

Netflix and Binge: The New Normal?

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Abstract

The world during the time of a life threatening pandemic, has been forced to term everything as the new normal. Social distancing, quarantine, wearing masks, sanitizing hands, work from home and study from home are all the new normal. In this phase, in the history of mankind a group of people mainly among college students, unemployed people and a group of general public have taken to the habit of watching series and movies on online streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon, the less privileged stick to downloading from Telegram. If the casual viewing of these shows on these platforms was part of the “old normal”, then the “new normal” trend is binge watching which is also known as binge-viewing or marathon-viewing, which is defined as the practice of watching content for a long time span, usually a single television show. This doesn't mean that people did not Binge watch during the pre-pandemic times, but only suggests that there has been a significant increase in the bingeing on television shows on these various online platforms. In this context, this paper aims to identify the change in viewership pattern among the general public on these online platforms and to state how the pandemic has led to an increase in the binge watching among them through an empirical study. So, the question that remains unanswered at this moment of time is has “Netflix and Binge” replaced “Netflix and Chill” as the new normal?

Keywords - *New Normal, Binge watching, Netflix, Pandemic*

Introduction

At this particular moment in time, which to be precise is in the year 2020, which will most likely in the future be referred to as the year of the Pandemic. We as a whole species are getting acclimated to a host of new things which we are at present calling the “New Normal”. Wearing a mask while stepping out of your house to go buy groceries is part of the new normal, while coming back to the same house the first thing you used to do was put the groceries in the kitchen and switch on the TV and flip through the channels to watch something interesting but now the first thing you do after getting back is washing and sanitizing your hands and then placing the groceries in the kitchen, taking a bath and then coming back and washing the groceries you bought with a sanitizing agent. What in the world is going on you may be wondering? Welcome to the New Normal my friend. In much simpler times I woke up at 7:00 am in the morning brushed my teeth, took a bath, got ready and caught a bus to go to college to attend a class which would start by 9:30 am, now what I do is wake up at 9:20 am brush my teeth and access a link in the mail to go to my class which happens online. Once again welcome to the New Normal. My uncle who is a very outdoor

person loved going out and meeting people and hanging out and was used to socializing at his workplace which is an IT company. But he does all his work online and does not go out much, why is that so, you might ask? Well you may already know the answer by now. Yes, the “New Normal”.

During the lockdown which was declared on March 25th all over India there was visible pandemonium all across the nation. The stock markets crashed, we can see that the benchmark BSE Sensex stock prices experienced a negative growth of -22.6% during the COVID-19 phase

(AK Mishra, BN Rath, AK Dash, 2020), There was also a large scale loss of jobs as a lot of industries shut down and there was also a large scale return of migrants from abroad as they were also largely affected by the CoronaVirus. Many business sectors were very badly hit as they could not carry out their daily operations. The lockdown which was initially planned to be for 21 days was extended to 40 days and finally seeing no eradication of the virus in the near future, Economies across the world decided that they had to live with the virus and started the process of reopening their economies, India too was forced to reopen its economy in phases and even as of now.it has not fully become functional though it is in the process of becoming fully functional. But all of this aside, we can see that during the lockdown period people who had been forced to sit idle at home decided to take up many new activities, Some started cooking, some started exercising, some were learning how to paint, some were learning how to play the Guitar while others started YouTube channels and so on. But there were many and I presume which can be called a majority who spent most of their time watching shows on various streaming platforms like Netflix, Amazon prime, Telegram and also even on the Television.

Online streaming platforms have seen a drastic increase during the lockdown, by definition a streaming platform is an on-demand online entertainment source for TV shows, movies and other streaming media. One of the companies which has profited the most due to the Pandemic is indeed Netflix. Netflix is one such online streaming platform which currently has about 192 million subscribers worldwide. Netflix has seen a massive increase in the number of subscribers in the past few months mainly due to the lockdown, it can be noticed that Netflix has added 26 million subscribers to its user base in the first two quarters of 2020. Whereas in the whole of 2019 it was only able to gain 28 million subscribers. Other similar streaming services such as Amazon Prime and Hotstar have also been able to gain a big foothold with respect to the number of subscribers. Well now when people have access to such streaming platforms and a lot of time to kill they will most probably end up spending all their time watching the shows and movies on these platforms for hours at a stretch, well this is exactly what is called Binge watching.

