

What Puts the Binge in Binge-Watching? Planned versus Unplanned Multi-Episode Viewing

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ABSTRACT

The marketing and consumption of video content has evolved dramatically over the past several years. The advent of video-on-demand (VOD) made it much easier for viewers to consume multiple episodes of the same content in a single setting. This multi-episode viewing is commonly referred to as binge-watching. The unequivocal conclusion from previous research is that multi-episode viewing can either be harmful or beneficial to consumers. Empirical research is now needed to establish what factors in a viewing session can lead to either healthy or unhealthy multi-episode viewing. The current paper presents the results of four studies which indicate that one such factor is whether the multi-episode viewing was planned or unplanned. These findings are important for marketers of video content to understand as they seek to be socially responsible. They are also important for consumers to understand as they seek to engage in healthy, and avoid unhealthy, video consumption. This research is important as we seek to understand multi-episode viewing in that it begins moving our focus from whether harm can exist to answering the question of what is there in the viewing session itself that may cause the harm.

Keywords: Binge-watching, Multi-episode viewing, Video-on-demand, Excessive consumption, Maladaptive consumption, Impulsivity, Self-control

Introduction

The problem isn't that I watch Netflix. The problem is that I plan on watching it for two hours and I end up watching it for two days.

The above quote reflects part of a recent dinner conversation at one of the authors' homes. His millennial children were explaining how the media they love can easily become the bane of their existence. They have time for a media indulgence. They may even have a plan for the viewing session. But something happens that draws them into a media world that will not let them go. When this happens with VOD content, the common way to describe such maladaptive video consumption is "binge-watching." But the term "binge-watching" is also used to describe multi-episode viewing that is planned and not problematic. Thus, the term "binge-watching" seems to encompass all multi-episode viewing, whether the video consumption harms or benefits the consumer.

The focal construct of the current study is *multi-episode viewing*, which we will define in this paper as viewing multiple (two or more) episodes of the same video content (episodes, movie themes, etc.) within a single viewing session. This has been commonly known as "binge-watching" (Pierce-Grove, 2017; Lu, Karmarkar, and Venkatraman, 2017). However, the word "binge" comes with significant negative connotations (Heatherton and Baumeister, 1991; Panda and Pandey, 2017). That is fine when the multi-episode viewing is indeed harmful in some way. However, not all multi-episode viewing comes with negative consequences and, in some cases, it can actually be positive and healthy (Feijter, Khan, and Van Gisbergen, 2016; Perks 2014). Calling all multi-episode viewing "binge-watching" runs the risk of mislabeling as negative some consumer behavior that is not harmful. This label may cause people to refrain from engaging in healthy behavior or make them feel guilty for doing so. "Binge-watching" might be better seen as a subset of multi-episode viewing that occurs when there are negative consequences of the viewing behavior (Tukachinsky and Eyal, 2018).

The fact that multi-episode viewing could be beneficial and/or harmful has been well established in previous research (Flayelle et al, 2020; Merikivi et al., 2020; Starosta and Izydorczyk, 2020). We also know the nature of many of those benefits (Feeney, 2014; Panda and Pandey, 2017; Perks, 2014; Pittman and Sheehan, 2015; Tukachinsky and Eyal, 2018), as well as the nature of many of the harms (Boulos, 2012; Devasagayam, 2014; Exelmans and Van Den Bulck, 2018; Feijter, Khan, and Van Gisbergen, 2016; Flayelle, Maurage, and Billieux, 2017; Grøntved and Hu, 2011; Panda and Pandey, 2017; Reinecke, Hartmann, and Eden, 2014; Schnauber-Stockmann, Meier, and Reinecke, 2018; Sung, Kang, and Lee, 2018; Tukachinsky and Eyal, 2018).

What previous research has not explored is whether there is something *in the viewing session* itself that makes the session harmful or beneficial. Our research looked for evidence as to whether planned multi-episode viewing tends to be beneficial and unplanned multi-episode viewing tends to be harmful. The difference between planned and unplanned multi-episode viewing has been discussed but never fully explored (Pierce-Grove, 2017). We conducted four empirical studies to explore the following research question:

Is the difference between healthy and unhealthy multi-episode viewing based on whether the session was planned or just emerged spontaneously?

Those in marketing and consumer behavior should seek to encourage healthy consumption behavior and discourage harmful consumption behavior. If indeed planned sessions are more beneficial to consumers and unplanned sessions are more detrimental, then marketers of video content who wish to be socially responsible should encourage planned multi-episode viewing and discourage unplanned viewing sessions. Also, consumers should seek to plan out as much of their multi-episode viewing is possible. However, whether planned viewing sessions are more beneficial than unplanned viewing sessions is an empirical question that has hitherto been unexplored. That question is what the current research empirically explores.

What follows is first a review of the relevant literature on binge-watching and on impulsivity. We then present the results of four studies that look at the potential effects of planning (or lack thereof) on the antecedents and consequences of multi-episode viewing. Study 1 establishes that binge-watching can be negative, and it can be either planned or unplanned. Study 2 explores whether the motivation for multi-episode viewing differs based on whether it is planned or unplanned. Study 3 looks at whether the outcomes differ based on whether the watching was planned or unplanned. Studies 2 and 3 indicate that the reasons for multi-episode viewing are not that different based on whether it is planned, but the effects of such viewing can be dramatically different based on planning versus impulsivity. Study 4 looks to see if the effects identified in Studies 2 and 3 could be attributed to length of session and not degree of planning. It finds that degree of planning is a more plausible explanation for these findings than length of viewing session. These results are then discussed in terms of their implications for marketing management, video consumption, and research into the nature of multi-episode viewing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Binge-Watching

The first use of the word "binge" in reference to watching video content appeared in the *New York Times* in 2005. However, it was not until VOD became more widespread that binge-watching entered common use (Pierce-Grove, 2017). With the emergence of VOD, there became a need for an expression to describe a certain behavior — that of viewers becoming totally immersed in video content to the extent that they disengaged with the outside world for an extended period of time. Beginning around 2011, "binge-watching" became that expression (Pierce-Grove, 2017; Schweidel and Moe, 2016). Within a few years, "binge-watching" became Collins English Dictionary's 2015 word of the year. Though other expressions were initially in contention (e.g., marathon viewing), it was binge-watching that became part of our shared lexicon (Dyche, 2017). Binge-watching began to be used not just to describe total video immersion, but multi-episode viewing of video content, in general. That is unfortunate because of the baggage attached to the word "binge."

