

## Binge Watching and Underlying Motivations among Young Adults

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### ABSTRACT

Binge watching has grown in popularity, particularly among millennials, due to the widespread availability of on-demand streaming services. It is defined as the consecutive viewing of multiple TV episodes at one's convenience, enabled by internet-based platforms. A range of motivations can lead individuals to binge watch television content, including entertainment, relaxation, social interaction, escapism, and habit. The primary aim of this study was to examine how motivations for watching TV series are related to binge watching behaviours, with an additional focus on potential gender differences. The study targeted young adults aged 18 to 25 years and employed the Binge-Watching Engagement and Symptoms Questionnaire (BWESQ) and the Watching TV Series Motives Questionnaire (WTMSQ) to measure the relevant constructs. The findings indicated that TV series motivations were significantly and positively associated with binge watching behaviour. Specifically, coping/escapism and social motivations significantly predicted the frequency and intensity of binge watching. Gender differences were also examined, revealing no significant differences in binge watching behaviour overall, although females reported higher scores on emotional enhancement motivations compared to males. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the binge-watching phenomenon and may help identify potential risk factors associated with excessive viewing. Additionally, the results highlight how males and females may differ in their motivations for engaging with TV series, providing insight into gender-specific patterns of binge-watching behaviour.

**Keywords:** *Binge Watching, TV Series Motivations, Young Adults*

The proliferation of technological devices, including laptops, smartphones, iPads, and tablets, along with widespread internet access and the rapid growth of online streaming platforms, has significantly changed how on screen entertainment content is consumed. Prominent online platforms, including Netflix, Disney+ Hotstar, Amazon Prime Video, and Sony Liv, reflect this shift toward on-demand viewing (Shim & Kim, 2018). The conventional model of linear TV viewing has given way to nonlinear and asynchronous consumption patterns that provide viewers with the opportunity to watch what they want, when they want, where they want, on which device they want and for however long they want. This personal autonomy, multi-screen environment and combination of

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affordable and accessible streaming/internet television have given rise to new viewing patterns known as binge watching (Vaterlaus et al., 2019; Jenner, 2016).

The binge watching generally refers to rapid consumption of streaming media content in a shorter span of time. There is still lack of consensus regarding what constitutes binge watching. Some researchers describe it in terms of watching multiple TV episodes consecutively in one sitting (Walton-Pattinson et al., 2016), whereas others focus on the total amount of time spent viewing (Wagner, 2016). Silverman and Ryalls (2016, p.522) defined binge watching as “consuming two or more episodes of a single television series in one sitting” whereas Sachdeva and Priyesh (2023, p: 48) defined binge watching as “watching a series of many episodes in a single setting i.e., when an individual watches 4 to 6 or more episodes for duration of about 3 hours or more without a break in a single setting of the same or different show irrespective of any streaming platform.” These both criteria have been criticized for ignoring other important elements of binge watching behaviour such as viewer autonomy. This research is based on the approach which considers binge watching as the act of viewing multiple episodes of TV content with the help of any internet driven platforms at one's own convenience and pace.

The trend of binge watching is seen in people of all ages however it is more common among college students aged 18-29 years (Weiland, 2021). Different viewpoints exist in previous literature concerning the gender differences in binge watching. Some researchers argue that gender has no effect on binge watching habits (Flayelle, 2020), while others believe that females are more involved in binge watching (Merrill and Rubenking, 2019; Weiland, 2021) and yet another group believes that males are more likely to indulge in this behaviour.

Binge watching behaviour is influenced by a variety of motivational factors, including technological and marketing aspects, audience expectations and needs, and advertising (Castro et al., 2019; Rubenking et al., 2018; Shim & Kim, 2018). These motivations can be examined from multiple perspectives. From a technological and marketing standpoint, viewers may engage in binge watching to satisfy hedonic motives, such as entertainment and enjoyment, or utilitarian motives, such as affordability, perceived control, and easy access to content (Kim & Sundar, 2014; Shim & Kim, 2018). From a psychological perspective, motivations can be categorized as hedonic (entertainment, relaxation, rejuvenation), eudaimonic (information seeking, personal growth), reward-based (sense of completing a series, excitement from plot developments, emotional satisfaction), and compensatory (procrastination, escapism, coping with stress) (Karuza, 2020).