Binge watching is defined in the Cambridge Dictionary as watching several episodes of a television series or programme, one after another. Binge watching is not something which

is uncommon among the people of the 21st century. But has the amount and the frequency of binge watching increased drastically in the past few months? Has the amount of time used for binge watching changed? These are the interesting questions that need to be answered.

In this study the main objective is to find out if there has been a visible change in the video streaming habits of the people during the pandemic as compared to the time before the pandemic. The study will look at what different viewing platforms are used by people, the amount of time spent viewing, the number of episodes that are watched to determine if there is an increase in binge watching during the lockdown and also if the streaming on these online platforms has led to any problems related to the day to day chores of the participants. So in short we will try and find out that if “Netflix and Chill” has indeed become “Netflix and Binge”.

Literature Review

Binge Watching

Binging is defined by Psychological researchers as “excessive amount in a short time,” such as binge eating or binge drinking. In the same manner Binge watching too is having an excess of something (This case TV shows or videos) in a short time. Binge watching can be said to be characterized by two common elements: the first is a heavy rate of consumption, which may occur within a single session or across multiple sessions within a short period of time. The second is that viewers consume multiple episodes of the same series. There are studies which categorize binging on basis of episodes watched but studies categorizing on the basis of time spent for viewing are yet to evolve. The evolution of online platforms which provide the users with content on the basis of their demand is providing the users with an alternative to watching TV and causing an increase in binge watching. Binge watching is a relatively new and emerging behavioural pattern and may have a few health effects as well, but there are others which see it as a good and restorative experience as well. So, we can say that binge watching is a commonplace thing in the current society and is associated with both reflective and impulsive factors. (Panda & Pandey, 2017; Jenner, 2017; Patinson, Dombrowski & Presseau, 2018)

Online Streaming Platforms

The global Television industry is getting a lot of scholarly attention as reality formats reorganize the transnational flow of television programming and online streaming platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime open up a new world of possibilities for global television audiences. Online Streaming platforms are an on-demand online entertainment source for TV shows, movies and other streaming media. These online streaming platforms can in the future become the source of eradication of the present day television, these platforms provide the user with exactly what they want and in the amount they want it, which is unlike the television for which the user has to change his timings and likings. These relatively new platforms of entertainment are something which have gained a lot of ground during the lockdown because

instead of purchasing individual content, streaming adopters rent access to libraries from which they can consume content at no additional cost. They can be called one of the winning actors of the great lockdown. The Biggest winner can be seen in Netflix, the company announced in its quarterly report published on April 22, 2020 a growth in its subscriber base by almost 15.77 million new paying subscribers worldwide in the first 3 months of 2020 while in comparison to a forecast of 7 million new subscribers which it initially had, this was almost more than double the growth that it had expected. The reason for this growth as is obvious was the lockdown. These online streaming platforms have a lot of scope for study and analysis as it is a niche area which has not been explored much. (Cha & Olmsted, 2012; Datta, Knox & Bronnenberg 2018; Wayne, 2019; Vlassis, 2020)

There is not a lot of research work which analyses the pattern of Binge watching before and during the lockdown. The studies on binge watching are mostly on the relationship of Binge watching and motivation or Binge watching and health or mental well-being. But the lock down was a time period which saw an extraordinary rise in binge watching and there are not many studies done related to duration of binge watching.

Methodology

The article uses a mode of empirical study using a structured questionnaire which was prepared based on past studies related to the subject matter collected from various articles in reputed journals. The questionnaire was prepared using Google forms and the survey was conducted online. The study uses frequency tables to provide a basic descriptive analysis of the data and analyze the pattern of responses that have been given. The respondents to the questionnaire are from the general public and are the people who have access to streaming platforms, most respondents are in the 18 - 30 age category. The selection of the respondents was done because of the prevalence of use of online streaming platforms among them and age groups that they are in, in general. The total number of respondents for the study is 80 people. The sampling method that was used to obtain these many number of respondents was that of Snowball Sampling method.

