

Binge or appointment: A study on TV plus appointment viewing as the preference of screen media consumption on OTT platforms

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Abstract:

Binge watching has become the preferred way for viewing on streaming platforms. With the competition getting intense, streaming platforms are looking at way to engage the subscribers. TV plus appointment viewing has been introduced on streaming platforms. The viewing preferences of the audience have not been studied on whether the return of appointment viewing in a new form is acceptable to the audience that is habituated to binge watching. Streaming platforms have made content libraries available to subscribers to control and the menus are personalizing content using algorithms. Having given the control to the user to pick the menu, the experimentation with TV plus appointment viewing needs to be studied. This paper studies the audience preferences using a purposive sampling method. The findings of the casual survey led to some interesting findings. Binge watching continues to be the ideal method of consuming content and viewers are not ready to give up the personalized control over the menu. So, while streaming platforms may be experimenting with delivery methods, audiences want to watch shows when and how they want. Instant gratification and control over the content menu are important arguments for binge watching. Future research may have to study decreasing attention spans and ideal lengths of episodes to engage audiences.

Keywords: Television; digital streaming; Over-The-Top (OTT); appointment viewing; binge watching; media.

INTRODUCTION:

Content consumption on TV has changed over the years along with the redefinition of screen media consumption. In India, conventional TV viewing till the 1990s implied that audiences would watch a single show at a specified time on a specific channel or channels. With the advent of satellite television digital mobile technology by 1992 and digital streaming services by 2007, audiences today can watch episode after episode continuously. The viewing options have grown from single TV screen in a common area at home to multiple screens and multiple devices. The concept of the family gathering in the living room post-dinner (1950s – 1980s) to watch a show is long dead. Homes¹, these days, can have multiple TV screens and family members can opt to watch shows individually on multiple devices, from laptops to hand-held tablets and smart phones. Viewing options have grown from a single channel to multiple channels in different languages and to multiple streaming or Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms with shows on demand and all episodes of a series being available at one go. The viewing patterns have shifted from channel controlled fixed point charts to audience managed selections with streaming platforms and AI driven playlist matching earlier viewed programmes. (Conlin, Billings, & Van Gerwen, 2017).

Although the first transmission of TV took place as early as 1928 in the United States, it was until the late 50s that TV broadcasting came to India. Started on an experimental basis for educational purposes with one public broadcaster, Doordarshan (DD) in 1959, Indian TV gradually evolved across its varied mass audiences hitherto

¹ Market research agency, Nielsen defines a home as at least one operable TV/monitor with the ability to deliver video typically used placed in the family room/ living room

attuned to daily listening to radio as a primary source of information and entertainment. TV serials began to air in the late 70s and most of these shows were from international networks like the BBC and from the UK, Russian, German and American public broadcasting offerings. In the early-80s, after colour broadcast was launched with the 1982 Asian Games, DD began screening homemade soaps like *'Hum Log'* (1984), *'Buniyaad'* (1986), *'Ramayan'* (1987-88) and *'Mahabharat'* (1988-89) which had audiences glued to their TV. (Kumar, 2020)

TV broadcasting continued to be under government control since the first broadcast in 1959 right up to the economic liberalisation of the 1990s. Opening of the economy to direct foreign investment, by the then Prime Minister PV Narashima Rao, led to changes in rules and regulations allowing private players into the broadcast space. Today, India has 905 satellite channels and 57 OTT platforms according to a recent study by the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting (MIB). (Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, 2024) Hindi and regional general entertainment channels (GEC) dominate India's broadcasting landscape with 52% of the viewership pie. In order to understand audience preferences when it comes to watching shows, this paper examines the different approaches of viewing patterns of selected OTT platforms. To understand this viewing behaviour, it is important to differentiate between 'appointment viewing,' 'binge watching,' 'on-demand watching,' and the neo concept of 'TV Plus appointment viewing.'

