TV-watching habit is widespread among Emiratis. The favorite TV program type among the respondents to binge-watch is foreign drama (38%); dubbed Turkish drama (28.4%); documentaries (24%); comedy programs and Khaleej's drama (23.6%); sports (20%); Japanese Anime (16.2%); and lastly, a mixture of adventures programs, Egyptian drama, talk shows, reality TV shows, cooking shows, and scientific programs with 10% and less of the viewing sample.

In the same context, Dickinson (2014) found that drama is the preferred TV show genre that Millennials choose to binge on (63%). The second most favored genre was "comedy" (25%). Other categories included "reality" (2.2%), "animation" (1.6%), "documentary" (2.7%), and "other" (5%) (p. 59).

Respondents use multiple media platforms to binge-watch. The results revealed that YouTube was identified by 34.5% of respondents as the media most often used for binge-watching, followed by available TV channel websites (23%), OSN-TV (11.4%), downloaded Torrents (10.5%), Shahid.net (7.4%), and the Internet streaming service (4.8%). The rest mentioned Netflix (3.9%) and DVDs (2.2%).

Most respondents tend to binge-watch during weekends (68.1%), watching up to four episodes or more per session (72%), mostly at home (77.7%); mean 2.75 and SD 0.49. Moreover, a significant number of respondents (68.5%) mentioned that they binge-watch alone; only 12.7% watch with friends and 18.8% with other family members. This is similar to what was reported by Dickinson (2014) who found that 81% of binge-viewers prefer to engage in binge-watching alone rather than with others. Only 19% of their sample preferred to binge-watch TV shows with "others" (p. 68). The MarketCast study (2013) revealed that 98% of 1,022 American TV viewers aged 13–49 binge-watched at home and 56% stated they only binge-watched shows by themselves.

The most frequent device used for binge-watching is the laptop (29.3%), then smart phones (21%), Internet TV (19.2%), iPad (18.8%), and desktop computer (11.8%). This is similar to the results reported by Dickinson (2014) who found that TVs and laptops are the preferred devices for binge-watching. In that study the TV was



determined to be the most used device for binge-viewing as 42% of respondents made this selection. The laptop was the second-most preferred device for binge-watching as 38% of respondents preferred this device to “tablets” (8%), “smart TVs” (2.2%), “smartphones” (2.2%), “desktops” (2.7%), or “other” (4%) (p. 58).

The results showed that almost 47% of respondents disagreed that binge-watching leads to feeling regret, while only 26% agreed that feeling regret is a consequence of binge-watching. At the same time, 46% ironically agreed that they should have done something else rather than binge-watch. This result goes along with the findings of a Wagner (2016: 31) study that found that only 63% of respondents reported feeling guilty from binge-watching television through streaming services.

Hypotheses tests

H1: There is a significant positive correlation between binge-watching and

1. Binge-watchers’ expected outcomes,
2. Anticipating regret of binge-watching,
3. Self-regulation deficiency.

Pearson correlation was used to test the first hypothesis and the results are shown in the following table.

Table (2)
Correlation between binge watching and the dependent variables

	Self-regulation deficiency	Anticipating regret	Outcomes expectations
Binge-watching	.339(*)	-.221(*)	.249(*)

(*) Correlation is significant at 0.01 level

The results showed a positive significant correlation between binge-watching and self-regulation deficiency ($r = .339$). The result goes along with the conclusion of the study of Walton-Pattison et al. (2016) who found that binge-watching does not correlate with self-efficacy (p. 5). This means that the more respondents practice binge-watching, the more deficient they are in their self-regulation.

In addition, the correlation between binge-watching and binge-watchers’ expected outcomes is significant and positively correlated ($r = .249$). This means that the level of binge-watching increases when the outcome expectations are higher. The mean scores of the expected outcomes of binge-watching revealed that “to decrease pressure” is the highest expectation (mean 3.64); then “to feel happy” (mean 3.62); “to feel relaxed” (mean 3.48); “to spend a good time with friends” (mean 3.34); and “to find something I can discuss with friends” (mean 3.36). It seems that the binge-watchers’ expected outcomes accounted for variance in binge-watching in most of binge-watching research (Dickinson 2014, Peña 2015, Walton-Pattison et al. 2016, and Staff 2014).



The correlation between binge-watching and anticipating regret is a negative correlation ($r = -.221$). This means that the more the respondents binge-watch, the less they feel regret. This indicates that the binge-watcher tends not to regret spending hours to watch back-to-back TV episodes of the same program. The first hypothesis is accepted.

