Speaker 1: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program, keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Nicki Donnelson: When you sit down to watch your favorite show do you watch just one episode? Or is your DVR full of stockpiled episodes ready for a marathon? Maybe you stream episode after episode, immersing yourself in a show. Binge watching is what we're discussing today on the Missouri State Journal. I'm Nicki Donnelson and my guest is Dr. Holly Holiday from the Media Journalism and Film Department at Missouri State University.

Nicki Donnelson: Holiday, a media and cultural studies scholar says that binge watching is a more recent phenomenon thanks to the technology and streaming services available. She argues that heavy television usage has been studied since its earliest days. The primary difference between those days and now is that we are controlling the consumption by choosing our show and watching the same series.

Holly Holladay: I think the idea of binge watching for a lot of people is a task that has to be accomplished. You are interested in a show. You want to watch it and get it done so that you can either be a part of the conversation with your friends and know what people are talking about. In that way some of the enjoyment can be taken out of a television show from binge watching if you look at it like a task that needs to be accomplished.

Holly Holladay: By the same token there's a lot of new research that's looking at the way that binge watching is related to immersion, and when you are spending eight hours a day with a particular television show and clicking Next Episode on Netflix you really become transported. And some people think of that as a bad thing. If you are maybe forgetting about your own life and your own responsibilities, but there's also some really interesting research that says that being really transported into a particular television narrative or narrative in general, can help us work out our own issues and problems and think about moral questions. When we look at it that way it feels pretty positive.

Nicki Donnelson: One change that has made binge watching so popular is the serialization of sitcoms. The early era of sitcoms, think I Love Lucy, or even much later, Seinfeld, wrapped up a plot within its 30 minute time slot. Now, that's not always the case. Holiday explains.

Holly Holladay: Things like soap operas, dramas have always been serialized by their very nature, but there's an increase in serialization of sitcoms which is a relatively new phenomenon and absolutely relates to binge watching. So I think about Parks and Recreation which is one of my favorites. In the fourth season of Parks and Recreation has a through line in which the protagonist is running for office.

Holly Holladay: Every episode tells a little bit more of that narrative, and if you're coming in the middle you're like, "Wait. What?" And you're missing references and jokes that might have happened in the previous episode or two. So that increased serialization of sitcoms is one major reason I think that binge watching is so prevalent now.

Holly Holladay: And the other thing has to do with technology itself. If you think about reruns, you're still beholden to the television schedule and what they are choosing to watch, but we have unprecedented control over what we watch and when we watch.

Nicki Donnelson: Even before binge watching became possible media moguls encouraged heavy viewership by establishing flow. Holladay elaborates.

Holly Holladay: But it's no accident that NBC used to program a Thursday night comedy block because all of those shows are similar. They're aiming for a similar demographic, and they want you even with the commercials in between to be in a state of flow in which you are watching something that almost feels like a continuous package.

Nicki Donnelson: Binge watching can negatively impact your favorite shows noted Holladay. She provides an example.

Holly Holladay: Last year whenever the TV renewals were coming out there's this really lovely show that was on FOX called Brooklyn 99. It had low to middling ratings the entire time it was on so Fox made what they perceived to be a good economic decision in choosing not to renew it. One of them were still measuring, imperfect as they are, television viewership in a very traditional Nielsen Ratings type way. And when the announcement of the cancellation of Brooklyn 99 hit social media people went nuts including celebrities and all of the fans of the show, coming seemingly out of the woodwork. That is not reflected in the ratings.

Holly Holladay: Luckily it was picked up in a smart economic messenger by NBC for a 60s, and there I think a lot of people because we have so much control, and we have so little patience for waiting between weeks or for waiting even between seasons in a more extreme case, that we'll just stockpile, and wait until the season's over and watch it all then. Or wait until it's run its course because, "I don't want to wait between summers. I just want to binge it." So that has negative implications if we're thinking about it from a ratings' standpoint because we're not indicating to the networks or to advertisers that it's popular, that it's being viewed.

Nicki Donnelson: That was Dr. Holly Holladay. I'm Nicki Donnelson for the Missouri State Journal.

Speaker 1: For more information contact the office of University Communications at (417) 836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at KSMU.org.