Appointment viewing is simply the act of watching a television programme at a stipulated time of the day and week. (Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged, 2024) However, with the emergence of streaming platforms, the concept of "appointment viewing" has changed, with programmes being available "on demand". Audiences can watch shows at their convenience from the readily available menu or pay an additional fee to watch a serial/ movie on demand. The on-demand culture has led to binge-watching, i.e. watching several or all episodes of a TV series in one sitting. (Netflix, 2013) More recently, the surfeit of platforms and a stagnation in the subscriber base has led to readdressing the issue of audience choice. OTT platforms have started the concept of "TV plus viewing" or reintroduced appointment viewing through scheduled releases of new content (Kochra, 2024). Platforms are doing this in two ways. Instead of dropping all episodes at one go, they release a few episodes at one time and make the viewer wait for the remaining episodes to become available at a future date. For example, with the new season (Season 4) of *"Emily in Paris"* (2024) on Netflix, the first 5 episodes were available together on August 15, 2024. The remaining five episodes were made available almost a month later, on September 12, 2024. Some shows like *"Only Murders in the Building, Seasons 1-4"* (Disney Hotstar, 2021-2024) or *"Pachinko, Season 1&2"* (Apple TV, 2022-24), or *"The Great Indian Kapil Show, 2 Seasons"* (Netflix, 2024), have the producers making one episode available on a particular day of the week, instead of all episodes in one go. To fully understand these changes, we need to understand the definitions of appointment viewing, binge watching and TV Plus viewing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Types of viewing

Appointment Viewing:

This type of viewing was more prevalent in the pre-streaming era, when you could watch one episode of a show at a time on a given day of the week at a pre-appointed time. This meant that the entire 'viewing universe'² watched the programme at the same time and there was no question of watching before or after others. Also, if viewers missed the show at the appointed hour, they had no way of viewing that episode unless the channel aired a re-run at a later date. Simply put, appointment viewing is watching a show at a pre-fixed time so that audiences watch the show at the original broadcast time as "they have a strong desire to see what will happen or be done or said." (Merriam Webster, 2024)

'Appointment' viewing is therefore, the opposite of watching a show 'on demand.' For example, India's public service broadcaster, Doordarshan, would air the popular Bollywood-song based programme *Chitrahaar*, at 8 pm on Wednesdays and Fridays in 1982 while the series *Mahabharat* was broadcast on Sundays at noon in 1988-89. (Kumar, 2020)

² Broadcast Audience Research Council-India (BARC-India) defines a viewing universe as the total number of individuals in a target group that is watching a particular show

On Demand Viewing

The concept of on demand viewing is about audiences being able to watch shows whenever they want from a content library that has movies, TV series, documentaries and more. Subscribers to a platform get free access to the content on the payment of a monthly fee. This type of viewing is known as Subscriber Video on Demand (SVoD). Some platforms based out of India like Zee5, Amazon Prime, Shemaroo, to name a few, have an added another layer of payment, by allowing subscribers to rent a movie, TV show or watch a live show for a single view. This is more like pay per view concept in some western countries. For example, Prime has a selection of movies that you can rent for a small payment and it allows you to watch it once in a 48-hour window. This type of watching content is known as transactional Video on Demand (tVoD). There is a third type, Advertising-based Video on Demand (AVoD), in which ads are inserted in between scenes and subscribers can watch shows without any payment but have to watch a minimum number of ads before they can return to the show. For example, YouTube, does not need any monthly subscription fee, but viewers have to watch ads in between content. (McKenzie, Crosby, & Collins, 2024)

Binge Watching

The phenomenon of binge watching has been described as watching two or more episodes of a serial at one go. (Bastos, Naranjo-Zolotov, & Aparicio, 2015) It moves away from the concept of the traditional appointment viewing with all episodes being available at the same time. Viewers no longer wait for a scheduled time to watch a show, instead they can watch all episodes at a time of their choosing. The first focussed definition of binge watching is from Netflix's survey of its subscriber's viewing habits. It found that 73% of its subscribers watched between 2-6 episodes in one sitting. (Netflix, 2013) The company hired American cultural anthropologist, Grant McCracken, to conduct the survey in his country. He found that better availability of services, internet and digital upsurge had facilitated binge watching. There have been studies about binge-watching since 2105 and a study by Flayelle, Maurage, Di Lorenzo, *et al* in 2020 that reviewed all research papers on the subject to find that no consensus exists on the measurement of binge-watching. (Flayelle, Maurage, Di Lorenzo, & al, 2020) This paper uses the Netflix definition as the benchmark classification and as the paper is looking to establish whether the Indian audience endorses the concept of binge watching nine years after Netflix launched in the country, and 11 years after binge-watching was first established.