Present research employs user and gratification theory (Katz et al., 1973) in order to understand the underlying motivations of binge watching behaviour. The Uses and Gratifications theory has been widely applied to understand media consumption patterns, including both television and internet use (Gangadharbatla et al., 2019). This framework is also relevant for explaining binge watching behaviour, as it encompasses aspects of both TV viewing and online media engagement. User and Gratification theory explains how individuals use media to satisfy certain needs and achieve personal goals. It is based on assumptions that audiences are active and goal oriented when seeking out media to meet their needs. Binge watching phenomenon fulfils this assumption as it gives viewer the autonomy, control and choice in determining their viewing schedule. This theory explains that people consume media to obtain five types of gratifications such as entertainment & relaxation, information, escapism, social interaction and identification.

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Research on what motivates the individual to binge watch has been thriving in recent times. Pitmann & Sheehan (2015) in their research revealed that various factors motivate people to binge-watch, such as engagement, relaxation, entertainment, passing time, and escape from reality. According to Panda and Pandey (2017) motivations linked to binge watching were social interaction, escape from reality, easy accessibility and advertising effectiveness. Shim & Kim (2018) reported that five motivations lead to binge watching drama series namely enjoyment, efficiency, recommendation by others, fandom and perceived control. Weiland (2020) reported that binge watching behaviour of college students is linked to motivations of social engagement, escapism, and easy accessibility of content and fear of being left out in conversations. Previous research also reveals that males and females differ from each on TV series motivations (Qayyoom & Malik, 2023). Qayyoom and Malik in their research also revealed primary motivations for females to engage in binge watching behaviour was fear of missing out (FOMO) and social interactions whereas for males it was excitement.

Overall, binge watching is becoming a popular new way to consume television content. There are various motivational factors that drive this behaviour. These motivations are similar to the motivations of traditional TV viewing, so further empirical evidence is required to ensure these are also motivations of binge watching as binge watching differs from TV viewing in terms of interactivity (more control), demassification (more choice of content) and asynchronicity (more choice of when to watch). Moreover, there is no clear consensus in studies on gender differences in binge watching and limited research is available on gender variations in motivations for binge watching. Thus, the present study seeks to explore the associations between TV series motivations and binge watching behaviours, with a secondary focus on gender differences.

### *Objectives*

1. To examine the relationship between TV series motivations and binge watching behaviour.
2. To examine the contribution of TV series motivations to the binge watching dimension (behavioural metric) of binge watching behaviour.
3. To examine the gender differences on binge watching behaviour and TV series motivations.

### *Hypotheses*

- **H1:** There will be a significant correlation between the dimensions of TV series motivations (social, emotional enhancement, enrichment and coping/escapism) and the dimensions of binge watching behaviour (engagement, positive emotions, pleasure preservation, desire/savouring, binge watching, dependency and loss of control).
- **H2:** TV series motivations (social, emotional enhancement, enrichment and coping/escapism) will significantly predict binge watching dimension.
- **H3a:** Females will score higher on binge watching behaviour (engagement, positive emotions, pleasure preservation, desire/savouring, binge watching, dependency and loss of control) as compare to males.
- **H3b:** There will be gender differences on TV series motivations (social, emotional enhancement, enrichment and coping/escapism).

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### *Sample*

The study included 80 participants, aged 18 to 25 years ( $M_{Age} = 21.5$  years,  $SD = 2.73$ ) recruited from different colleges in Punjab. Participants were included if they had no history of common mental disorders, had access to the internet, were proficient in its use, understood English, and provided informed consent. The sample comprised of 62% female and 37% male participant. Among the sample, 58% were undergraduates, 30% graduates and 12 % post graduates. 68% of the sample was unemployed while 32 % was employed. 54% of the respondents resides in urban areas whereas 46 % resides in rural areas. The sample was predominantly single, comprising 90% of participants.