As with most words, the meaning of "binge" has morphed over time. Its etymology can be traced back to the concept of soaking wood in water to make it swell. From there, it became a colloquialism for an episode of excessive alcohol consumption. Binge's meaning would expand to include other episodes of overindulgent consumer behaviors, such as binge eating and binge shopping ("Binge", 2020). Its meaning came to imply consumer behavior that is maladaptive due to excessive consumption in a short time period (Heatheron and Baumeister 1991a, 1991b; Panda and Pandey, 2017). Though one might conceivably think of a possible benefit of binge eating, drinking, or shopping, bingeing in these contexts always connotes maladaptive consumer behavior.

Much of the early scholarly discussion of binge-watching sought to define what binge-watching is and determine whether it is healthy or maladaptive. Due to the name itself ("binge"), much of this work assumed *a priori* that it was maladaptive. In trying to define binge-watching, two general approaches emerged. One approach emphasized "binge" and the other emphasized "watching." The "binge" definitions related to whether the viewing was in excess of some normal or healthy amount (Exelmans and Van Den Bulck, 2017; Heatheron and Baumeister, 1991a; Jenner, 2017; Panda and Pandey, 2017; Pierce-Grove, 2017; Riddle et al., 2018; Rubenking et al., 2018; Shim et al., 2018). The "watching" definitions emphasized the number of episodes watched or the amount of time spent watching them (Devasagayam, 2014; Dwyer, 2016; Lu, Karmarkar, and Venkatraman, 2017; Panda and Pandey, 2017; Pierce-Grove, 2017; Sung, Kang, and Lee, 2015).

Three recent reviews of the binge-watching literature indicate that there are indeed two types of multi-episode viewing based on whether the experience is positive or maladaptive consumption (Flayelle et al, 2020; Merikivi et al., 2020; Starosta and Izydorczyk, 2020). There is a substantial body of literature that would indicate that binge-watching may be maladaptive. By *maladaptive*, we are referring to consumption behavior that runs counter to the goals, interests,

health, or wellbeing of the consumer (Clithero, Karmarkar, and Hsu, 2021). Negatives associated with binge-watching have included guilt (Feijter, Khan, and Van Gisbergen, 2016), procrastination (Reinecke, Hartmann, and Eden, 2014; Schnauber-Stockmann, Meier, and Reinecke, 2018), excessive or poor quality food consumption (Boulos, 2012), health problems (Grøntved and Hu, 2011), social isolation (Sung, Kang, and Lee, 2018), social anxiety (Tukachinsky and Eyal, 2018), poorer sleep quality (Exelmans and Van Den Bulck, 2018), depression (Tukachinsky and Eyal, 2018), addiction (Devasagayam, 2014; Flayelle, Maurage, and Billieux, 2017; Panda and Pandey, 2017; Tukachinsky and Eyal, 2018), and self-regulation failures (Tukachinsky and Eyal, 2018). In contrast, there is also a wide body of literature which points to positive aspects of binge-watching. These include mental restoration (Pittman and Sheehan, 2015), positive mental outlook (Panda and Pandey, 2017), deeper engagement with plot and characters (Perks, 2014), deeper affect and cognitive transportation into the story (Perks, 2014), sources for a means of reward (Feeney, 2014; Pittman and Sheehan, 2015), reflection (Tukachinsky and Eyal, 2018), camaraderie (Perks, 2014), hedonic and eudaimonic enjoyment (Tukachinsky and Eyal, 2018), feelings of accomplishment (Perks, 2014), and parasocial relationships (Tukachinsky and Eyal, 2018).

Research clearly shows that what is commonly called "binge-watching" could be a harmful form of consumption (like binge eating, drinking, and spending), but it is not necessarily so. What is needed is a better understanding of what makes multi-episode viewing maladaptive in some cases and what makes it a benign or even positive entertainment activity in other cases. The purpose of the research presented in the current paper explores one potentially important variable that might determine whether multi-episode viewing is maladaptive. That factor is whether the multi-episode watching session is planned or unplanned. In the next section, we will explore why the distinction between planned and unplanned multi-episode viewing may be important in understanding the nature and potential maladaptive consequences of multi-episode viewing of VOD content.

Planning, Impulsivity, and Maladaptive Consumption

There seems to be a difference between consumer behavior that is planned, taking future consequences into consideration, and consumer behavior that is unplanned with little regard for the future (Barbić Lučić and Chen, 2019; Beek Handgraaf and Antonides, 2017). Strack, Werth, and Deutsch (2006) defined *impulsive consumption* as "a sudden and immediate purchase with no pre-shopping intentions. The behavior occurs after experiencing an urge to buy and it tends to be spontaneous and without a lot of reflection (p. 206)." This consumption without consideration for future consequences can have harmful effects on consumers (Håkansson, 2014). Within video consumption, this distinction between planned and impulsive consumption would manifest itself in terms of whether a person planned the viewing session or extended the viewing session in the moment. Though Pittman and Sheehan (2015) posited that a major factor that differentiates positive from negative multi-episode viewing is the extent to which the sessions are planned, there is no empirical evidence to either support or refute their assertion. However, in one important study, unplanned binge-watching was shown to be closely related to impulsivity (Riddle et al., 2018). That is important because impulsiveness has often been seen as a key component of many forms of maladaptive behavior (de Wit, 2009; Hofmann, Friese, and Strack, 2009; Larose, Lin, and Eastin, 2003; Reynolds et al., 2006), including maladaptive consumer behavior (Baumeister, 2002; Dholakia, 2000; Shi et al, 2017). According to Dholakia (2000), impulse control reduces negative forms of consumer behavior. In general, consumers can act on their impulses, or they can keep these impulses under control. Whiteside and Lynam (2001) argue that the lack of premeditation is key to impulsive behavior. In contrast, Hofmann, Friese, and Wiers (2008) see reflective control as a means of reducing the negative effects that impulsivity may create.