H2: There are significant differences among those who binge-watch alone and those who include others in their binge-watching.

T-test was used to test this hypothesis. There is a significant difference in the level of binge-watching between respondents who binge-watch alone and those who binge watch with others. The results revealed that those who watch alone tend to binge-watch more than those who watch with others ($T = 3.076$, $df = 227$, $P = 0.002$). The data indicated an increase in the mean of those who watch alone (7.95), in comparison to the mean of those who watch with others (7.0). The second hypothesis is accepted.

H3: The device used for watching correlates positively with the level of binge-watching.

The cross-correlation table (3) shows differences in binge-watching levels among various devices.

Table (3)
Devices used and binge-watching level

Binge-watching level	Devices used				
	iPad	Smart phone	Computer	Laptop	Internet TV
High	23.7%	8.3%	33.3%	35.8%	11.4%
Moderate	55.3%	75%	48.1%	49.3%	56.8%
Low	21.1%	16.7%	18.5%	14.9%	31.8%

The table shows that laptops were used by 35.8% of the high binge-watcher group. Smart phones were used by 75% of the moderate group of binge-watching. Among the members of the low binge-watching group, 31.8% use Internet TV. Chi-Square and One-Way ANOVA were used to examine the second hypothesis. Chi-Square showed a significant correlation between the level of binge-watching and the device used ($\text{Chi-Square} = 25.1$, $P = 0.005$). One-Way ANOVA indicated that the means of binge-watching levels differ as per the device used in binge-watching ($F = 3.954$, $P = 0.002$). The third hypothesis was accepted.

H4: There is a positive correlation between the media channel used and the level of binge-watching.

One Way ANOVA indicated no significant correlation between binge-watching and the media channel used ($F = 1.507$; $P = .156$). The fourth hypothesis is rejected.



H5: Emiratis differ according to their demographics in:

1. Level of binge-watching,
2. Outcome expectations,
3. Anticipating regret of binge-watching,
4. Self-regulation deficiency.

This hypothesis was tested using the T-Test, Pearson correlation, One-Way ANOVA, and Post hoc Test. The results revealed the following:

Gender: There is no significant difference between males and females in binge TV-watching, outcome expectations, self-regulation deficiency, or anticipating regret of binge-watching.

Age: The difference in binge-watching among the three age groups was assessed using ANOVA and T-test. The results are shown in the following table:

Table (4)
Correlation between Binge-Watching
and Self-Regulation Deficiency among Age Groups

	Age groups	Mean	StD. Deviation	ANOVA F	T
Binge-watching among age groups	Less than 20	13.969	2.952	7.396(*)	4.124 (**)
	20 to 25	13.256	4.094		
	25 or more	11.468	3.522		

(*) $P = .001$ (**) $P = .000$, $df = 277$

ANOVA and T-test showed a significant difference among the sample's age groups in their self-regulation deficiency while binge-watching. The mean results indicate that the lower the respondent's age, the more that respondent might be deficient in self-regulating their binge-watching ($F = 7.39$, $r = .339$). This was also supported when the Post Hoc Test was used.

Education: There is no significant difference among education level groups of Emiratis in their binge TV watching, outcome expectations, self-regulation deficiency, or anticipating regret of binge-watching. This is an indication that binge-watching is becoming a daily habit regardless of education level, starting from high school or younger and reaching university level and above.

Marital status: There was a significant difference between single and married people in the sample in their self-regulation deficiency. Single respondents proved to be more deficient in self-regulating than married respondents. There is no difference between the two groups in binge TV-watching, outcome expectations, and anticipating regret of binge-watching. The fifth hypothesis is accepted regarding age and marital status, but rejected in terms of gender and education.



(2) In-depth interviews results

The results of the in-depth interviews are presented according to the following items:

1. Binge-watching habits among Emiratis (duration, frequency, medium used, number of episodes, etc.)

More than 15 respondents participating in the in-depth interviews expressed that they started binge-watching more than ten years ago. They began this habit by using Internet websites to watch 5 to 10 episodes from a TV series in one session. Each episode might last up to two hours, as with the Turkish soap opera. One interviewee stated that he might watch up to 30 sports program episodes in one session. Most interviewees mentioned that their binge-watching habit became extensive during summer breaks, because they had extended leisure time and nothing to achieve.

One female interviewee stated that she started marathon TV-watching while she was preparing herself for the EILTS exam. She started watching a foreign drama and became involved in it to improve her language. She said: “I intensively watched back-to-back episodes of the foreign drama daily; gradually, I did not need to read the translation subtitles while watching... my language had improved because of binge-watching.”

