

The Additional Cost of Streaming Sites: Binge Watching and Associated Mental Health Outcomes

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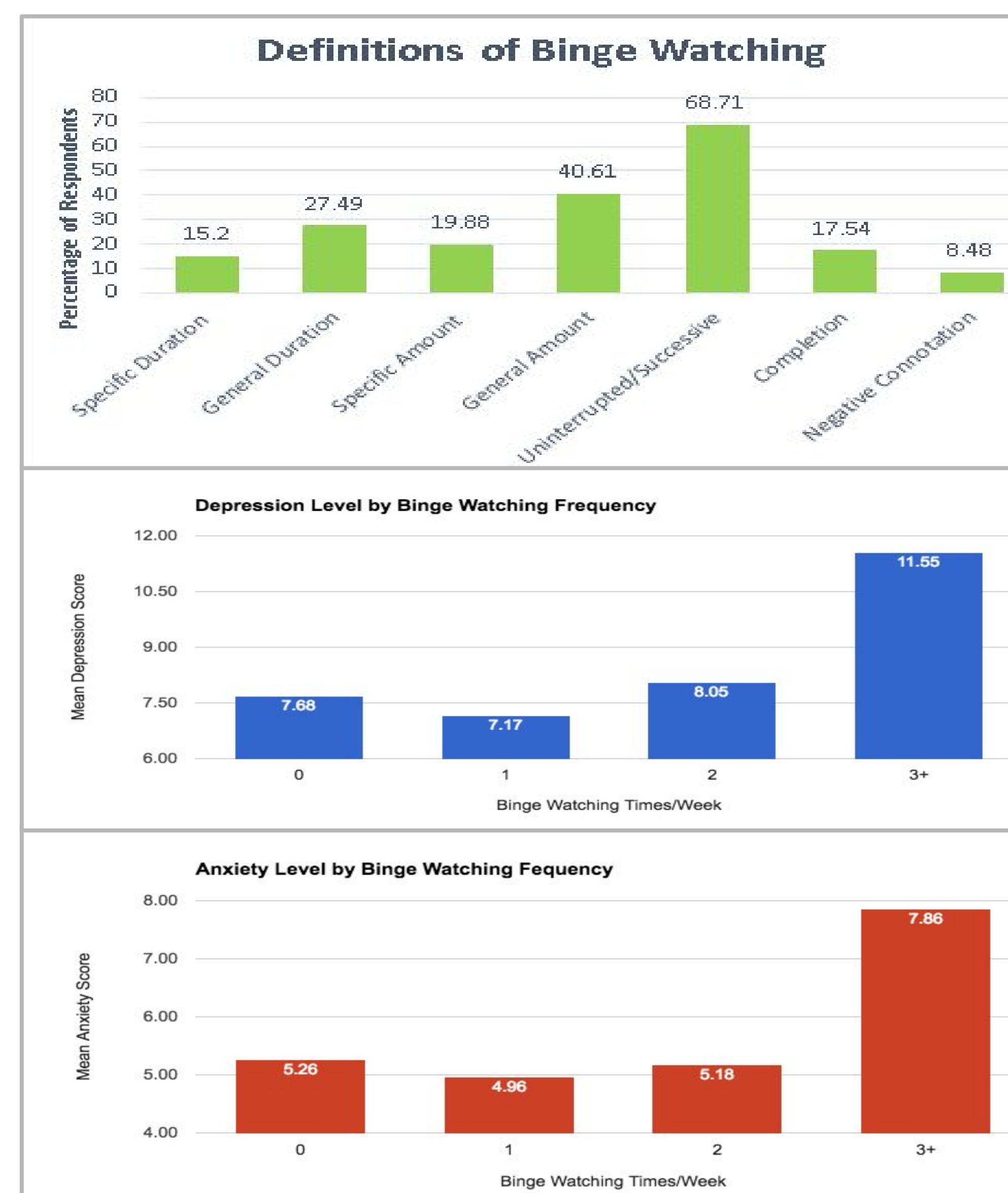
Background

- “Binge Watching” is a term used by the general public to describe the act of watching multiple tv shows or movies consecutively.
- Data from Netflix and TiVO suggest more than 80% of subscribers report binge watching.
- Across many domains, “binging” is associated with poor mental health: as in binge eating, gambling addiction, video game addiction, and drug and alcohol abuse.
- In some studies viewers have reported feeling guilt and shame with binge watching.
- Conversely, some qualitative studies have suggested benefits of binge watching and even discuss it as “media marathoning.”
- Little quantitative research has attempted to measure whether binge watching is associated with mental health problems.
- Little qualitative research has been conducted to determine what a “binge” actually is.
- The current study tested whether binge watching frequency and duration are associated with depression and anxiety, as well as gathered data concerning the definition of “binge watching.”



Methods & Results

- To determine whether binge watching behavior is associated with poor mental health, we conducted a survey of US adults.
- Participants ($N = 338$, $Age^{Mean} = 37.5$) were recruited online via Mechanical Turk and were compensated with 1 US dollar for participation.
- Depression was assessed with the CESD-10.
- Anxiety was assessed with the GAD-7.
- Binge Watching was measured as frequency per week and length of binge activity.



Discussion

- These findings support the hypothesis that binge watching is associated with poor mental health.
- Analyses comparing individuals who binged once or twice a week to those who binged 3 or more times per week reveal a nonlinear relationship between binge frequency and mental health.
- More than half of participants (68.71%) defined a “binge” as having an uninterrupted or successive component.
- Additionally, only 8.48% of participants attributed a negative connotation to a “binge.”
- For most people, binge watching is likely just another way of consuming media; however, for some, binge watching may be a marker of poor emotional health.
- High levels of binge watching for those with high depression and anxiety could reflect an adaptive coping response.
- Binge watching could also be a form of avoidance coping. Follow-up research is testing these relationships currently.
- Future research should seek to establish directionality and rule out the influence of outside variables.
- Future research should explore theoretical implications. Follow-up research is doing so now.