TV Plus Appointment Viewing

TV Plus Appointment Viewing is the new terminology used to describe an old concept since 2024. While it is the norm for platforms to release all episodes of a television series' season simultaneously, platforms have gone back to the days of appointment viewing by releasing one episode per week, but call it TV Plus Appointment Viewing (Kochra, 2024). This kind of viewing engages the audience by making them return at an appointed hour and day to follow the narrative progression. This approach is analogous to that of past television shows in the pre streaming era, which released new episodes on a weekly basis. The key difference being that the episode remains available to subscribers even if they don't show up at the appointed time to watch the show, unlike traditional TV channels. For instance, Netflix releases one episode of "The Great Indian Kapil Show," every Saturday, as does Disney plus Hotstar, which releases one episode of its popular series "Only Murders in the Building" r Apple TV which released one episode per week of multilingual drama series, "*Pachinko*".

Other platforms have taken the concept a step further by releasing a few episodes at one go. SonyLIV, for example, releases three episodes in a week of popular shows like "Raisinghani vs Raisinghani" and "Adrishyam". Netflix, which made binge-watching popular, has a new strategy of dividing seasons into two parts, like it did with "Bridgerton Season 3"(2024) and "Emily in Paris Season 4"(2024) TV Plus Appointment Viewing combines binge watching and appointment viewing, as all previous episodes are available to subscribers to watch when they want. If a subscriber missed the appointment viewing, the episode is available in the content library for viewing as per the subscriber's need.

Types of serials

Limited Series

This is a short format TV series in which there are 8 to 13 episodes in one season of a show. Limited series became a popular category in the mid 70s when the Television Academy introduced an Emmy category "Outstanding Limited Series or Anthology Series". The category is defined by the Television Academy as a "limited series with two or more episodes and a total run time of at least 150minutes." (TV Academy, 2024) Limited series are not

limited by being a one season production. They may have multiple seasons but will not cross the line of more than 13 episodes. These target audiences that want to binge watch a show and give a complete story. Many limited series follow a format of completing one story in one episode like “Modern Love Mumbai” (2022, Prime), “Modern Love Hyderabad” (Prime, 2023) and “Zindaginamma” (Sony Liv, 2024),

Mini Series

There is a thin red line between a mini-series and limited series. A mini-series is a take-off from the limited series but as a rule is has a fixed number of episodes. Finding that limited series were popular with viewers, mini-series came in with even fewer episodes in a series. “Tiger King” (Netflix, 2020-22) had seven episodes in Season 1, five in season 2. BBC was the first to start mini-series as early as 1953 with “*The Quarter mass Experiment*”. It has just six episodes and was like a docu-drama telling the story of the first manned spaceflight. Some popular serials in India too are adopting this format for not just docu-dramas like “House of Secrets: The Burari Deaths” (Netflix, 2021) had just three episodes but fictional serials too. “Maamla Legal Hai” (Netflix, 2024) wrapped up in nine episodes in Season 1, as did “Family Man- 1” (Netflix 2019), “Family Man-2” (Netflix, 2022).

According to media research company, Deloitte, of the 6.2 hours an average Indian spends on the internet, almost 21% is spent on entertainment. (Deloitte, 2015) Mini-series give a way to producers to cater to the short attention span and garner more viewers.

Spurring the limited series and mini-series formats was the COVID-19 lockdowns, when audiences were consuming a lot of entertainment shows as they were restricted to being indoors, producers found viewers showed a preference for series that had limited episodes. With binge watching becoming the new normal for audiences of all ages and the appetite for limited and mini-series found favour from then onwards.

Event Series

These are long terms series are like game shows and long running soaps that do not have an end date or a limit on the number of episodes. Some of the daily soaps run into years and producers decide to end them only when they find that audiences are dropping. In multi-season shows, the episodes do not have a conclusive end point. Instead, most producers leave the audiences at a cliffhanger point in the drama where they will want to know more. They also don’t have distinction beginnings, middles or endings to a story, they can introduce new characters and go back and forth with the storyline.

Research Questions

The link between binge watching and streaming platforms is well-established. Yet, OTT platforms are employing methods like TV Plus Appointment viewing to increase their customer base. Streaming platforms are going back to the concept of traditional TV appointment viewing, by either dropping episodes of popular programmes one by one or by dropping 3-6 episodes at one go and then dropping the rest after a gap of a month or more. There is no formal co-relation between preference for new-style TV Plus Appointment Viewing and Binge Watching.