Another interviewee, who started binge-watching 9 months ago, said: “I began watching one two-hour episode after another of a Turkish soap opera over many hours; it feels like it lasts just seconds because it kills my boring leisure time.” One interviewee started binge-watching because of the number of advertisements interrupting Twitter and Google, and her friends encouraged her to try binge-watching without advertisement breaks.

The duration of binge-watching ranged from 6 to 14 hours a day, from 3 episodes in a row to a whole season (about 24 episodes). One interviewee mentioned that “during university time, I cannot exceed five back-to-back episodes a day, but during summer, I watch eight episodes each one being two hours in length at maximum.” Five respondents said that the number of episodes per session is determined by the amount of “enthusiasm” and “suspense” exhibited during watching that can motivate them to watch one after another overnight until the next morning, as long as “I do not have work or study the next day”, as mentioned by one interviewee.

18 interviewees expressed that they do not subscribe to websites, as they prefer free websites such as Shahid.net, YouTube, or “Kisat Esh’q”, among others. They also use mobile applications, such as the Turkish soap opera app. Two interviewees mentioned that they subscribe to Netflix to satisfy their desire of



binge-watching the most recent foreign dramas, as Netflix makes whole seasons available for a huge range of favorite TV shows and dramas.

2. Methods of binge-watching

Most respondents said that they binge-watch using iPads and smart phones, because they can use them anywhere. Others mentioned that they preferred the laptop screen because it is bigger and makes binge-watching easier and more enjoyable. One interviewee said: “I used the Turkish soap opera mobile application for my phone... all the Turkish drama episodes are available, and I can hold it anywhere while watching.” Another interviewee introduced a different reason for using the smart phone in binge-watching. She explained: “I used my smart phone for binge-watching because it has a faster and stronger Wi-Fi signal; it does not cut out while watching online videos and I can open more than one link—while watching one episode, another one is being uploaded on another website, so I never stop watching.” Another interviewee said: “I can binge-watch anywhere and get involved instantly, even if I was busy doing something else; I just get out my phone and start watching.”

One interviewee, who uses her laptop for binge-watching, realized that she cannot stop binge-watching once she started: “Binge watching is very tricky; that is the reason for opening a link only if I have free time, because I know that once I start watching an episode, I will lose control of the time being wasted.” Two other interviewees preferred to link their IPs to the TV screen to enjoy watching via a bigger screen that helps to “fight against falling asleep while watching.”

3. Preference of binge-watching alone or with company

Most interviewees admitted that they prefer binge-watching alone. The reasons varied; one reason is the desire to concentrate on the dramatic events and scenes unfolding without interruption, to feel more involved. One interviewee stated that he “prefer(s) to binge-watch alone, as I hate to have someone bothering me by asking questions or commenting while I am watching.” Another interviewee mentioned that “binge-watching alone allows me to freely stop any scene and re-watch it; group watching is more like in cinema halls where you can’t do that.”

This can be considered as a new perception of TV-watching behavior; the motivation used to be having all the family members participating in one activity - watching TV drama and newscasts. Exchanging comments and sharing interpretations of what they were watching was one of the enjoyable moments most families used to have, especially in the Arab world.

Feeling isolated is another reason for not only binge-watching, but for being alone while watching, as mentioned by another interviewee who stated “I am



alone at home most of the time; none of family members join me in any activity.”

A number of the females interviewed introduced a new behavior of online binge-watching. A group of females would agree on watching certain episodes at the same time but each alone on their own devices. They would then discuss the content while watching via WhatsApp, all agreeing no one should spoil the events. This indicates that TV-watching behavior has changed dramatically using the available advanced technology via internet and by having websites that make whole seasons of TV content available to all users 24/7.

One interviewee only preferred binge-watching with friends, especially if they agreed to watch certain sports programs, such as football games. He said “this made binge-watching more interesting as I and my friends analyzed the game to enrich our sports-watching experience.”

4. Motivations for binge watching

When asked about possible motivations for binge-watching and the reasons it was preferable over the traditional type of TV watching, interviewees mentioned various purposes. Enthusiasm and suspense in TV shows and drama enrapturing the viewer was the most frequent reason mentioned by the interviewees. The other reasons are:

- To enjoy watching beautiful vistas from different countries;
- To learn how the series ends quickly before others tell you how it ends;
- To strengthen English language skills while watching foreign TV content;
- To fulfill curiosity to see the next details of the drama;
- To escape from the pressures of study;
- To enjoy the real-life stories of certain series;
- To entertain;
- To pass time; and
- To gain knowledge from watching historical TV series and documentary programs.

