



RESEARCH PAPER

The Motivation Behind Binge-Watching Practices: Impact on Health in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Many people like binge-watching. It means watching 2-4 episodes in one sitting. Various reasons have led young adults to binge-watch, which has grown very popular. This study's main objective is to check the effects of binge-watching on psychological and physical health. Under the theoretical framework of uses and gratifications, the researchers use a quantitative approach and convenient sampling techniques to collect data from all ages and genders in Pakistan. The online survey was conducted conveniently to collect the sample from the population. Focused on 300 participants, the study received 386 participants. The data indicates binge-watching is driven by Enjoyment, relaxation, escape from boring routines, diversion from stressful events, loneliness relief, parasocial contacts, and cliffhanging episodes. Results show Netflix is the most popular. Furthermore, results conclude that loss of control over content consumption, increased feelings of loneliness, disruption of a healthy sleep cycle, procrastination, and feeling stressed out or anxious are some health impacts that binge-watchers might face in the aftermath of binge-watching. Future Recommendations include the study being done with a qualitative technique for more in depth analysis of effects of binge watching on health.

KEYWORDS Binge-watching, Cliff-Hanging Episodes, Entertainment, Netflix, Relaxation, Uses and Gratification

Introduction

Over the years, technology has developed immensely. There has been a shift from traditional media to digital media. Earlier, the only option available to people for entertainment was TV or DVDs. People had to wait for episodes to come out every week, which has now been challenged by digital streaming platforms that allow people to have access to their desired content all at once (Schweidel & Moe, 2016)

Today's era of media content is ruled by digital streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, etc. These platforms are prevalent among people because of their more accessible accessibility and affordability factor, especially Netflix (Flayelle et al., 2020). Netflix is a digital streaming service owned by an American company that provides access to millions of TV shows, movies, and documentaries. It has almost 167 million active users worldwide. Soon after its release in 2007, it started gaining popularity, and in 2013, it began producing its content. Netflix soon started serialized content, releasing all of the episodes of the series at once. Thus giving birth to a new behavioral phenomenon called binge-watching (Suleman & Zehra, 2021).

Binge-watching is a complex phenomenon, and different critics offer different definitions. Binge-watching is viewing multiple episodes of a suspense thriller for 3, 4, or more hours. Since the coronavirus pandemic hit the world, Netflix saw a vast increase in signups during 2020, with about 16 million users, almost double the number of users in

2019 (Thomas, 2020). Four primary motivations for binge-watching, as highlighted by a study, include anticipating what is coming next, the user's mood, escapism, catching up with friends, or the popularity a particular show has gained (Rubenking et al., 2018).

There has been an increase in binge-watching research suggesting how prolonged exposure could have adverse effects (Flayelle et al., 2019). Binge-watching poses a threat to the well-being of a person due to its addictive nature. It provides a platform that helps individuals escape their reality and dive into a world that seems fascinating to the viewer (Panda & Pandey, 2017). Binge-watching is a hot topic in new media, and it is necessary to explore what it is. Hence, this study was conducted to determine what motivates people to binge-watch. Does it impact individuals who binge-watch regularly in any way? Moreover, the most popular platform among people to binge-watch was also explored.

Literature Review

The binge-watching phenomenon came with the digitalization of media (Sung, Kang, & Lee, 2018). Although sources of entertainment like VCRs, DVDs, and VOD existed before digitalization, certain hindrances did not let people binge-watch. Netflix started as a DVD rental company and became a digital streaming service in 2007. This kickstarted the binge-watching phenomenon as people could watch their favorite series all at once without a commercial break, and with Netflix features like auto-play to the next episode, only with a small monthly subscription fee (Snyder, 2016). Later advances in technological devices (smartphones, tablets) made digital streaming and the phenomenon of binge-watching even more convenient (Sung, Kang, & Lee, 2018)

With digital media streaming platforms, people have complete control over what they want to watch and how many hours they want to spend watching shows or movies. It is not restricted to a specific schedule, which was the case with traditional TV (Bhatti, Khalid, & Khalid, 2022). Such platforms have algorithms (with interconnecting episodes and even seasons) designed to influence users so that even if they intended to watch only one episode, it could turn into three episodes (Sung, Kang, & Lee, 2018).