This does not imply that all planned behavior is good, and all impulsivity is bad. Dickman (1990) identified two types of impulsivity—functional and dysfunctional. Functional impulsivity can be positive when planning and forethought are not optimal for the situation. Larose, Lin, and Eastin (2003) have extended this dichotomy to the impulsive consumption of media content, though they present it as a continuum. Under some circumstances, maladaptive consumer behavior arises from ineffective emotional regulation resulting in impulsive consumption. However, impulsivity can be kept in check through cognitive reflection (Fenton-O'Creevy, Dibb, and Furnham, 2018; Hofmann, Friese, and Strack, 2009; Shi et al, 2017). Not all unplanned behavior is impulsive, but all impulsive behavior is unplanned. Thus, one clear manifestation of impulsive consumption is the extent to which the consumption behavior is unplanned.

All this points to the role that planning, or the lack thereof, may have as we try to understand the potential maladaptive nature of multi-episode viewing. It might also explain why some multi-episode viewing is healthy and beneficial. Despite this great potential that an understanding of the role planning or lack thereof may have in helping us understand healthy vs. harmful multi-episode viewing, no research published to date specifically explores whether planning makes a difference between harmful or healthy consumer behavior in this realm. The purpose of the research reported here is to remedy that gap by looking at the nature of multi-episode viewing to explore the difference between planned and unplanned multi-episode viewing.

METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

The current research involved four studies of multi-episode viewing. Our review of the literature led us to suppose that there is some negativity associated with multi-episode viewing, as reflected in the phrase “binge-watching.” It also led us to suppose that some multi-episode viewing is planned, and other multi-episode viewing is not. The purpose of Study 1 was to ascertain whether these two suppositions are true. We then explored the differences between planned and unplanned multi-episode viewing sessions in terms of both the antecedents to and consequences of the viewing sessions. Study 2 explored the antecedents of multi-episode viewing by looking to see if there were motivational differences between planned and unplanned viewing sessions. Study 3 explored the differences in consequences between planned and unplanned viewing sessions by having respondents rate their experiences for both planned and unplanned multi-episode viewing sessions. Since Study 3 found such differences, we needed to see if these differences could be attributed to differences in length of session. We explored this possibility in Study 4 by addressing the following two questions: 1) did unplanned sessions last longer than planned sessions, and 2) was there a difference in the evaluations of longer versus normal length sessions. These were the four studies that comprised the current research. What follows is a description of the methodology and results of these four studies.

Study 1

In our research, we sought to find out if the negativity associated with binge-watching could be due at least in part to it being unplanned at times. That necessitated us initially checking to see if the phenomena we are studying actually exist. We needed to see (1) if indeed there was negativity associated with binge-watching and, if so, to what extent did it exist; and (2) if binge-watching indeed was sometimes but not always unplanned and, if so, to what extent was it planned or unplanned. The purpose of Study 1 was to explore these two fundamental aspects of our research. We also used Study 1 to gather age and motivation information which we needed for the next part of our research.

To accomplish this, we gathered information through a Qualtrics survey completed by a broad sample of U.S. adults. In exchange for course credit, undergraduate business students at a Midwest private university recruited participants to complete the Qualtrics survey. The students were encouraged to recruit two male and two female participants in three age groups: 18 – 25, 26 – 39 and 40+. A total of 1,041 usable surveys were returned with 56% females and 44% males. By age, 40% were 18 to 25, 26% were 26 to 39, and 34% were 40 or over.

As noted earlier, researchers have posited that multi-episode viewing of sequential media content may suffer an image problem. Part of that may be due to the word “binge” being associated with it. We asked respondents if they were familiar with the term “binge-watching.” Most of them were familiar with the term (see Table 1). We also asked them to indicate whether they saw it as primarily good, primarily bad, a mixture of the two, or neither. As can be seen in Table 1, there was a significant amount of negativity associated with “binge-watching.” Less than 10% of the respondents saw it as primarily a good thing and almost two-thirds of the sample attached at least some negativity to “binge-watching.” Those who were not familiar with the term “binge-watching” were significantly more likely to see it as primarily a bad thing due to how it sounds. This indicates that multi-episode viewing of video content may have a maladaptive component ascribed to it, and at least part of that is due to it being called “binge” watching.

Table 1: Perception of “binge-watching” based on familiarity with the term

From how it sounds...	Unfamiliar with term	Familiar with term	Total
Primarily a bad thing	39 (21)	232 (250)	271
Mix of good and bad	10 (31)	396 (375)	406
Primarily a good thing	5 (8)	97 (94)	102
No meaning attached	25 (20)	237 (242)	262
Total	79	962	1041

Chi Sq. 35.566, df = 3, $p < .01$

Respondents were then given the following definition of binge-watching:

What binge-watching generally refers to is a sequential watching of multiple episodes of the same show in a single sitting (i.e., back-to-back). It occurs when someone has available to him or her multiple episodes of the same series through the internet, DVD sets, or other means of video delivery.

Note that this definition was consistent with how we defined multi-episode viewing (see Introduction section). Further, this definition was simple enough for a respondent to understand, while still encompassing most definitions of “binge-watching” presented in the literature, whether they relate to time of viewing, episodes of viewing, or they were more

conceptually oriented definitions. After seeing this definition, respondents were asked if they engaged in such VOD viewing. Those respondents who indicated that they had never engaged in binge-watching as defined here were excluded from subsequent questions, leaving 905 usable responses for further analysis.

