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## **Armchair marathons: Binge viewing is the way many watch TV today**

Bingeing isn't automatically a vice anymore. When it comes to television, bingeing is the choice of more and more viewers each day — and it's not just the ideal activity for the lazy or those overwhelmed with leisure time. It is the conscious decision of how to experience a story.

"Back to when I was a kid, when I picked up a book, I used to read the whole book," said Ringwood's Dave Finkelstein, a self-described binge viewer who watches a few hours of TV via Netflix each night to wind down after work. "I like to get into the story. When it's one [episode] after another after another, you really get the idea of the story. You don't forget what happened in the first season because it's seven years later, so the story has a better continuity."

Binge viewing is a growing phenomenon fueled by technology and television content, allowing fans to watch past shows they missed all at once or in a short period of time, catch up on past seasons of current shows or re-experience their favorite series.

Watching three or four episodes of a show each night takes viewers through a season or series in a matter of weeks. Finkelstein sped through "Battlestar Galactica" and "Dr. Who" and is currently watching "The West Wing" and "Archer." He is not alone in his methods. As a matter of fact, as a binger, he is pretty tame. It is not uncommon to have people spend a weekend watching or reliving multiple seasons of an old series or past seasons of a current show.

Binge viewing is done more often by those ages 18 to 29, according to a recent study by MarketCast, but the research also showed that 67 percent of all television viewers ages 13 to 49 have binged at one time or another. The study indicated the habit is on the rise, with bingers having increased the intense, time-consuming viewing in the last year with plans to do more in the near future.

MarketCast defined binge viewing as: "The experience of watching multiple episodes of a specific television program or series in a single sitting or as a marathon that spans at least several hours or seasons of that program. Binge viewing may occur either online or offline and can involve the use of a television, DVD player, computer, tablet, or other video-enabled mobile device."

It isn't really new. It began with television show marathons. At that time, though, fans had to sit and watch one episode after another on the date and times specified by the network. Not anymore. Technology allows not only time-shifting, but also viewing anywhere thanks to the ability to watch on a computer, tablet or smart phone. Television content is a key factor, as well.

"There is one other reason for this phenomenon," said Ron Simon, curator of TV and Radio at The Paley Center for Media. "Television has embraced the long-form narrative and become, as many have said, the novel of our time. Television really has reached a very high quality so there are many different kinds of shows, drama or comedy, that lend themselves to this kind of viewing. ... They really invite you to take a special look at them, not just one episode at a time."

The phenomenon has been intensified by streaming services like Netflix and Hulu and now their entry into providing content, like Netflix's "House of Cards," which it released as an entire season at once in February.

Now the more traditional cable companies are trying to take advantage of the trend. For a week, starting today, Comcast will celebrate binge viewing with a Watchathon, offering more than 3,500 episodes of shows from more than 30 networks on demand on multiple platforms.

The industry is already reacting with the kinds of shows it makes, as well.

"[Binge viewing] has led, in part, to the creation of more serials because I think serial programming is especially conducive to that sort of viewing experience," said Hugh Curnutt, Montclair State professor of media and television studies, giving examples like "Game of Thrones," "Homeland" and "Girls" as shows that lend themselves to watching many episodes in a row. "It kind of hooks the story line in between the episodes. It creates a viewing experience where the viewer wants to continue to watch the program. They want to know what happens next."

The ability to get any show at any time is also part of the pull.

"That's part of the temptation too," said Finkelstein, who — along with current series — chooses shows he didn't have time to watch when they aired or even favorites from his youth like the original "Battlestar Galactica." "It's there, so it makes it easy."

It's not just fans, either. People in the industry are bingeing as well.

"Oh, yeah, that's one of my favorite ways to watch television," actress Elizabeth Mitchell of NBC's post-apocalyptic sci-fi series "Revolution" said during a recent conference call. "I did that with '24.' I did that with 'Breaking Bad.' I will go back and probably do that with 'Revolution,' just 'cause I like the ride. I love the idea of sitting down to a 24-hour movie. I think it's very fun. I really think it's a little nuts, but you get in your PJs, you get some great popcorn. It's worth it."

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