With respect to sports programming specifically, the inability to watch more than one match in one session in a traditional viewing atmosphere was an important reason for binge-watching. Other interviewees stated that the reason for sports binge-watching is the desire to share interests and engage with friends in the discussion of the events of the football matches.



5. Types of TV programs the respondents tend to binge-watch

The interviewees have different tastes in the TV content they tend to watch. Drama was rated highly in terms of most binge-watched content. Indian, Turkish, Khaleej, and Kuwaiti dramas were among the most mentioned. Some interviewees also included U.S. action and European dramas, especially epic fantasies such as *Game of Thrones*. Others binge-watch Egyptian soap operas, football games, or foreign comedy shows.

Here are some examples of foreign TV content binge-watched by the interviewees:

How to Get Away with Murder, The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon, The Tomorrow People, The Ellen DeGeneres Show, Baby Daddy, Young and Hungry, The Walking Dead, Supernatural, Friends, Full House, etc.

As for the Arabic content, the interviewees mentioned the following Turkish dramas: “Al Azahr Al Hazena” or “Sad Flowers”, “Hoab A’ma” or “Blind Love”, “Motazwgat Ghadebat” or “Angry Wives”, etc. One interviewee stated: “These styles of TV series require certain preparation before you start binge-watching: free time, silence, headphones, and dim lighting.”

6. Anticipating regret during and after binge watching

Fifteen of the participants in the in-depth interviews confirmed they never feel regret after they marathon TV-watch. The reason is that most state they binge-watch during their free time. Interviewees seemed to exaggerate their ability to prioritize, while some of them justified not feeling regret: “If I do not waste my time watching these series, I might open the door for doing something that has a more negative effect on me.” Another interviewee said: “The state urges us to attend national games and encourage our national team; this binge-watching of football games can be seen as something positive and I cannot regret it.” One female said, “I do not regret binge-watching these series to give my brain a rest from studying.”

Five interviewees said that they felt regret if they practiced binge-watching during times when they should be studying. Binge-watching made it difficult to wake up early; therefore, regret was often apparent in the morning. Two Interviewees said that binge-watching via laptop caused severe headaches afterwards. One said, “I remember my duties late at night, then I have to spend extra time to do my homework, so I feel very sorry.” Some respondents attributed regret for content-related reasons and focused on the fact that the series was trivial and repetitive. Others stated that they felt regret because it would be better to do something else, such as read a book, read the Qur’an, or pray. One respondent said, “I keep watching and watching and watching while feeling happy until I realize that my whole time has disappeared watching a single series; then I regret it and wish that



I did something more useful to me.” Another said, “I do not regret it, but I feel depressed if I think about how I lost all these hours in something unimportant! But it has become a habit and I often ignore this feeling.”

One interviewee mentioned that she “forced” herself to watch a whole season of one series all day and deeply regretted her choice. She said, “when I slept, I dreamed of the series as if I were the heroine and actually entered prison. I lived as if I were in the prison, so then when I woke up, I felt regret and began working on controlling the hours I spent binge-watching.”

7. The binge-watcher’s ability to stop watching when he has something else to achieve

Most of the participants in the in-depth interviews confirmed that it is difficult to quit binge-watching unless there is something necessary or urgent. One interviewee stated that she often could not stop watching for the sake of anything else, even if it was important. “Unfortunately, binge-watching made me lazy and idle, and I found it difficult to achieve anything else,” she said.

Another respondent said: “If I can postpone the work, I will postpone it and continue watching.” Another interviewee said: “Even if I receive an important call, I cannot answer because I am focused on the series and too involved in it.” One respondent said: “I cannot stop watching the matches; I cannot sleep until I finish watching”. One female stated: “I cannot stop because there may be no other time to watch... It is impossible to stop, for example, if I start watching a series. I cannot check my phone even for a minute, because I cannot afford to miss even a scene. If my mind is distracted, I have to re-watch the whole episode from the beginning.”

Five interviewees said they could stop binge-watching a series to do any sort of work. One of the interviewees said, “there are many things in my life more important than television and the telephone.” Another said: “Normally, I can stop because I care about real things ... I can leave it for hours and return later to continue watching.”