Respondents were then asked to indicate what style of binge-watching best describes them: (1) binge-watching is a planned activity, (2) binge-watching was something that just happens without planning, and (3) sometimes it was planned while other times it just happens. Respondents were almost evenly distributed among the three types of watching. Of the 905 respondents who answered this question, planned watchers accounted for 297 (33%) of the responses, unplanned watchers accounted for 291 (32%) of the responses, and mixed watchers accounted for 317 (35%) of the viewer types. Thus, there appears to be a substantial variability in the primary construct of interest—whether people plan their multi-episode viewing sessions or just let them happen in an unplanned manner.

Study 1 helped us in the design of subsequent studies in two ways. First, age was related to multi-episode viewing. We asked respondents to describe their binge-watching habits on a six-point scale from never (1) to very frequently (6). Those 40 and over binge-watched substantially less (2.67) than those 26 to 39 (3.3), and those 25 and under (3.5). Also, when asked what platforms they binge-watch on, those 40 and over binge-watched on fewer platforms (1.5) than did those 26 to 39 (2.4) and those 25 and under (2.5). For both questions, the difference between 40 and over and under 40 were significant at the .01 level. Thus, in subsequent studies the age categories were lowered to 18-23, 24-30, and over 30 giving us younger samples.

Second, we also asked respondents two open-ended questions to ascertain their motivations for planned multi-episode viewing sessions ("If you have times when you plan to binge-watch, what motivates you to do so?") and their motivations for continuing their watching in a way that was not planned ("If you have times when binge-watching is unplanned, but it just happens, what made it happen? What drew you into the binge?"). Nineteen different motivations were identified from the responses to these two questions. These nineteen motivations were explored in Study 2.

Study 2

Having identified that planning does differentiate multi-episode viewing patterns and having gathered some qualitative data as to the motivations for multi-episode viewing, in Study 2 we wanted to see if planned multi-episode viewing differed in its motivation from unplanned multi-episode viewing. Following the same data collection protocol as in Study 1, students at a Midwest university were given course credit for recruiting participants. However, based on two questions from Study 1, we noticed that multi-episode viewing was more prevalent in younger adults than older adults. Thus, we believe lowering the age category gives us a better representation of those who are more likely to engage in multi-episode viewing. A total of 187 usable surveys were returned with 52% females and 48% males. By age, 38% were 18 to 22, 30% were 23 to 29, and 32% were 30 or over. Respondents were presented with scenarios for both planned and unplanned multi-episode viewing (see Appendix A). They were then asked to indicate how likely it was that each of the scenarios would happen to them. Those who answered "never" to either scenario were eliminated from further analysis, resulting in a usable sample of 148 respondents who had engaged in both planned and unplanned multi-episode viewing.

The primary purpose of Study 2 was to see if planned watches were motivated differently than unplanned watches. As mentioned earlier, Study 1 asked respondents about their motivations for both planned multi-episode viewing and multi-episode viewing in an unplanned way. These responses were then categorized by the researchers. The most common answer categories were presented to the participants in Study 2. They were asked to rate these statements on an eight-point Likert scale from "it is never a reason" (1) to "it is the primary reason almost all of the time" (8). These questions were presented to respondents twice, separated by fourteen filler questions not used in the current research. One time, they were asked to rate them as their motivations when their multi-episode viewing session was planned. The other time they were asked to rate them when they watched multiple episodes, but it was not what they planned to do. Based on random selection, half of the respondents received the planned questions first and half received the unplanned questions first.

Using paired comparison t-tests, the statements in the unplanned scenarios were compared with the same statements in the planned scenarios. The results of these comparisons are presented in Table 2. As can be seen, only three of the comparisons were significant at the .05 level. These were 1) procrastination, 2) catching up, and 3) free time. None of the other motivations were significant at the .05 level. Thus, in terms of motivation, unplanned and planned sessions only differed in the following three cases:

1. If respondents were trying to avoid doing something they should do, they rated unplanned sessions as being more likely (4.26 vs. 3.92, $t=2.37$, $p<.05$).
2. If respondents were trying to "catch up" on the program, they rated planned sessions to be more likely than unplanned sessions (4.00 vs. 3.68, $t=-2.23$, $p < .05$)
3. If respondents had time available to watch TV, they rated planned sessions as being more likely than unplanned sessions (5.22 vs. 4.98, $t=-1.99$, $p<.05$)

Except for these three cases, planned and unplanned sessions do not appear to be that different in their motivation. It is worth noting however that, in two of the three cases where they do differ, these could be seen as mild forms of maladaptive

consumption. Unplanned sessions are more likely when the respondent is procrastinating on doing something they do not want to do but should do. Also unplanned sessions are less likely to occur when the respondents have time to engage in multi-episode viewing. Thus, unplanned multi-episode viewing appears to be at least somewhat of a means of poor time management as opposed to planned multi-episode viewing. Still, overall planned and unplanned are not that different in their motivations.

Table 2: Mean comparisons for motivations to binge based on planned vs. unplanned

