Factors Motivating Binge-Watching of TV Series Among College Students

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Abstract

The rapid growth of Internet-based TV companies has transformed the way of video consumption. Internet-Based TV companies are releasing an entire series of programmes at once, which leads consumers to watch the TV series at once or three to four episodes at one sitting. This phenomenon gained popularity due to the development of platforms such as Netflix, Hulu, HBO GO, Amazon Prime, Disney+, and Apple TV (Winland, 2012). Students are spending less time devoted to academic pursuits. Research studies have indicated that students are heavily distracted from their academic pursuits due to binge-watching, with many students spending almost 8 hours per week on binge-watching. Based on an extensive literature review, a glaring gap was noticed in assessing binge-watching behaviour among Indian students. Hence, the paper aims to explore various factors that influence college students' attitudes towards binge-watching. The study is grounded on four different stimuli that influence Binge-watching: enjoyment, escapism, social influence, and convenient access.

Design/Methodology/Approach

The present study is a descriptive research design. Quantitative methods were used for the collection and analysis of data. A structured questionnaire based on pre-validated scales was used as a research instrument. The respondents were from the student community across India. Analysis was based on correlation and multiple regression analysis.

Originality

The paper significantly contributes to the understanding of factors influencing binge-watching attitudes among students in India. There is a huge dearth of literature concerning binge-watching in India.

Findings

The findings of the study indicate that escapism, enjoyment greatly motivate students to spend more time binge-watching. As per the survey, we found out that college students don’t binge-watch because of convenient access and social influence.

Keywords: Binge-Watching, Escapism, TV Series, College Students, Motivation, Enjoyment
Introduction

Over-The-Top (OTT) video streaming services that offer direct streaming services to the viewers have been gaining popularity throughout the world in the past years. OTT video platform is witnessing a substantial rise in the video on demand compared to traditional video. As per the latest, ‘Entertainment Goes Online’ by the Boston Consulting Group, revenue from the platform have seen a CAGR of over 40% for the period 2005-2017 and are expected to grow by 20% in the period 2017-2023 (Boston, 2020). There are many digital platforms and formats offering video content to internet users which contribute to internet video traffic, which is the primary driver (nearly 75%) of the total internet traffic (Cisco, 2019). Much of this exponentiating video traffic is being fuelled by a few OTTS commercial video service providers such as YouTube, Amazon, etc. (Global Phenomena Report, 2013)

People spend longer amounts of time viewing media individually as one-person households become more prevalent due to shifts in societal conditions. Over-the-top (OTT) media services have also contributed to the changes in the media viewing paradigms of audiences around the world. (BEREC, 2016)

Viewers are no longer limited to the traditional patterns of watching TV. They are no longer required to wait a week for a new episode of a series to be broadcasted. Viewers are in complete control in the new model of audio-visual content consumption, as may be observed in behaviour such as binge-watching (Rui, 2000). Binge-watching indicates the consumption of multiple episodes of a series or the viewing of several movies in a single sitting (Shim, 2018).

According to a Survey indicates the consumption of multiple episodes of series or the viewing of several movies in a single sitting (Shim, 2018). Accordingly, participants reported binge-watching 2.94 episodes (SD=2.23) for 2.51h (SD =2.23) and 1.42 days (SD=1.42) in a week. Accordingly, the present study defines binge-watching as the consumption of more than two episodes of the same binge TV show in a single sitting (Walton-Pattison, 2018).

Binge-watching is a phenomenon that became popular recently (Schweidel, 2016) and the frequency of consumption have been increased drastically in the last decade (Netflix, 2013) and (Neilsen, 2013) but there is very little academic research on the subject. Much remains to be explored about the binge-watching phenomenon in terms of motivation and viewing behaviour. And there is way less study on college students who form a significant portion of the consumers engaging in binge-watching (Chaudhary, 2014). It’s been found that nine of ten college students use Netflix regularly and binge-watch television shows (Solis, 2014).

The main purpose of this study is to explore the pre-binge motivation that influences college students to spend more time binge-watching. Therefore, the key research question is as follows: What is the motivation that influences college students to binge-watch?

We discuss the theoretical background of the binge-watching phenomenon and hypothesize the relationship in the subsequent section, follows by the method and results, discussion, conclusion, limitation and future research direction.

Literature Review

Binge-Watching Motivation

The most studied psychological condition of binge-watching is the motivation that drives people to binge-watch. Uses and Gratification Theory is the most referred theory that explains that individuals use media such as the internet, television, and social media to satisfy their needs. There are many reasons to binge-watch and instant gratification and hedonistic needs related to entertainment, engagement, and relaxation are reasons why people binge-watch. (starosta, 2020) and (Izydorczyk. B, 2020). People who are driven by hedonistic and obsessive motivations seek instant gratification and would probably end up binge-watch.
A study conducted by (Hongjin Shin, 2018) states the relationship between attitudes toward binge-watching and the extent of binge-watching and the role of viewers’ personality traits. The study found that there was a positive association between viewers’ negative attitudes and the extent of their binge-watching, showing a signature indicator of attitude-discrepant behaviours. Another study (Starosta, 2019) focuses on psychological conditions of the phenomenon of binge-watching. The study characterizes the frequency and motivation to perform binge-watching in a group of young adults. The conducted analysis revealed a significant association between the high frequency of binge-watching and escape motivation. There are some relations with various motivations and frequency of binge-watching with risk factors for behavioural addiction. On further research, a study (Yoon Hi Sung, 2018) expanded the definition and motivations for binge-watching behaviour. It says that in addition to the number of episodes, the amount of time spend, frequency of binge-watching, and engagement in binge-watched programs were considered to define Binge-watch.