Two of the participants stated that they have the will and ability to organize their time and ensure the completion of work and then continue binge-viewing or vice versa so as not to create conflicts. Others indicated that they could complete their work while listening to the audio file of the series from the laptop.

When respondents were asked their opinion about young people who may postpone important work in order to finish watching consecutive episodes of the same program or series, the interviewees described such behavior as “not good” and something that should be immediately eliminated. The interviewees started giving advice: “We are accountable for our time and my advice is do not



neglect your work so as not to regret it later.” One noted that “TV programs exist all the time; make your priority the family, praying, reading, or watching educational programs that are limited on television!”

Another respondent said that binge-watching is “a waste of time” and “ruins homes.” “These young people do not bear responsibility and do not have full awareness.” they added that such a young person “has misleading logic and does not have control of his life.” Another interviewee pointed out that “a person should have the sensible mind not to postpone work to watch a TV series that can be watched at any time.”

Some respondents concluded that this phenomenon may affect social relations and an individual’s personality and their psychological makeup. One interviewee said that “once involved in watching a series, one forgets his family and everyone around him; he may use the character’s words and imitate his behavior.” Another interviewee added that “a person could turn into a maniac ... these people are not mature.”

One interviewee explained this phenomenon as a kind of addiction. A female respondent drew attention to the existence of competition among friends on who can finish watching the whole season first. She added: “If a friend reaches the 30th episode and her friend is still watching the 10th, the latter may neglect her life, duties, and studies to spend her day watching the series to reach the 30th!”

This indicates the importance of studying this phenomenon in the context of Philip Davison's Third Person Theory (1983), which hypothesizes that an individual reduces the likelihood of harmful and socially undesirable effects of media content on himself and those close to him, while overestimating the likelihood that the same content will negatively affect others.

Conclusion and discussion

This research is one of the earliest studies in the Arab world investigating binge TV-watching habits and the factors predicting it. Quantitative and qualitative methodologies were applied using survey and in-depth interviews. A structured questionnaire was designed. The data was collected from a sample of 229 Emiratis living in Abu Dhabi, the capital of United Arab Emirates. In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 Emiratis. The results revealed that 84% of respondents are binge-watching TV programs for at least four hours per session a day. Similarly, Ahmed (2017) found that 44.6% of a sample composed of Arab residents in the UAE were binge watchers. This proves that the new TV-watching behavior is prevailing in the Emirates and probably throughout the Arab world.

New technologies facilitate binge-watching, as it was found that most of the respondents practice binge-watching through smart phones and laptops. Respondents also used a variety of media hosts to binge watch from, including



YouTube, Internet TV, and many others. This result proposes that new technology, such as mobile devices along with Wi-Fi Internet accessibility everywhere in UAE, makes it easier for people to be involved in the binge-watching habit. It also might explain the reason for an increasing tendency to practice binge TV-watching nowadays. Warren (2016) reported that, on average, respondents who watched primarily on tablets tended toward watching more episodes in subsequent weeks than those who watched primarily on a Mac or PC (p. 55). Western drama is the most popular content the sample binge-watched, followed by dubbed Turkish dramas. The extensive exposure to foreign media content might initiate a possible negative effect that is related to cultural imperialism.

The results of both the survey and the in-depth interviews show a tendency among respondents to binge-watch alone rather than with friends or family members. Interviewees revealed a new TV binge-watching behavior—using WhatsApp to discuss the TV shows' contents with friends who are watching at the same time individually in separate locations. Binge-watching alone may satisfy the Emiratis' desire to watch calmly and to control their watching atmosphere. In the same context, Warren (2016) found a statistically significant positive relationship between the number of episodes watched with others and the hours spent per viewing session (p. 37). In addition, he found that respondents who viewed all binge-watched episodes with others had levels of mental rumination higher than those who binge-watched by themselves (p. 57). This might enhance the effect of binge-watching and make it a more enjoyable experience than when done alone.

This result might indicate there are possible psychological consequences of binge-watching. Traditional TV-watching habits used to correlate positively with increased family ties resulting from watching and discussing TV content. With the new TV-watching behavior of binge-watching, there is a tendency toward unaccompanied watching of a great amount of media content that might additionally cause loneliness, isolation, and depression. Ahmed (2017) and Sung et al. (2015) found a correlation between binge-watching and depression.

The results reveal that Emiratis use every possible and available method to binge-watch. They can binge-watch using laptops, smart phones, and Internet TV, on websites and smart phone applications to binge-watch anywhere at any time. Foreign dramas and Turkish soap operas are the most popular TV content that Emiratis tend to binge-watch.