Data Analysis

The main problem that is being studied in the paper is the relationship of the lockdown and Binge watching among the young and middle aged population from the general public. The data which was collected is as follows –

Table 1: Age of Participants

Age Groups	Frequenc y	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
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18-21	55	68.8	68.8	68.8
21-25	19	23.8	23.8	92.5
25-30	6	7.5	7.5	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Table 1 depicts the age groups into which the participants are grouped. It can be understood from the table that the majority of the respondents fall into the 21-25 age group which is about 68.8% of the total respondents, whereas 21-25 makes up 23.5% of the respondents and 25-30 year olds make up the smallest portion of the total which is only about 7.5%.

Table 2: Streaming Platform Used

Streaming Platform	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Television	4	5.0	5.0	5.0
Telegram	22	27.5	27.5	32.5
Netflix	30	37.5	37.5	70.0
Amazon Prime	7	8.8	8.8	78.8
Others	17	21.3	21.3	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 depicts the different kinds of streaming platforms that are used most popularly by the respondents. From the table it is clear that the most used platform for streaming is Netflix which is about 37.5%, followed by Telegram in 2nd place with about 27.5% , Other platforms at 3rd place with 21.3%, Amazon Prime at 4th place with 8.8% and Television viewers at 5th place with 5%.

Now let us take a look at the data regarding the difference in viewing time among the people before and during the lockdown. We will also further analyse the data using statistical tools to check if there is a significant difference among the 2 data sets.

Table 3: Hours spent streaming daily before the lockdown

Time spent streaming	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Less than one hour	29	36.3	36.3	36.3
1-3 Hours	41	51.2	51.2	87.5
3-5 Hours	6	7.5	7.5	95.0
More than 5 Hours	4	5.0	5.0	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Table 4: Hours spent streaming daily during the lockdown

Time spent streaming	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Less than one hour	7	8.8	8.8	8.8
1-3 Hours	29	36.3	36.3	45.0
3-5 Hours	27	33.8	33.8	78.8
More than 5 Hours	17	21.3	21.3	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

With just a glance at the above table we can come to an understanding that there is indeed a significant increase in the viewing time during the lockdown when compared to the pre lockdown period. Most of the respondents were streaming Less than an hour or 1-3 Hours before the lockdown and when it comes to the streaming time during the lockdown we can see most of the respondents are in the 3-5 hours or more than 5 hours streaming bracket. To further consolidate on the point let us confirm our preliminary finding using a Chi Square test.

Hypothesis testing

Table 5: Cross Tabulation

Hours spent streaming daily before the lockdown	Hours spent streaming daily during the lockdown				Total
	Less than one hour	1-3 Hours	3-5 Hours	More than 5 hours	
Less Than One Hour	7	13	5	4	29
1 - 3 Hours	0	16	18	7	41
3 - 5 Hours	0	0	4	2	6
More than 5 Hours	0	0	0	4	4
Total	7	29	27	17	80

Table 5 is a cross tabulation of the two data sets which show the streaming habits of the respondents before and during the lockdown. Using the data we will run a Chi square test and since the data size is more than 50 we will be using a Pearson's Chi square test. The Rule of thumb is applicable in this case which is : if the p value (sig value in the output table) is less than .05 the null hypothesis is rejected and alternate hypothesis is accepted

Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant association between the duration of online streaming before lockdown and during lockdown

H₁: There is a significant association between the duration of online streaming before lockdown and during lockdown

Table 6: Chi-Square Test

Particulars	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	36.662 ^a	9	.000
Likelihood Ratio	37.955	9	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	19.784	1	.000
Number of Valid Cases	80		

From the Table 6, we can see that the corresponding p value (sig value) for Pearson chi square test is .000(which is less than .05). Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. Thus, it can be interpreted that there is a very high significant association between the duration of online streaming before and during lockdown.

The amount of episodes watched in one sitting is often what is considered as binge watching, so to understand if there has been an increase in binge watching during the lockdown the respondents to the questionnaire were also questioned on the amount of

episodes they watched in one go before and during the lockdown. The following tables depicts the data relating to these aspects:

Table 7: Number of Episodes viewed in one go before lockdown?