Research question relating to a) consumption patterns of content b) preference for type of consumption and c) co-relation between viewing and availability of shows on platforms are hypothesized in this paper. Recent studies have shown that binge watching has been a trend among viewers but what are the consumption patterns by different groups is unclear. The research questions were proposed keeping this in mind:

RQ1: What is the relationship between content availability and viewing pattern?

RQ2: Does content availability show a preference for binge watching?

RQ3: Is there a specific age group that prefers binge watching?

RQ4: How long will the audience wait for a new season of a show?

RQ5: Is there be a preference to wait for a show at a particular time day of the week?

RQ6: Is there be a preferred length for a series?

METHOD

Sampling:

The study used the casual survey method to gauge whether audience's preferences can predict content consumption patterns between and predict preference for binge watching to appointment viewing or TV Plus appointment viewing. The research paper used snowball or chain purposive sampling to get respondents. By identifying one participant relevant to this study, it leads participants of similar characteristics, leading to the planned sampling. (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024) The reasoning behind this technique is that getting one participant to lead you to another, building the chain. Therefore, using social media was useful, especially What's App. When one participant in a group responded by answering that he/she had completed the questionnaire, it prompted other to follow suite.

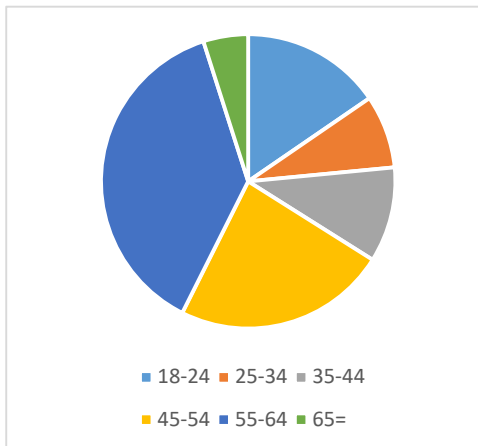
A survey website (Survey Monkey) was used to create the questionnaire and the link was posted online. The link was shared via social media on What's App groups, LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter handles of the researchers.

Respondents were not offered any monetary benefits and were based purely on the personal connections. The respondents were from different backgrounds and age groups, they included friends, relatives, students, friends of friends. The survey did not ask for any personal details, except for age group, in order to keep the identities of the respondents protected and as well as to ensure that their personal data is not misused.

To identify the audience, we used a large age group from over 18 (adults who can watch content without parental permission) to 65 plus so as to get a wider canvas of OTT audiences, since streaming platforms are an entertainment option among all age groups.

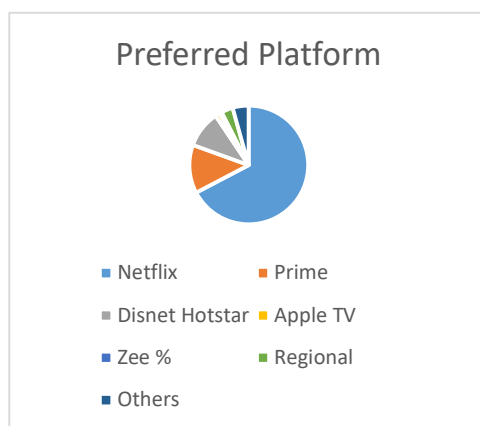
Survey Design

A casual comparative design was used for the survey. This type of survey is also known as explanatory survey used to identify cause-effect relationship between two or more variables, (Lawrence, 2023) in this paper between OTT audience and binge watching, appointment viewing and TV plus appointment viewing. For this paper, the researchers used quantitative method to get results based on which conclusions were drawn. The method was used to quickly draw a conclusion for the problem at hand. None of questions were reverse coded. The respondent was asked 10 questions to which they were given multiple choices for answers. They were asked about their favourite platform, frequency of consumption, hours of content consumption, viewing preferences, appointment viewing and whether they like to wait for episodes and new seasons and ideal number of episodes in a series.