Binge-watching

When VOD became popular with the rise of Netflix, it made watching back-to-back episodes in a continuous setting more convenient, leading to marathon watching. This phenomenon was soon called "Binge-watching" (De Keere, Thunnissen, & Kuipers, 2020). There are multiple definitions of binge-watching. The most common is Netflix's definition of "watching 2 to 6 episodes in one sitting," or it is also explained as "watching multiple episodes in one sitting" (Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020). For people, Binge-watching is an activity that brings them relaxation. Still, sometimes, it ends with guilt and realizing how much they procrastinated (Chandran, 2021). Some researchers say there is a fine line between binge-watching that is healthy and has no such adverse effects on your health and the one that is unhealthy with so many destructive impacts on both physical and mental health (Flayelle et al., 2020, as cited in Starosta & Wontorczyk, 2021)

The motivation behind binge-watching:

The most common reasons predicted for binge-watching are excitement to view content, social influence, suspense, deeper involvement in content, engagement, and escape (Flayelle et al., 2020). People binge-watch to relax, to have a sense of completion, to feel culturally included, and to improve their viewing experiences (Steiner, Emil, 2018). An analysis revealed that there are four significant motivations for binge-watching: 1) excitement of what's going to happen next, 2) Mood satisfaction, 3) escape from reality, and 4) Social purposes (Rubenking, Bracken, Sandoval, & Rister, 2018)

Social pressure, social engagement, FOMO

People tend to binge-watch if it is popular among their social group. If they are a part of fan groups (Fandom), that can also be a reason for them to binge-watch a particular show. If a show is hyped on the internet, that can also serve as a motivation for people to binge-watch. FOMO is a significant contributor to binge-watching as people want to be a part of the trending discussions, so if it's a show, they quickly try to catch up with the Hype created (Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020)

Escape from reality

When people indulge in binge-watching, they tend to ignore their surroundings as their interests are taken over entirely by the show they watch, serving as a source to escape from reality (Sung, Kang, & Lee, 2018). College students tend to binge-watch to escape from their daily routine (Fernandes & Pinto, 2020)

Boredom/entertainment/knowledge

A study was conducted where a few respondents agreed on binge-watching at workplaces out of boredom (de Feijter, Khan, & van Gisbergen, 2016). Binge-watching is also a source of gaining knowledge, and it is often done when a person seeks pleasure or means to enjoy themselves (Munawar & Siraj, 2022)

Loneliness/parasocial relations

Alfonsi et al. (2022) point out that loneliness is why most individuals seek high-intensity binge-watching sessions. Sometimes viewers binge-watch because of Parasocial interactions, which refers to an association or a relation that viewer develops with a character in the show they are watching (Rubin & McHugh, 1987 as cited in Anghelcev, Sar, Martin, & Moultrie, 2020). Continuous binge-watching means a stronger Para social relationship (Snyder, 2016).

Impact of binge-watching

The most common effects of binge-watching include insomnia, unhealthy lifestyle, fatigue, and impact on social relations (Flayelle et al., 2020a). Excessive binge-watching has specific implications, such as a lack of control, damaged health, guilt, and a lack of motivation to fulfill duties (Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020). A study suggested binge-watching may be related to feelings of depression and loneliness and represents a lack of control among its viewers (De Keere, Thunnissen, & Kuipers, 2020). Studies also suggest that binge-watching is instead an addictive phenomenon (Flayelle, Maurage, et al., 2019)

Depression/anxiety

Research shows that there are signs of depression and fatigue in those who consecutively view multiple episodes of a show (Devasagayam, 2014). The more a person binge-watches, the more significant symptoms of anxiety-depressive syndrome will be seen in him (Starosta, Izydorczyk, & Wontorczyk, 2021).