Motivation		Mean	t	df	p	Effect
Procrastination: As a way to put off doing things that I don't want to do (but should do)	Unplanned	4.26	2.37*	145	.02	More
	Planned	3.92				
Catch Up: Feeling a need to "catch up" on the program	Unplanned	3.68	-2.23*	145	.03	Less
	Planned	4.00				
Free Time: Having time available to watch TV	Unplanned	4.98	-1.99*	146	.05	Less
	Planned	5.22				
Stuck: Not having other things to do because of weather, sickness, etc.	Unplanned	4.49	-1.88	146	.06	ns
	Planned	4.62				
Completion: The feeling of a need to complete the whole series or season	Unplanned	3.71	-1.79	147	.08	ns
	Planned	3.97				
Alone Time: A desire for some alone time	Unplanned	4.22	-1.70	142	.09	ns
	Planned	4.31				
Relaxation: Need for relaxation	Unplanned	4.77	-1.50	145	.14	ns
	Planned	4.81				
Boredom: Looking for a way to fight boredom	Unplanned	4.38	-1.02	144	.31	ns
	Planned	4.42				
Talk About: Having something to talk about with others (in-person or online)	Unplanned	3.38	1.00	143	.32	ns
	Planned	3.28				
Social Interaction: Having something to do with friends	Unplanned	3.86	0.89	145	.37	ns
	Planned	3.83				
FOMO: Feeling that, if I didn't keep watching, I would be missing out on something	Unplanned	3.24	0.88	145	.38	ns
	Planned	3.16				
Curiosity: Curiosity about the next episode	Unplanned	5.54	0.78	146	.44	ns
	Planned	5.50				
Uplifting Experience: A desire for an uplifting experience	Unplanned	4.04	-0.72	145	.47	ns
	Planned	4.14				
Enjoyment: Enjoyment of the watching experience	Unplanned	5.47	-0.53	146	.59	ns
	Planned	5.50				
Quality: The quality of program content in terms of plot development and character development	Unplanned	5.03	-0.37	143	.71	ns
	Planned	5.03				
New Series: It was a new series that was just released	Unplanned	4.13	0.33	144	.74	ns
	Planned	4.10				
Mood: The mood I was in	Unplanned	4.71	0.18	143	.86	ns
	Planned	4.63				
Reward: I saw it as a reward for something I had previously accomplished or finished	Unplanned	3.49	-0.11	144	.91	ns
	Planned	3.48				
Accomplishment: A feeling of accomplishment as I moved towards completing the series	Unplanned	3.44	0.05	146	.96	ns
	Planned	3.48				

* $p < .05$

Study 3

Though Study 2 indicated a small degree of differences in motivations for multi-episode viewing between planned and unplanned sessions, and though those differences could be seen as at least somewhat maladaptive, the study did not establish whether the outcomes were different between planned and unplanned multi-episode viewing. The purpose of Study 3 was to explore potential outcome differences based on whether the session went as planned or extended beyond that which was planned. Continuing with the same data collection protocol as in the previous two studies, students at a Midwest university were given course credit for recruiting participants. A total of 220 usable surveys were returned with

52% females and 48% males. By age, 23% were 18 to 23, 34% were 24 to 30, and 42% were over 30. Respondents who had not recently engaged in multi-episode viewing were eliminated from further analysis, leaving to a reduced sample of 200 responses. We did not define "recent" for the respondents. However, we did ask them how recent the session was. Of the 195 that responded to that question, 54 (28%) stated that it was within the last week, 58 (30%) stated that it was more than a week but less than a month ago, 63 (32%) stated that it was more than a month but less than six months ago, and 20 (10%) stated that it was more than six months ago.

Respondents were asked to evaluate the consequences of two different types of watching sessions. In one scenario, they were asked to evaluate a situation where they had a specific number of time or episodes that they planned to watch, and they followed their plan. In the other scenario, the situation was such that they thought they were going to watch a certain amount of content, but they kept watching beyond their plan. Subjects were then asked what the results would be on ten different dimensions. Each dimension was rated on a seven-point Likert scale. Respondents were asked to rate these outcomes if their "plan is followed" and if they watched "more than planned." These ten dimensions were selected based on a review of recent research which posited both positive and negative aspects of binge-watching. These ten dimensions were:

Feeling of guilt (Feijter, Khan, and Van Gisbergen, 2016; Granow, Reinecke, and Ziegele, 2018): How guilty would you feel if [you watched more than planned / your plan were followed] (rated from "Not guilty at All" [1] to "Extremely guilty" [7]).

Procrastination (Merrill and Rubenking, 2019; Reinecke, Hartmann, and Eden, 2014; Schnauber-Stockmann, Meier, and Reinecke, 2018): When [you watch more than planned / your plan is followed], how likely is it that you are procrastinating rather than doing something more important (rated from "Very unlikely" [1] to "Very likely" [7]).

Parasocial relationships (Dyche, 2017; Erickson, Cin, and Byl, 2019; Perks, 2014): If [you watch more than planned / your plan is followed], how likely is it that it is because you have a special connection with the characters (rated from "Very unlikely" [1] to "Very likely" [7]).

Sense of accomplishment (Feeney, 2014; Perks, 2014; Pittman and Sheehan, 2015): When [you watch more than planned / your plan is followed], how much of a sense of accomplishment do you feel (rated from "None" [1] to "A whole lot" [7]).

Transportation (Erickson, Cin, and Byl, 2019; Pittman and Steiner 2019; Warren 2020): If [you watch more than planned / your plan is followed], how much does it feel like you are actually experiencing what is happening in the show you are watching (rated from "None" [1] to "A whole lot" [7]).

Amount of sleep that night (Exelmans and Van Den Bulck, 2017, 2020) If [you watch more than planned / your plan is followed], how much sleep do you think you will get that night? (rated from "A lot less than I should" [1] to "A lot more than I should" [7]).

Productivity next day (Da Costa, 2021; Feijter et al., 2016; Steiner and Xu, 2020): If [you watch more than planned / your plan is followed], how will it affect your productivity the next day at work, school, home, etc. (rated from "A lot less productive" [1] to "A lot more productive" [7]).

Healthy food consumption (Boulos, 2012; Vaterlaus et al., 2019): How would you describe any food you might eat when [you watch more than planned / your plan is followed] (rated from "Extremely unhealthy" [1] to "Extremely healthy" [7]).

Internet Social Activity (Perks, 2014; Sun et al., 2021; Sung et al., 2015): How much social interaction on the internet would you likely get on a day when [you watch more than planned / your plan is followed] (rated from "None" [1] to "A whole lot" [7]).

Other Social Activity: (Perks, 2014; Sun et al., 2021; Sung et al., 2015): How much social interaction other than on the internet would you likely get on a day when [you watch more than planned / your plan is followed] (rated from "None" [1] to "A whole lot" [7]).

Based on random selection, half of the subjects were presented the planned followed scenarios and then the longer than planned scenarios. The other half of the subjects receive these pairs in the opposite order.