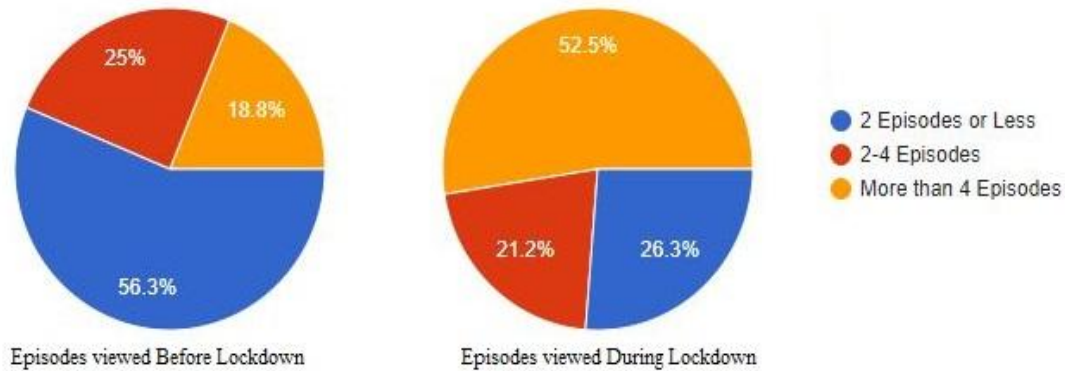
Number of episodes viewed	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Less than 2 Episodes	45	56.3	56.3	56.3
2-4 Episodes	20	25.0	25.0	81.3
More than 4 Episodes	15	18.8	18.8	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Table 8: Number of Episodes of web series watched in one go during lockdown?

Number of episodes viewed	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Less than 2 Episodes	21	26.3	26.3	26.3
2-4 Episodes	17	21.3	21.3	47.5
More than 4 Episodes	42	52.5	52.5	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

From the above table we can understand at a glance that when most of the participants used to view less than 2 Episodes before the lock down, during the lockdown the viewing trend changed and they are seen viewing upwards of 4 episodes of their favorite shows in a single sitting. Let's take a closer and more detailed look at this data through the use of a Pie Chart which will give a more clear and precise understanding of the data.

Chart 1: Comparison of Episode views before and during lockdown



From the graphical representation in the pie chart it is clear that most of the respondents changed their viewing habits during the lockdown and that when almost 56.3% were used to viewing 2 episodes or less before the lockdown that shrunk to almost 26.3% during the lockdown and the period saw a drastic increase in the episodes viewed as 52.5% of the respondents started watching more than 4 episodes during the lockdown. Compared to 18.8% before the lockdown. The amount of respondents viewing 2-4 episodes remained almost at a constant of 25% before the lockdown to 21.2% during the lockdown.

The other aspect that was studied was if there was any effect of streaming on these online platforms upon the respondents day to day activities. This study was also done with regard to the time frame of before the lockdown and during the lockdown. The responses that were gathered are given in the table below. We will also look at a Pie Chart representations of this data to give us a more detailed and accurate representation.

Table 9: Did streaming online affect your daily routine before lockdown?

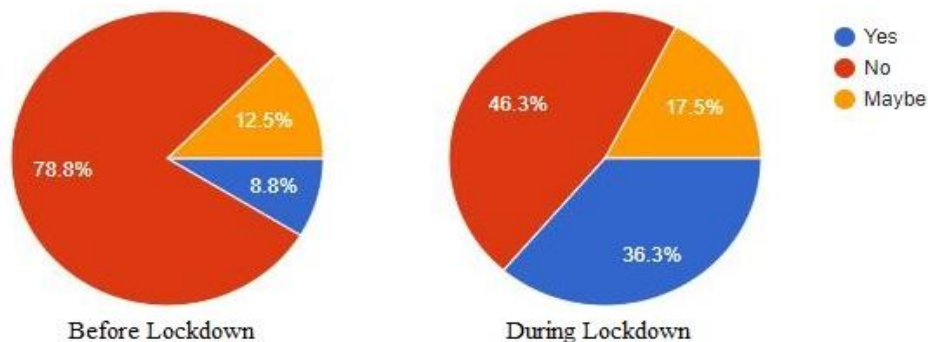
Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	7	8.8	8.8	8.8
No	63	78.8	78.8	87.5
Maybe	10	12.5	12.5	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Table 10: Did streaming online affect your daily routine during the lockdown?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	29	36.3	36.3	36.3
No	37	46.3	46.3	82.5
Maybe	14	17.5	17.5	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