Loss of control

In a qualitative study, some participants revealed that they often cannot stop themselves once they start binge-watching and often neglect their responsibilities. (Chang & Peng, 2022) like other forms of bingeing, binge-watching also signifies the same level of loss of control.

Sedentary lifestyle, Appetite change, Weight gain

Binge-watching may lead to a sedentary lifestyle, and it is related to weight gain due to all the unhealthy snacking on junk food a person does while binge-watching (Srinivasan, Edward, & Eashwar, 2021).

Insomnia, disruption of the sleep cycle

Binge-watching can worsen a person's sleep cycle and lead to insomnia. A study showed that 81% of binge-watchers had poor sleep quality, almost 86.7% faced trouble falling asleep, and about 88% felt unable to perform their daily activities properly due to binge-watching last night (Srinivasan & Eashwar, 2021).

This study explores the motivation behind Netflix binge-watching among Pakistani users. It also aims to explore the physical and psychological impacts of binge-watching. Until now, minimal research has been done on Pakistani Netflix users, so the researcher aims to explore this aspect. Additionally, very little research has been done on the motivation behind binge-watching and its impact.

Theoretical framework

This study adapted the uses and gratification theory. Uses and gratification scholars are of the view that audience utilizes media to satisfy five needs, i.e., to get information, education, entertainment, improve their social interactions, and escape from reality (Pittman & Sheehan, 2015) People binge-watch to satisfy similar needs, and the relationship between binge-watching and mental health has been explored by many researchers previously and is supported by the Uses and gratification theory (Alimoradi et al., 2022)

Material and Methods

A quantitative study was conducted to identify the intended factors in this research. A questionnaire was administered to the targeted population (Pakistani binge-watchers) through social media platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp. SPSS was used for data analysis. A sample size of 382 people was taken. The respondents were both male/female binge-watchers who were above 18. This research implied a convenient sampling technique.

Reliability

Cronbach's alpha was used on spss software to measure the scale's reliability in the pilot study. The general rule while checking out the value of Cronbach's alpha is that it is good if the value is .70 or above. If the value is .80 and above, it is better; if it is .90 and above, it is excellent. In the case of the pilot study, the value of Cronbach's alpha obtained was .904, which, according to the rules of Cronbach's alpha measurement, is excellent.

Table 1
The reliability of the Questionnaire was measured through Cronbach Alpha

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.904	.900	30

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics of Gender

Gender	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	300	77.7	77.7
Male	86	22.3	100.0
Total	386	100.0	

The results in the table highlight that binge-watching behavior is more common in females (77 % were females) than in males (23%).

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics of Platforms Used for Binge-Watching

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Amazon Prime	4	1.0	1.0
Netflix	235	60.9	61.9
Youtube	147	38.1	100.0
Total	386	100.0	

To summarize the results of the study, the most popular binge-watching platform among individuals is Netflix, as the majority of the respondents, 60.9%, answered that they use Netflix for binge-watching purposes. The results of the question support the study research conducted by (Rubenking, Bracken, Sandoval, & Rister, 2018), where participants associated binge-watching with Netflix.