Table 3 presents the results of this comparison. Nine of the ten paired comparison t-tests were significant, all at the .01 level. The unplanned sessions resulted in less sleep ($t=-11.5$ $p=.01$), more guilt ($t=9.92$ $p=.01$), more procrastination ($t=9.64$ $p=.01$), less of a sense of accomplishment ($t=-8.87$ $p=.01$), less productivity the next day ($t=-8.85$ $p=.01$), less social interaction ($t=-6.33$ $p=.01$), less healthy food consumption ($t=-6.32$ $p=.01$), stronger parasocial relationships ($t=3.35$ $p=.01$), and more transportation into the content ($t=2.6$ $p=.01$). The only pair that was not significant was social interaction on the internet ($t=-1.03$, ns). Thus, it appears as though maladaptive consumption of VOD series would be more associated with both the positive outcomes and negative outcomes when the sessions go longer than planned. Consumers apparently receive positive benefits from extending their binge-watching beyond that which they planned, but they also experience negative consequences.

Table 3: Planned versus longer than planned

Variable	Stayed with Plan	Mean	t	df	p value	Result
Amount of Sleep that Night	Longer than Planned	2.685	-11.50	196	<.01*	less sleep
	Followed Plan	3.675				more sleep
Feeling of Guilt	Longer than Planned	2.638	9.92	198	<.01*	more guilty
	Followed Plan	1.553				less guilty
Procrastination	Longer than Planned	4.575	9.64	199	<.01*	more procrastination
	Followed Plan	3.465				less procrastination
Sense of Accomplishment	Longer than Planned	2.255	-8.87	199	<.01*	less accomplishment
	Followed Plan	3.26				more accomplishment
Productivity Next Day	Longer than Planned	3.204	-8.85	195	<.01*	less productive
	Followed Plan	4.036				more productive
Other Social Activity	Longer than Planned	3.452	-6.33	198	<.01*	Less Social Interaction
	Followed Plan	3.99				More Social Interaction
Healthy food consumption	Longer than Planned	3.153	-6.32	195	<.01*	less healthy
	Followed Plan	3.577				more healthy
Parasocial Relationships	Longer than Planned	4.231	3.35	194	<.01*	more parasocial
	Followed Plan	3.938				less parasocial
Transportation	Longer than Planned	3.327	2.60	198	<.01*	more transportation
	Followed Plan	3.126				less transportation
Internet Social Activity	Longer than Planned	3.838	-1.03	197	0.31	No Difference
	Followed Plan	3.924				

p < .01

Study 4

Study 3 established that extending the viewing session beyond that which is planned brings with it negative consequences. Are these negative consequences occurring because, presumably on impulse, the consumers extended their viewing sessions beyond what they had determined was appropriate through cognitive reflection? Or was it simply that the sessions on average were longer? Perhaps the longer unplanned sessions would have more negative consequences because of the time it took to get through the sessions? Was it the length of the session and/or the impulsivity that drove the findings in Study 3? It would be very difficult to unequivocally answer that question, but it is what we sought to address in Study 4. We did so through comparing viewing sessions that were normal in length with ones that were much longer. We compared the planned versus unplanned nature of such sessions, as well as the positive and negative consequences of these two types of sessions.

This study used a Qualtrics panel to recruit respondents from all over the U.S. and collected a sample representative of the population in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, and household income. The respondents completed the survey in exchange for a small monetary compensation. A total of 433 usable surveys were returned with 50% females and 50% males. By age, 27% were 18 to 23, 38% were 24 to 30, and 35% were over 30. Respondents who stated that they do not engage in multi-episode viewing were eliminated from further analysis, leaving a reduced sample of 384 respondents for analysis.

Subjects were asked to imagine two different scenarios of multi-episode viewing. One was their "longest (in terms of time and/or episodes) in recent sessions." The other was to be one that was "typical of how long you spend" multi-episode viewing, that is it "wasn't a long or short sitting" but "somewhere in between." Based on random selection, half of the respondents were presented the longer session questions followed by the normal length session questions and the other half were presented the questions in the opposite order. For both the long and normal length scenarios, subjects were asked to indicate the following: 1) did they plan how long their watching session would be; 2) how much did they watched relative to their plan; 3) how much did they expect to enjoy the session; 4) how much did they actually enjoy the session; 5) considering both the enjoyment and negative consequences, was the session a good or poor use of their time.

Tables 4a and 4b used chi-squared analysis to test the differences between longer and shorter sessions. In Table 4a we see that unplanned sessions go significantly longer in terms of time than planned sessions (χ^2 with 2 degrees of freedom=20.1, $p<.01$). Table 4b looked at length of session in comparison to the original plan. To come up with this comparison, a respondent needed to have a plan against which to compare whether the session went longer or shorter than planned. So, we only included those who had planned sessions, thus eliminating those who only had unplanned sessions from the analysis (because obviously respondents could not determine if their sessions went longer than planned if they

never had a plan). This gave us a further reduced sample of 272 respondents. Compared to normal length sessions, long sessions extended significantly more from their original plan than did short sessions (χ^2 with 3 degrees of freedom=15.6, $p<.01$). What should be noted from Tables 4a and 4b is not just the statistical significance (which exists in both cases), but the magnitude of the differences. In Table 4a, the total differences between normal and long sessions would have disappeared if only 12 out of 371 respondents had switched their answer from no plan to plan. In Table 4b, most of the difference between the groups was between "about the same" and "more." There was almost no difference between the "a lot more" in terms of the normal and long sessions. Also, fewer than 10 people would have needed to switch their answers between "about the same" and "more" for the difference to disappear. Thus, though these differences are of statistical significance, there is not a large practical difference between them.