### *Measures*

- 1. Binge Watching Engagement and Symptoms Questionnaire (BWESQ; Flayelle et al., 2019):** The BWESQ assesses how actively individuals engage in binge watching and whether their viewing shows signs of problematic patterns. It consists of 40 items divided into seven subscales: engagement, which assess the degree of involvement in TV series watching; positive emotions, reflecting the emotional benefits gained from watching; desire-savoring, which captures the intensity of desire for and appreciation of TV series; pleasure preservation, assessing strategies used to maintain or enhance enjoyment from watching; binge watching, measuring the frequency and intensity of binge viewing; dependency, which indicates difficulty in refraining from watching; and loss of control, representing problematic or compulsive involvement in binge watching. Each subscale's items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree), and average scores are calculated for each subscale, with higher scores reflecting either greater engagement or more problematic binge watching behaviours. According to Flayelle et al. (2019), the subscales demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  ranging from 0.65 to 0.83.
- 2. Watching TV Series Motives Questionnaire (WTMSQ; Flayelle et al., 2019):** WTMSQ is 22 item scale that measures TV series watching motivations with help of four dimensions namely, social (assesses the social aspects of watching TV series, such as discussions with others or bonding over shared shows), emotional enhancement (measures the enhancement of emotional experiences through watching TV series), enrichment (focuses on the intellectual or educational aspects of watching TV series) and coping/escapism (reflects the use of binge watching as a coping mechanism or escape from stress or negative emotions). The items are scored on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 4 (to a great extent), with an average score calculated for each subscale. A higher score on a subscale reflects a greater degree of that specific motivation. Flayelle et al. (2019) obtained acceptable internal consistency for each subscale with  $\alpha$  ranging from 0.64 to 0.79.

### *Procedure*

The data was collected through online survey using Google form link. The online survey consisted of three sections: sociodemographic profile to assess the sample characteristics, questions about binge watching behaviour and questions about TV series motivations. Data was analysed using percentages, t-test, correlation and stepwise regression.

## **RESULTS & DISCUSSION**

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and ranges for all study variables, while Table 2 displays the correlations among them. The relationship between TV series motivations and binge watching was examined with help of Pearson Correlation. The

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findings showed that coping/escape motives showed significant positive correlations ( $r = .34$  to  $.50$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $df = 78$ ) with both non-problematic dimensions like engagement, positive emotions, desire/savouring, pleasure preservation as well as problematic dimensions like binge watching, dependency and loss of control of BWESQ. Escaping from reality, has been acknowledged as a motivation to spend more time doing binge watching among undergraduates (Panda & Pandey, 2017). The engagement in TV series driven by coping/escapism motives on the one hand could provide temporary relief from daily life stressors and thereby allow individuals to relax and experience immediate enjoyment (Rubenking & Bracken, 2018). On the other hand, binge watching as a coping mechanism can be rewarding by providing immediate distraction and pleasure, which may reinforce the behaviour and could facilitate the development of problematic binge watching behaviour (Ort et al., 2021). The enrichment motivation ( $r = .30$  to  $.36$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $df = 78$ ) was positively and significantly associated with non-problematic dimensions namely engagement, desire/savouring, positive emotions, pleasure preservation. The intellectually stimulating or educational content of TV series can result in cognitive stimulation, emotional engagement, and enjoyment thus contributing to positive emotional experiences (Beggs & Elkins, 2010). In relation to problematic dimensions, enrichment motivation showed moderate positive and significant association with binge watching ( $r = .38$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $df = 78$ ), weak positive and significant correlation with dependency ( $r = .23$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $df = 78$ ) and no significant correlation with loss of control. Enrichment seeking viewers not only perceives binge watching as valuable because of educational or intellectual benefits associated with it, but also becomes deeply engrossed in it owing to its content. Previous research also reported that learning and intellectual benefits associated with watching TV series encourages viewers to indulge more in binge watching behaviours (Flayelle, et al., 2019). This enhanced willingness to engage in it could result in prolonged viewing sessions eventually leading to dependency over time. Sussman and Moran (2013) in their study reported that in case of vulnerable individuals TV usage for learning and information seeking purposes could be linked to problematic media use.