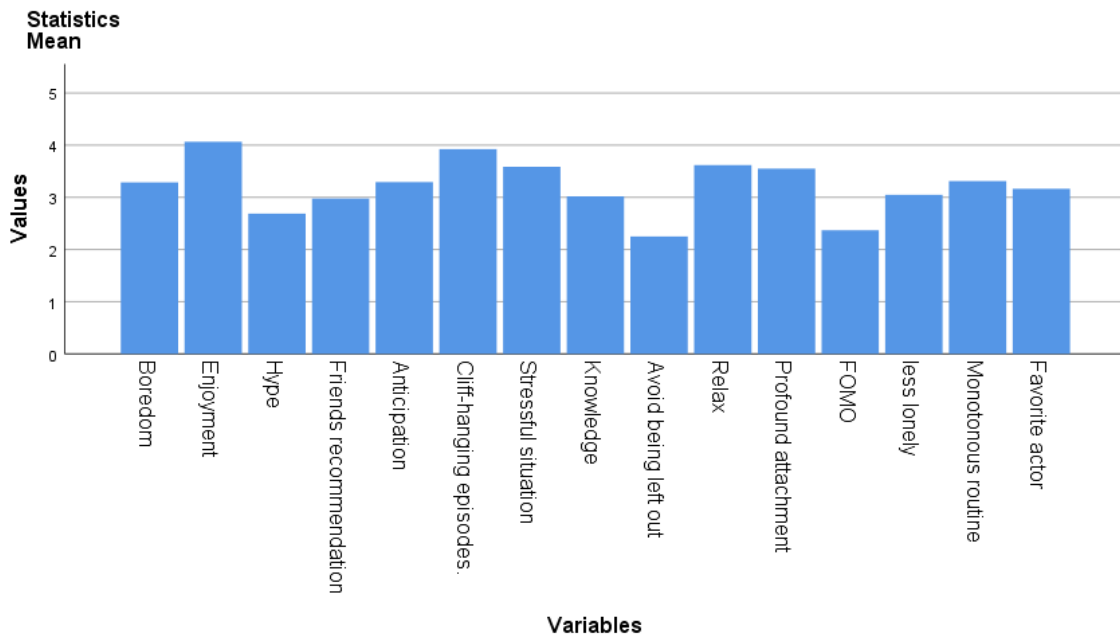


Figure 1 The motivation behind Binge watching

X-axis: Reasons for Binge watching, Y-axis: Values(Strongly disagree= 1 to strongly Agree=5)

The current study revealed that people binge-watch for the gratification of immediate rewards such as Enjoyment, relaxation, and less loneliness. Hence, these two factors could be considered as motivations for binge-watching. Additionally, cliff-hanging episodes, stressful situations, profound attachment to the show's characters, parasocial relationships, and a break from monotonous routine/ escape from reality motivates binge-watching practices.

The results show that for most people, the Hype of a show and FOMO don't motivate binge-watching. The results negate the study conducted by Starosta and Izydorczyk (2020) that people tend to binge-watch to quickly try to catch up with the Hype created regarding the show.

To summarize the explanation concerning the second research question of this study, the prime motivational factors that lead to binge-watching are Enjoyment, relaxation, cliff-hanging episodes, escape from reality or stressful situations, profound attachment with characters of the show or parasocial relations, escape from the monotonous routine and to

feel less lonely. The results reflect that when a person experiences any of the above feelings or intends to handle any of the above feelings, then that person indulges in binge-watching sessions. Furthermore, it is seen that cliff-hanging episodes are a significant motivational factor for people to continue their binge-watching sessions.

This study's third research question, i.e., "What is the impact of binge-watching behavior on health?" The principal motivation of the author behind this question is to find out the possible impact that binge-watching may have on human health so that awareness could be created among Pakistani binge-watchers, as a minimal study has been done on this topic in Pakistan.

Table 4
Correlation between the impact on physical health and no episodes of binge-watched

			Binge Watching	Physical health
Spearman's rho	Binge watching	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.218**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	386	386
	physicalhealth	Correlation Coefficient	.218**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	386	386

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The above table shows that there is a positive relation between the impact on physical health and the number of episodes watched, as the significant value of Spearman's correlation coefficient is .000. This indicates that the more episodes a person watches, the more chances of impact on physical health are there. The value is highly significant.