Table 4a: Relationship between type of plan and length of session

Type of Plan	Length of Session		Total
	Normal	Long	
No Plan	101 (-24)	153 (24)	254
Vague Plan	143 (-1)	150 (1)	293
Plan	127 (25)	81 (-25)	208
Total	371	384	755

χ^2 (df=2, n = 755) = 20.1, $p < .01$

Table 4b: How length of session compares to original plan for normal and longer sessions

Compared to Plan	Length of Session		Total
	Normal	Long	
Fewer	29 (3)	19 (-3)	48
About the same	177 (17)	119 (-17)	296
More	56 (-19)	83 (19)	139
A lot more	10 (-1)	10 (1)	20
Total	272	231	503

χ^2 (df=3, n = 503) = 15.6, $p < .01$

As stated above, the purpose of Study 4 was to see if the results identified in Study 3 could be attributed to sessions, on average, being longer. Because the differences identified in Study 4 were so minor (from a practical perspective), it appears that the much larger differences identified in Study 3 were more likely due to impulse than simply the length of the sessions. Thus, comparing these results to those obtained in Study 3, it appears that the more plausible explanation for the difference between planned versus unplanned sessions is impulse and not length of session.

Consistent with satisfaction/dissatisfaction theory, Table 5 presents the paired comparison t-tests comparing the expectations of the sessions, performance of the sessions relative to these expectations, and the overall evaluations of these sessions. As can be seen in Table 5, longer sessions resulted in higher expectations ($t=-2.13$, $p<.05$), higher performance relative to expectations ($t=2.00$, $p>.05$), and higher overall evaluations ($t=2.60$, $p<.01$). Again here, though these differences were statistically significant, the magnitudes of the differences were not very large. For expectations, the difference was only 0.17 on a nine-point scale. For performance relative to expectations, the difference was only 0.07 on a seven-point scale. For overall evaluation, the difference was only 0.12 on a seven-point scale. Thus, there were statistically significant difference between normal and longer sessions, but the practical significance of these difference was minimal.

Table 5: Normal versus longer viewing sessions expectations and outcomes

Variable	Length	Mean	t	df	p value	Result
Expectations of session (nine-point scale)	Normal	6.88	2.13	372	.03	Lower expectations
	Long	7.05				Higher expectations
Performance relative to expectations (seven-point scale)	Normal	4.25	2.00	360	.04	Relatively lower
	Long	4.32				Relatively higher
Overall Evaluation (seven-point scale)	Normal	5.05	2.60	371	.01	Lower
	Long	5.17				Higher

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

When comparing planned to unplanned multi-episode viewing sessions, the antecedents are not that different, but the consequences are quite different. Our research indicates that what gets someone into a multi-episode viewing session is not that different between ones that are planned and ones that turn out to be unplanned. On the other hand, the research presented here also indicates that the viewing experience often becomes maladaptive when a reasonably motivated watching session turns into an impulse extended binge. It appears that the lack of planning is what puts the binge in binge-watching. This is important for those who study what is in the best interest of consumers. VOD continues to increase in popularity. In fact, there is some evidence that it may be replacing appointment TV as the way digital natives and even digital immigrants consume video content. As with any substantial change in consumer behavior, the change comes with both new opportunities and new challenges. One of the big changes is that VOD technology allows and enables multi-episode viewing. A problem that this relatively new form of media consumption can create was captured in the quote with which we opened this paper. The problem is not with watching multiple episodes of a single series in one sitting. That can be planned into a person's schedule and many benefits can be received from doing so. Multi-episode viewing can be a very welcome planned indulgence capable of producing rest, relaxation, reward, restoration, enjoyment, and high-quality entertainment (Perks, 2014). On the other hand, it is possible that a two-hour planned multi-episode viewing session can turn into a two-day media consumption overindulgence.

Study 1 indicated that binge-watching is seen as maladaptive by a substantial portion of the population. Part of the problem can be attributed to the word "binge." People who did not know what binge-watching means were the most likely to ascribe negative connotations to the phrase. Study 1 also indicated that, when it comes to binge-watching, about an equal number of respondents either plan their multi-episode viewing, do not plan their multi-episode viewing, or plan at times and at other times do not plan. These findings indicated that the research question as to whether planning could be a potential variable explaining the difference between healthy and harmful binge-watching is a valid one, worthy of further exploration.

Did people who did not plan have a more negative multi-episode viewing experience than those who did plan? In Study 2, we looked at the potential motivations for binge-watching between those who plan and those who do not. That study indicated that there may be some motivational differences, but these differences were not substantial. Thus, with a few minor exceptions, the motivation for people entering into a multi-episode viewing session is not that different between those who plan and those who do not. The real difference between viewing sessions became apparent in Study 3, where significant and substantial differences were found. The viewing behavior that extended beyond that which was planned exhibited deeper negative consequences than the viewing behavior that ended as planned. Planning to quit and then not doing so appears to be what has the potential to turn normal, healthy viewing behavior into maladaptive consumption. But was this difference simply due to the unplanned sessions extending for a longer period of time? In Study 4, we found that it is unlikely that the negative consequences of extending multi-episode viewing sessions can be attributed to the length of the extended sessions, thus making the planned/unplanned distinction the most plausible explanation for the difference we found in Study 3.

The dual systems framework of impulsive behavior posits that impulse and reasoned actions work against each other (Hofmann, Friese, and Strack, 2009; Hofmann, Friese, and Wiers, 2008; Vale, 2010). When, through cognitive reflection, a limit is set to a multi-episode viewing session, the limit is presumably set for a reason. It is likely that extending the viewing session on impulse is harmful to the original reason for setting the plan. If someone were to plan to end binge-watching in time to get to bed by 10:00 PM, there is probably a beneficial reason for setting that limit. If then one, on impulse, drops that original plan and binge-watches for another two hours, there will likely be negative consequences for doing so.

These findings have implications for both maladaptive consumption in general and VOD media consumption in particular. Overconsumption seems to be associated with harmful consumer behavior (Håkansson, 2014). However, not all consumption in larger-than-normal quantities come with the same stigma. Overeating on Thanksgiving is not called binge-eating. It is called feasting. Excessive libations on New Year's Eve are more likely to be seen as celebrating than binge-drinking. Overindulgence can be planned, and it is less likely to be seen as maladaptive. Whether it is eating, alcohol consumption, shopping, or other forms of consumer behavior, problems seem to increase when impulse overrides reasoned action. Binge-eating, binge-drinking, and binge-shopping all seem to have an important impulsive loss of control component to them.