The emotional enhancement motives showed significant positive correlations with non-problematic dimensions such as engagement, positive emotions, desire/savouring, pleasure preservation and problematic dimensions namely binge watching, dependency ( $r = .32$  to  $.46$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $df = 78$ ) and loss of control ( $r = .24$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $df = 78$ ). Emotional enhancement seeking viewers could have the desire for emotional connection and binge watching could allow them to explore complex emotions, process feelings, and find catharsis through storytelling. Bartsch (2012) through their research revealed that emotional media experiences lead to not only reward feelings such as positive affect, arousal and empathic sadness but also fulfil individual's cognitive and social needs of meaning and social connectedness. Now, emotional enhancement seeking viewers may also experience emotional responses, such as thrill, anticipation, empathic sadness, or nostalgia which can be addictive in nature leading to increased binge viewing, dependency and loss of control over time. Studies have also found that binge watching behaviour of both unregulated and regulated binge watchers stemmed from emotional enhancement motives (Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020).

Social motivation exhibited positive and significant correlations ( $r = .36$  to  $.54$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $df = 78$ ) with both non-problematic (Engagement, Positive Emotions, Desire/Savouring, Pleasure Preservation) and problematic (Binge Watching, Dependency, Loss of Control) dimensions. Research studies done in past have also shown that social interaction plays a crucial role in motivating individuals to watch TV series (Panda & Pandey, 2017; Pittman & Sheehan,

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2015). Shim and Kim (2018) reported that individuals are more likely to engage in binge watching when influenced by their peers and social networks. Such social interactions around TV series can foster shared enjoyment, discussions, and a sense of connection over common shows, potentially enhancing the overall binge watching experience. Nevertheless, social interactions associated with binge watching can reinforce the behaviour, leading to loss of control and dependency. Studies also found that social interaction motives are linked to problematic viewing behaviours (Ort et al., 2021).

**Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Psychological Variables**

Variable	M	SD	Range
Engagement	2.30	0.58	1-3.5
Positive Emotions	2.53	0.60	1-4.0
Desire/Savouring	2.60	0.62	1-3.8
Pleasure Preservation	2.30	0.68	1-3.6
Binge Watching	2.30	0.60	1-3.6
Dependency	2.23	0.63	1-3.6
Loss of Control	2.23	0.60	1-3.8
Coping/Escapism	2.14	0.67	1-3.8
Enrichment	2.42	0.76	1-3.8
Emotional Enhancement	2.16	0.71	1-3.8
Social	2.00	0.71	1-3.5

Note.  $N = 80$ .

**Table 2 Correlations for Study Variables**

Variables	Coping/Escapism	Enrichment	Emotional Enhancement	Social
Engagement	.50**	.31**	.43**	.54**
Positive Emotions	.47**	.30**	.43**	.36**
Desire/Savouring	.49**	.36**	.46**	.37**
Pleasure Preservation	.44**	.30**	.40**	.45**
Binge Watching	.48**	.38**	.43**	.49**
Dependency	.34**	.23*	.32**	.51**
Loss of Control	.34**	.21	.24*	.44**

Note.  $N = 80$ .

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

A stepwise regression analysis (Table 3) was conducted to predict binge watching, problematic dimension of BWESQ measuring severity of continued viewing based on several predictor variables namely coping/escape, enrichment, emotional enhancement and social motivations. The stepwise selection process resulted in a final model with two predictor variables: coping/escapism and social motivations. This model was statistically significant with  $R^2 = .28$ ,  $F = 14.86$ ,  $p < .001$ . The adjusted  $R$ -square of .28, indicates that 28% of the variance in frequency and intensity of binge watching was explained by the coping/escapism and social motivations. The positive coefficients indicate that as the use of coping/escape and social motives increase, problematic binge watching also increases. Emerging adulthood period is characterized by low parental supervision, high control over personal time and various life challenges like transitioning to higher education, starting careers, forming new relationships and identity formation (Wood et al., 2017). Coping is the