Table 5
Correlation between the impact on Mental health and no episodes of binge-watched Correlations

		Binge Watching	Mental health
Binge Watching	Pearson Correlation	1	.246**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	386	288
Mentalhealth	Pearson Correlation	.246**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	288	288

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The above table shows that there is a positive relation between the impact on mental health and the number of episodes watched, as the significant value of Spearman's correlation coefficient is .000. This indicates that the more episodes a person watches, the more chances of impact on mental health are there. The value is highly significant.

The results of the study reflect that people believe binge-watching to be an addictive activity. (Devasagayam,2014) Studies also suggest that binge-watching is instead an addictive phenomenon (Flayelle, Maurage, et al., 2019). Furthermore, the survey findings reveal that people agree to lose control over content consumption while binge-watching.

Results show that binge-watching has an impact on individuals' sleep schedules. As concluded in the study of Vinothkumar, M., & George, A.(2022), When a person binge-watches, he compromises on sleep and tends to munch on snacks or unhealthy meals. Sleep is the most critical factor for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. When you start losing a healthy sleep cycle, you automatically welcome severe health-related problems.

The study's respondents did not agree with experiencing unhealthy eating and abrupt weight changes and refuted the study's claim that Binge-watching may lead to a sedentary lifestyle. It is also related to weight gain due to all the unhealthy snacking on junk food a person does while binge-watching (Srinivasan, Edward, & Eashwar, 2021). Additionally, the study points out that respondents do not experience anxiety or depression as an aftermath of binge-watching. The finding of this statement refutes several studies conducted before this work that exhibited a positive relation between binge-watching and issues of anxiety and depression. For instance, a study conducted by Ahmed (2017) claims that High binge-watchers tend to be more depressed than low binge-watchers.

This study shows that binge-watching is not associated with a negative impact on mental health, like anxiety, depression, or low well-being (guilt, low mood, or headaches/migraine). The results suggest that most respondents believe binge-watching makes them procrastinate, and most people strongly agree that they feel stressed out after binge-watching.

To summarize the answer to the question, "What is the impact of binge-watching behavior on health," the study results substantiate that binge-watching has several impacts on human health. This may include loss of control, overconsumption of content, and procrastination, leading to increased stress that eventually impacts mental health. Furthermore, binge-watching has an impact on healthy sleep patterns among binge-watchers. It can also lead to an increased feeling of loneliness. No effect was found on physical health.

Conclusion

Binge-watching refers to the back-to-back consumption of serialized content in one sitting. While binge-watching seems just a source of entertainment, the studies on the phenomenon and the prior literature suggest more. Especially the health implications that revolve around it. The primary reason behind the study was to explore the motivation for binge-watching practices and to find out whether there are any health implications of binge-watching practices concerning Pakistani audiences.

A quantitative study was done to examine the above-stated objectives. First, the platform for binge-watching practices used by Pakistani audiences was explored the most. The results suggest that Netflix is the most used platform for binge-watching purposes by Pakistani audiences. The results of the second question regarding the motivation behind binge-watching practices highlight that people binge-watch to get an immediately rewarding experience. This includes Enjoyment, relaxation, and a means to end loneliness. Cliffhanging episodes, monotonous daily routines, escape from reality, and parasocial relationships motivate binge-watching.

Lastly, the study attempted to determine whether binge-watching practices impact individuals' health, as most of the prior literature covered the health implications of binge-watching. Results reflect the impact of binge-watching on the healthy sleep cycle, increased feelings of loneliness, increase in stress, and anxiety.

The result of this study adds to the literature on binge-watching. This research helps us understand and explore the binge-watching phenomenon in the context of the Pakistani population. This study provides knowledge regarding the motivational factors influencing

behavior among Pakistani binge-watchers. Moreover, it sheds light on the impact of binge-watching on mental and physical health.

Recommendations

Advanced research can be conducted on binge-watching involving comprehensive qualitative research. It may include in-depth interviews and several open-ended questions to get more explanatory results. Other than this, future studies should focus on applying many sample sizes as Due to certain limitations regarding time and resources, this study could not include a larger sample size.

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