From the above data we can infer that there has been an impact of streaming on the respondents. Before the lockdown 78.8% of the respondents said that streaming has had no impact upon their day to day activities. Whereas during the lockdown the percentage which said so has shrunk dramatically to 46.3% and the number of people who responded in the affirmative has increased from 8.8% before the lockdown to 36.3%. The percentage which is not so sure about the effect has also increased from 12.5% to 17.5% during the lockdown compared to before the lockdown. The following Pie Chart will give a clearer representation of the study:

Chart 2: Impact of streaming on daily routine



From the above Pie Chart it is clear that there has clearly been an effect of streaming and bingeing on these online platforms on the daily routine of the respondents.

Implications of the Study

The study which has been conducted in this paper is with regard to the various aspects of Binge watching. We have looked at the amount of time and number of episodes that were viewed by the customers and have seen a visible increase in the time, this shows that with a lot of free time at hand most people have seen an increase in the amount of time spent for watching web-series and such. This further shows the impact that online streaming platforms have been able to create in the society and the kind of penetration that they have been able

to achieve over the past year during the lockdown. The ground that has been gained by these streaming platforms over the past few months can be seen as a penetration phase for them in an emerging market like India where Internet penetration is still in its nascent stages. This phase of gaining new customers for the streaming platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime and Hot star etc. is just the beginning of a large scale expansion that we are about to witness in the coming years, we will see a lot of people moving away from conventional Television sets and opting for these on demand online video streaming services.

Currently India is the nation which provides internet facility at the lowest rate all over the world. The amount of viewership that has been generated by these Platforms over these past few months is also due to this factor. In the coming few years if the data rates remain the same we will see a major boom in this segment of the market and also increased competition in the segment as well. It is important to note that the sector is currently dominated by foreign players like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Hotstar (Wholly owned subsidiary of Walt Disney) etc. there is no significant Indian player in the segment which can be called a worthy competition. Thus it is not a far cry to say that there will emerge a significant local competitor in the scene of the Indian market in the near future as well. The lockdown has thus caused a dynamic change in the viewing habit and platform selection of the people as well.

Conclusion

The present world that we live in is ever changing and fast paced in which technologies evolve, mature and become obsolete in the blink of an eye. Television is something that has been around for a long time since its invention in 1926. It has been one of the most popular modes ever since then up until recent times, but now we are seeing people shift away from the usual Television screens and television channels to their smartphones, laptops or for the well off their smart Tv's, what are they watching now? The answer if you read this far is quite obvious, They have shifted to online streaming platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Hotstar where the shows or Cinema they want to watch is available on demand without the regular advertisement breaks we are used to on Television. But this was a trend which has been taking place for quite some time now, but the lockdown period was a period in time where many people were stuck at home with a lot of free time at hand, This led to an increase in the enrollment on these online platforms and increased viewership and time spent for the viewing during this time.

From the survey that was conducted among 80 participants we have been able to notice that there has been a significant increase in the time spent by the viewers during the lockdown on these online streaming platforms when compared to their viewership pattern before the lockdown. This shows an increase in the binging behaviour among the participants who were in the 18-30 age group. We can see that the number of episodes that were watched by most of the participants had also increased. Almost more than half the number of participants admitted to having watched more than 4 episodes of web series or shows in a day. This behaviour can be categorized as binge watching. So in short we can see that binge

watching has indeed increased during the lockdown period. So we can in almost all certainty say that the times have changed and we are indeed witnessing what is a precursor to change on a larger scale. For now anyway “Netflix and Chill” has indeed become “Netflix and Binge” how long this trend will last for, only time will tell.

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