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emotion regulation strategy often used during stressful periods. The young adults could use TV series viewing as way to cope with their daily life stressors to seek temporary relief, relaxation and to rejuvenate oneself. Engaging in TV series watching for coping or escapism purposes might limit the adoption of healthier coping strategies, and overreliance on this behaviour could foster greater binge watching dependency (Flayelle et al., 2020; Panda & Pandey, 2017; Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020). Starosta et al. (2019) in their research reported that escapist motivation was significant predictor of problematic binge watching behaviours. Social TV series motivation refers to the peer influence and social norms that influence one's binge watching behaviour. Young adults may watch many episodes of a TV show in a row if their friends also do so and encourage them to do the same, as they are greatly influenced by their peers. Fernandes and Pinto (2020) also in their study has found that the college students are strongly motivated to binge-watch to gratify their needs of belonging to friends and peer group, escape reality, entertainment and curiosity.

**Table 3 Stepwise Regression Predicting Binge Watching Dimension of BWESQ**

Variable	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p	95% CI
<b>Constant</b>	1.25	.20	-	6.11	.001	[.84, 1.65]
<b>Coping/Escapism</b>	.25	.12	.28	2.13	.03	[.02, .48]
<b>Social</b>	.26	.11	.30	2.33	.02	[.04, .48]

Note.  $N = 80$ .  $R^2 = .28$ ,  $F = 14.86$ ,  $p = .001$ .

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

**Table 4 Gender Differences on Binge Watching Behaviour and TV Series Motivations**

Variables	Males		Females		t (78)	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
<b>Engagement</b>	2.34	0.61	2.28	0.56	0.39	0.69
<b>Desire/Savouring</b>	2.57	0.53	2.61	0.67	0.25	0.80
<b>Pleasure Preservation</b>	2.41	0.72	2.23	0.65	1.13	0.25
<b>Positive Emotion</b>	2.48	0.57	2.56	0.62	0.59	0.55
<b>Binge Watching</b>	2.34	0.64	2.27	0.58	0.49	0.62
<b>Dependency</b>	2.30	0.64	2.18	0.62	0.81	0.41
<b>Loss of Control</b>	2.34	0.69	2.16	0.53	1.25	0.21
<b>Coping/Escapism</b>	2.01	0.61	2.22	0.68	1.39	0.16
<b>Enrichment</b>	2.26	0.74	2.50	0.76	1.31	0.19
<b>Emotional Enhancement</b>	1.94	0.66	2.28	0.71	2.08*	0.04
<b>Social</b>	1.96	0.69	2.02	0.72	0.38	0.70

Note. Results of t tests for Males ( $n = 30$ ) and Females ( $n = 50$ ) are shown.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

An independent samples t-test (Table 4) was conducted to examine gender differences in binge watching behaviour and TV series motivations. The results indicated no significant differences between males and females in their binge watching behaviour. However, mean scores suggest that males tended to score higher than females on most binge watching dimensions, with the exception of desire or savoring and positive emotions. These findings are consistent with previous research, such as Asmael (2018), which reported that men may engage in binge watching more frequently during the week. Additionally, studies indicate that men often prefer science fiction and fantasy series, which provide cognitive stimulation and may encourage longer viewing sessions, whereas women are more likely to watch comedy and drama, which can lead to emotional fatigue and necessitate breaks from viewing

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(Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020). Thus, these differences may be explained by gender-based preferences for specific genres as well as variations in technology access and content availability between males and females. Further t-test revealed significant gender differences on emotional enhancement TV series motivation with females coming high on emotional enhancement motives in comparison to males. The plausible explanation for these findings is that females might be interested in watching TV content that offers emotional depth and enhances their emotional experiences as females tend to be more expressive and open about their emotions compared to males. Moreover, females may be socialized to value emotional expression and empathy, so these emotional needs could motivate them to engage in binge watching. A study by Starosta et al. (2019) also reported that women often seem to seek emotional support by watching TV series.

### CONCLUSION

There is positive association between motivations for watching TV series and binge watching behaviour and coping/escapism and social motives were significant predictors of severe binge watching behaviour. There were also no notable gender discrepancies in binge watching behaviour, although females were high on emotional enhancement TV series motivations as compare to males. Further exploration on TV series motivations is warranted to understand the unexplained variance. The gender differences should also be explored further in light of preference for different genres by genders and in terms of availability of technology and content.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

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