Results

There were 162 respondents to the survey of varied aged groups. Since the demographics was not selected, it had a varied age group of respondents in the following age categories: aged 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54 55-64 and 65 plus. There were no respondents under the age of 18. (See Figure 1)



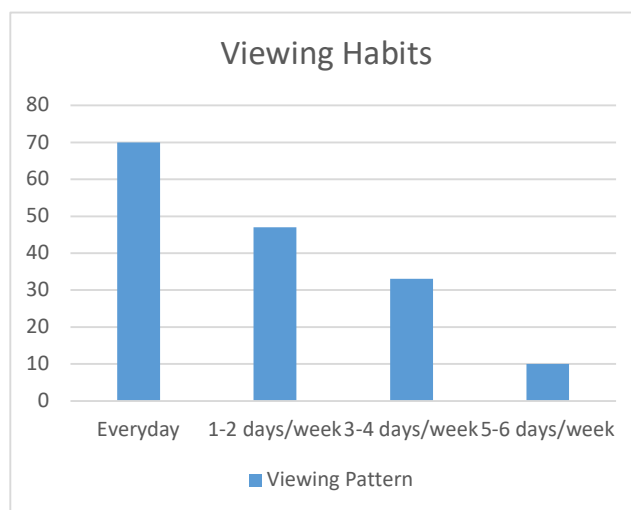
Platform preference

The identity and gender of the respondents was kept out of the purview of the survey.

The highest number of respondents were in the age group of 55-64 at 37.65% with lowest number of respondents over 65 plus at 5.56% and age groups 18-24 was at 15.43%, ages 25-34 at 8.02%, ages 35-44 at 10.49% and 45-54 at 22.84%.

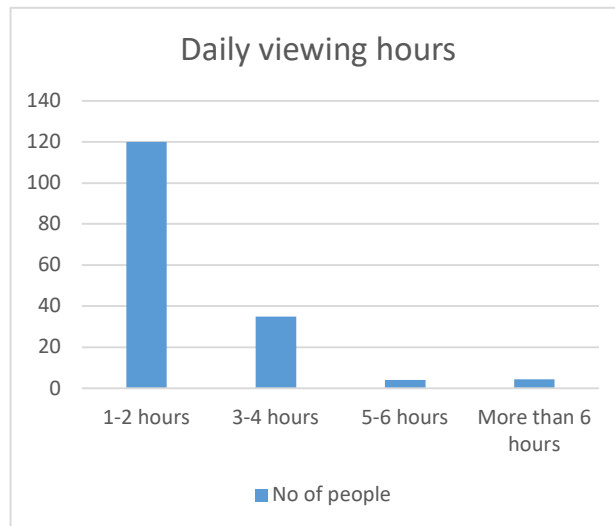
Of the respondents only 3 said they did not watch any OTT content.

An analysis of showed that all these respondents belonged to the senior citizen category (65+). To check their preferred streaming platform to watch serials, the top five English and Hindi content platform. (Disney Hotstar, Netflix, Prime, Zee 5 and Apple) were listed. (Reuters New Agency, 2024) The option of 'regional' and 'others' were also listed. Most people who watched serials listed 'Netflix' as their preferred channel. (See Figure 2)



Viewing frequency

RQ 1 sought to understand whether there was a link between availability of content and viewing. The highest number of respondents (69) said they watched some content on a daily basis. As many as 47 respondents said they watched content only once or twice a week, while 33 watched some content 3-4 days and week and 11 watched for 5-6 days a week. (See Figure 3).



Viewing hours

RQ 2 looked to correlate number of hours of watching and content availability. Almost 74% of the respondents watched content on OTT platforms continuously for at least 1-2 hours in a day, which fits the definition of binge watching. Only 2.5% went to the extreme of watching for more than 5-6 hours in a day. (RQ3) (See Figure 4).

Audiences and viewing method

While 44% watched at least 2-3 episodes at a time, nearly 26 % watched all episodes together and only 30% preferred watching one episode at a time. RQ 4 looked at audience preference for appointment viewing. The results show that the binge-watching phenomenon has not declined in spite of channels trying to garner more interest in shows with an TV Plus Appointment Viewing approach. An overwhelming 111 respondents said they did not like platforms to drop one episode at a time and 109 said they would want the platforms to drop all episodes at one go, rather than waiting for an episode once a day or even once a week at a given time.