These findings indicate that it may not be best to use the phrase "binge-watching" to describe all multi-episode viewing of VOD content. It may mask when such viewing is actually beneficial. Flayelle et al. (2019a) warn against the overpathologization of this activity that can, in many instances, be a very popular leisure activity. Our research indicates that, if there is a negative component to multi-episode viewing, it comes when one's viewing session moves beyond what is planned (implicitly or explicitly). Whereas some researchers have defined "binge-watching" in terms of number of episodes viewed, length of viewing session itself is not likely what makes some multi-episode viewing maladaptive. Our research seems to indicate that the negative consequences of multi-episode viewing arise from impulsively spending more

time than one has allocated to watch sequential VOD content. Multi-episode viewing has also been called "media marathoning" (Perks, 2014; Tukachinsky and Eyal, 2018). Perhaps it would be more appropriate to reserve the word "binge-watching" for those multi-episode viewing sessions which are extended beyond what is planned to the extent to which they become maladaptive. As suggested by Perks (2014), the more common emersion into serial content that is not maladaptive could be called "marathoning" instead. This difference seems to be closer to the other uses of the words "binge" and "marathon." One usually does not plan a binge, but nobody ever completes a marathon on impulse.

As marketers become more sophisticated in their craft, many maladaptive consumer behaviors will likely become more prevalent. Marketers often work to push consumers to behave on impulse (Dholakia, 2000; Shi et al, 2017). If maladaptive consumption has an impulse component, the more skilled marketers become in pushing us towards impulsivity, the more likely it is that we will engage in maladaptive consumption. This seems to be happening with multi-episode viewing as VOD content providers are learning what to do to entice consumers to continue watching into the next episode. We could see this as we worked through the responses to the two open ended questions in Study 1. It was clear that consumers often attribute extending their viewing sessions to the actions of the VOD providers to entice them from one episode to the next. Sometimes it was the technology (e.g., auto-play of the next episode). Sometimes it was the plot (e.g., ending on a cliffhanger).

Finally, we do not wish to imply that impulsivity is always a problem with multi-episode viewing. Dickman (1990) provided evidence that impulsive behavior may indeed be positive if the situational environment in which it occurs is optimally suited for such impulsivity. Looking for something to fill one's free time is a major motivator of multi-episode viewing that we saw when we worked through the open-ended questions collected in Study 1. People do not always know how much enjoyment they will get from watching a series until they get into it. When a person has the time, staying with a series longer than expected on impulse does not result in negative consequences. It results in greater consumer satisfaction.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The current study only looked at multi-episode viewing of VOD content. Thus, our findings only extend to VOD serial content and not to other types of video content. A topic for future research would be to study how extending the viewing sessions in other forms of video content could impact consumers. It is likely that consumers extend their sessions when watching other forms of media content, such as appointment TV. However, binge-watching more commonly refers to multi-episode viewing of VOD content. Is that because the pull to continue beyond the allocated time is greater when the material being watched is made up of serial content? If so, then that would point towards multi-episode viewing having a greater potential for being maladaptive. If not, it would seem as though the word binge could apply just as appropriately to all forms of extended media consumption. This is an area for future research.

Study 3 indicated that extending the viewing session seems to lead to maladaptive multi-episode viewing. That fits well within the impulsivity theory the current research was based on. Thus, our findings are consistent with the theory we provide. We used Study 4 to see if impulse or length was a more viable explanation for the relationships we found in Study 3. Study 4 gave evidence that impulse must be at least part of the explanation for the identified relationships. However, it would require much more extensive work to conclude definitively that impulse is the best explanation for the effect we identified. Future studies are needed to identify and isolate impulse as indeed the operative theory that explains what we found in Study 3.

A potential limitation to the current research was that, due to the sampling method, it is likely that some respondents participated in more than one study. Thus, it is possible that having responded to one survey could have impacted some responses to a later survey. We did not test or control for this but simply assumed that such confounding would be minimal, given that three to five months elapsed between the administration of the surveys. However, we acknowledge this as a potential limitation in Studies 2 and 3, given that we repeated the same sampling technique across the first three studies.

Another potential limitation of this study is in the single-item measures we used. Binge-watching is a new area and the scale development process is just now beginning. This is a need for future research. We feel as though some of the findings here may be useful in testing the nomological validity of scales that will emerge in this field.

Finally, future research may want to consider the content of or interest in the programs being watched. In Study 2, we found that there was not much of a difference between the two groups in terms of motivation for engaging in multi-episode viewing. Those who stuck to their plan were motivated by mostly the same things as those who extended their watching session. However, we did not study what made them continue to watch after they were into their watching session. This is an area for further study. Was the continued watching due to superior content or greater interest in the subject matter? There does not appear to be much of a motivational difference between planned and unplanned binges, but there could be a difference in program interest and quality once the watching session begins. Future research is needed to explore that possibility.

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Appendix A

Scenarios for Planned and Unplanned Binge-watching

Planned Watching Scenario

You watched multiple episodes of the same series **because that is what you intended to do**. You sat down at your TV or device and your plan at the time was to watch multiple series on Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime Video, DVD boxed sets, a TV station's series day marathon or the like. When you sat down, you knew you weren't going to stop watching after just one episode. When the first episode ended, you continued watching another episode because it was your intention from the start to do so.

Unplanned Watching Scenario

You only intended to watch one episode in a series. But before your TV watching session was over, you ended up watching multiple episodes (two or more) of that series back-to-back. **This was not what you planned to do**. It just happened. You sat down at your TV or other device, turned to watch one episode of a series on Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime Video, DVD boxed set, cable TV series day marathon or the like. However, you ended up watching multiple episodes (two or more episodes) of the same series before you either switched away from the series or you quit watching TV and went to doing something else. Without planning to do so, you watched multiple episodes of the same series in one sitting.