Almost 50% of respondents do not feel binge-watching might lead to feelings of regret, while only 26% determined that feeling regret is a consequence of binge-watching. At the same time, 46% expressed that they regret binge-watching, and should have done something else with their time. This coincides with the in-depth interviews, showing that most respondents ignore the feeling of regret after spending many hours watching back-to-back episodes. However, this finding



contradicts the results of the Walton-Pattison et al. (2016) research, which found that binge-watching is associated with anticipating regret.

The results revealed a positive correlation between self-regulation deficiency and binge-watching. There was an indication that binge-watchers find it difficult to stop watching unless there is a reason driving them to do so. In-depth interviews indicate that the respondents overestimated their abilities to stop watching and underestimated the negative consequences of this habit on themselves. In the same context, Dickinson (2014) found that 60% of binge-watchers did not feel they had binge-watched enough unless they felt “sleepy”. Some other respondents expressed that they only stopped binge-watching a TV show after “there had been some resolution,” or they “start feeling antsy,” or they felt “like (they) should be doing something else,” or they got “tired of the content,” or are “no longer paying attention,” or got hungry.

It was found that the level of binge-watching increases when the outcome expectations are higher among respondents. “To decrease pressure” was the highest expectation among binge-watchers, followed by “to feel happy.” This result supports other research findings of Dickinson (2014), Peña (2015), Walton-Pattison et al. (2016), Petersen (2016), and Staff (2014). Moreover, Horvath et al. (2017) revealed that binge-watchers reported enjoying the viewed program significantly less than people who watched the same show on a daily or weekly schedule. The Uses and Gratifications approach might help in introducing further explanation for the motivations of binge TV watching, taking into consideration the integration between TV content and the Internet or new devices used in binge-watching like iPads, smart phones, laptops, etc.

As for the demographics, gender was not proven to be a predictor of the level of binge-watching, nor any of the other research variables. Similarly, MarketCast (2013) found that binge-watching is equal among men and women who are likely to have binge-watched television shows. Also, Ahmed (2017) supported the same findings in a sample of Arab residents of UAE. However, Warren (2016) found that women reported a significantly higher binge-watching frequency than men.

As for the age variable, the younger the age of the respondents, the higher the tendency to binge-watch. The implication of this result might be related to the younger age groups having fewer responsibilities. Also, those within this age category are classified as “digital natives” who are likely to be more attached to any alterations in technology-related behavior, including the use of Internet in binge-watching. However, Warren (2016) found that the relation between age and the frequency of binge-watching remained insignificant (p. 54). Griffiee (2013) explained that college students are more likely than adults to binge-watch because they are not yet set to regular schedules or busy spending time with their spouses or children.



Binge-watching pervades all education levels. Anticipated regret, self-regulation deficiency, and expected outcomes do not differ among education groups. The current study found that single binge-watchers are more self-regulation deficient than married respondents, and otherwise, there is no significant difference between the two groups in binge TV-watching, outcome expectations, and anticipating regret. However, in Ahmed's (2017) research, single respondents were found to binge-watch more when depressed, while married respondents were less likely to binge-watch even if they were depressed (p. 204).

To conclude, it seems that binge-watching is not a problem by itself, per se; the problem starts when it correlates with preexisting sociological or psychological disorders, such as loneliness or depression. Binge-watching alone and self-regulation deficiencies that correlate with binge-watching might lead to undesired consequences.

Recommendation and further research

Although binge-watching is a newly emergent TV-watching behavior, it seems that TV show consumers will continue to watch episodes of shows consecutively. Content creators will continue to develop programming with consecutive viewing in mind (Warren 2016: 80). Binge-watching has become a daily habit among all age groups and educational levels in the UAE. Therefore, media scholars should pay more attention to study not only the binge-watching habits of consumers, but also their psychological causes and effects. It might be studied in the context of the Third Person Effect of Philip Davison. Many binge-watchers underestimate its effect on them while they overestimate its negative effects on others.

Marathon TV-watching puts the viewer in an abnormal watching condition, keeping him or her away from interacting with others while watching. This might lead to isolation, as it makes the watching behavior more "personal" and extremely "intensive", but reduces the valuable discussion of the content among viewers.

TV content producers might find the results of binge-watching studies as beneficial to better develop content that gratifies the audience's needs and matches the new TV-watching behaviors. Arab scholars should spend more effort creating an operational definition of binge-watching in the Arab world and serve to build a new media theory for a better understanding of the phenomenon and to anticipate and control its outcomes.

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