An audience research survey done for US tech giant Cloudcast shows a similar preference for binge watching in among the US viewers too. Comparing viewing patterns from 2015 to 2023, the study found 72% of US adults fitted into to binge watching category and 96 % of US households used some form of streaming platform. (Usercible, 2024)

Attention span of viewers

Less than 50 % of the audience would wait for a new season of a show if they really liked the previous season. Only 34% would wait for the new season to be launched. One season typically has 13-22 episodes and content producers go for a new season depending on audience demand. This means that audiences can get bored quickly with a show and producers cannot be sure whether a new season will be sought after.

RQ 6 sought to identify the preferred length of a series, 50 % of the audience prefers 'Limited Series' of 10-13 episodes with 40.55 % preferring mini-series (6-8 episodes) while only about 9 % liked the unlimited episodes of the soaps they watched.

DISCUSSIONS

With technology making it easier to access the internet, audiences are spending more time both for work and entertainment on their screens. (Naranjo-Zolotov, Turel, Oliveira, & Edison, 2021) Binge watching, meaning watching two or more episodes of a serial at one go. (Bastos, Naranjo-Zolotov, & Aparício, 2015), has become the way people consume content. The survey shows that binge watching is not restricted to a particular age group, but is something that all age groups indulge in. Citing numerous research papers on addictive behaviour, Flayelle *et al* have shown that binge watching is correlated to young adult behaviour. (Flayelle, Maurage, & al, 2020)

However, how many hours a person watches is determined by different factors like content, convenience, enjoyment, cost and age. (Yoon, Kim, & Kankanhalli, 2021) This paper used age as one of the main factors to assess binge watching behaviour and found it is across all age groups.

The data collected herein ruptures the stereotyped argument that older adults are accustomed to traditional form of appointment viewing. In the current purposive sample of 162 people, the responses display shows that older adults are also binge watch as they watch more than one episode at a go and for more than one to two hours a day, fitting into the definition of binge watching, as determined by Netflix. The wide availability of content, easy access to OTT platforms and availability of a range of electronic devices are the reasons attributed to the binge watching. (Flayelle, Maurage, & al, 2020) The survey data collected shows that 99% of the respondents watch some content on a daily basis with a minimum of one to two hours. This validates the pattern of binge watching with the widely available content on OTT platforms, while TV plus appointment viewing or appointment viewing is not a preferred option for audiences and 69% said they will not like to wait to watch a show at a particular day or time.

Clearly, audiences want the choice of selecting the number of episodes they would like to watch and not be dictated by appointment viewing. The advantage for streaming platforms is that audiences can still watch the show even after the appointed hour and the content can be found on the app's library, unlike cable or satellite channels, where shows are not available after the appointed time.

The new normal for watching media is longer hours of watching and availability of all episodes in one go. Viewers like to be in charge of what they watch and be able to select from an unlimited library (Flayelle M. , Maurage, Di Lorenzo, & al, 2020), consistent with the findings in this paper.

The limitation in this study is that respondents were more from the 45 plus age group with the maximum being in the 55 plus age group, so a comparison with younger adults could not be made, when it comes to binge watching.

Appointment viewing was popular in the time when streaming was not an option and audiences depended on C&S channels for content with their fixed programming. (Conlin, Billings, & Van Gerwen, 2016)

The reintroduction of appointment viewing in a new form by streaming channels does not seem to have been favourable with audiences today who have an unlimited choice of not only content but also platforms to choose from. From the findings herein, one can conclude that audiences prefer to binge watch content while streaming that wait for appointment viewing.

CONCLUSION

The re-introduction of traditional appointment viewing in a new format on streaming platforms may not be as favourable to the audience as binge watching. While binge watching has been around since Netflix identified it in 2013, viewers continue to opt for this style of viewing and prefer to consume at least two to three episodes in one sitting of one to two hours of continuous viewing. Conlin *et al* (2016) has concluded that binge watching was related to the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) among streaming audience. Instant gratification and control over the content menu are important arguments for binge watching. (Stafford, 2019) The ease of access to technology and the amount of content available plays a role in consumption. Viewing has also moved from single TV screens to multiple digital formats and consumption is not restricted to a given location, like the living room. OTT platforms have been experimenting with viewing patterns but binge watching seems to be the preferred mode although the number of hours may of continuous watching may be investigated in future research to help with engagement patterns. With decreasing attention spans, future research could also study the ideal length of an episode and the desirable number of episodes in one season of a show.

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