**Escapism**

Escapism is assumed to be the bad aspect of Media Consumption and it has been defined as a psychological strategy employed by individuals to distract from real-life problems (Gabbiadni et al., 2021) and has long been considered a major motivation for television viewing behaviour. Others used the same mechanism to help them escape boredom or to pass time. This is why young people represented in the research tend to binge-watch during their weekends, sometimes even by sacrificing their social life (Setianto, 2020).

Binge-watching is believed to be a way to escape from reality to gain temporary psychological comfort. Researchers (Greene, 2017; Bull, 1991 and Penna, 2015) have claimed that the gratification of escapism is one of the primary motivations of binge-watching by the younger generation. (Matrix, 2014) Young Individuals consider binge-watching an effective way to escape from reality because it promotes transportation experiences (Wagner, 2016), thus avoiding, at least temporarily, the negative emotions caused by various other reasons. Hence, we can consider that escapism is one of the main factors, among others. However, no study has attempted to find the relationship between escapism and the content of the programme. a (Peña, 2015), Researchers should more to which viewers become absorbed or lost in the content they binge. There is a research gap on factors motivating escapism and taking the easy route of ignorance and do binge-watching.

**Social Influence**

The motivation for binge-watching can be social. It has been found that many people binge-watch to make social connections, to be part of the group or fandom, to feel accepted by their peers[4,5]. A study conducted by Shim and Kim [6] shows that people tend to get the motivation to binge-watch more when it is recommended by others.

To avoid feeling excluded or left out while having conversations among their social groups, they spend their time binge-watching. Binge-watching for a longer period is considered normal and they imitate their friends and peer groups. They receive recommendations, pointers and feedback about TV shows that contributes to their binging behaviour. The User & Gratification (U&G) framework proposes social engagement as a key factor contributing to TV viewing behaviour (Katz et al., 1973). This particular finding supports the U&G framework and extends the finding to binge-watching across video streaming websites as well (McQuail, 2010).

**Enjoyment**

Enjoyment is a predominant motivation predicting the use of media and this variable is more like an incentive for binge-watching. Entertainment shows and dramas are the primary content consumed...
for the entertainment offered by the OTT platforms. Dopamine, a neurotransmitter is also known as the happy hormone is released in the brain while binge-watching. When dopamine is released, it creates a feeling of pleasure and helps people to relax and relieve stress. It was concluded that it was not the show that binge-watchers are craving, what made them keep on watching episodes after episodes were the feeling of pleasure they get from the constant release of dopamine. Thus the body becomes addicted and finds it hard to discriminate against pleasure. Individuals who achieve enjoyment gratification by binge-watching may obtain a positive emotional boost and form attitudes toward binge-watching. Finishing a series can give viewers the feeling of control and power, which can be beneficial to boost their mood.

People experienced feeling drained out and sad when they reach the end part of their favourite series or drama and the reason behind it is because our body realises that the dopamine production has been cut off and we don’t feel as happy as we did before. Incidentally, that’s exactly why streaming services suggest similar shows for us to watch immediately after we finished watching one.

**Convenient Access**

There are various platforms available like TV, a phone, a tablet, a computer, a laptop or even many streaming websites like Netflix, Hulu and Amazon Prime where people can easily access and binge-watch the content they desire. All these are possible due to the unique type of viewing which is largely based on the availability of streaming TV services, which depends on capabilities to house streaming technology and relatively new ways of distributing television content. These technological advances have changed the way of viewing TV content and have largely contributed to the decline in traditional television viewing, such as appointment viewing. Appointment viewing refers to the act of an individual set aside time to watch television content as it airs live (Conlin et al. 2016). Appointment viewing has become an inconvenient way of viewing television for many individuals as they are busy with other tasks when the content is airing live. Thus, individuals are engaging in binge-watching more than ever because it allows individuals to watch lots of television content when they please and the new video streaming platforms are helping viewers to access the content anytime they desire. Individuals are starting to value their paid streaming services more than their cable services (Deloitte 2016), and more people are binge-watching than appointment viewing (Hallinan and Striphas, 2016). Video streaming services allow individuals helps to not only lose control of the frequency of their binges, but also the duration of their binges. Petersen (2016) interviewed college students that regularly binge-watch television and reported being immersed in television content and often losing track of time when binge-watching. The participants further said that the automatic continuation options in these streaming services like Netflix, Hulu make them more immersed in the binge-watching rituals. These streaming platforms have used the persuasion technique which will eventually make the viewers continue easily to another episode as opposed to stopping the binge-watching experience. Binge-watching is gaining popularity among young people, primarily due to the availability of various types of video content on the internet and due to the increase of the internets’ accessibility and availability across the world. The key point of binge-watching is to let the viewers have full control over their viewing behaviour (Susanno et al., 2019). One of the reasons is their busy lifestyle, young people are unable to adapt to “appointment viewing” which make it increasingly difficult for young people to sit in front of the television and wait for their favourite series to be played at a particular time. Rather, they prefer to watch all of their favourite episodes one after the other whenever they find some free time. Taking advantage of the particular situation content providers came up with different methods to make the viewer indulge in the behaviour of binge-watching. They are: (i) releasing the entire season in one go;
(ii) ending every episode on a cliffhanger to keep viewers hooked (Dhanuka & Bohra, 2019). A study by Schweidel and Moe (2016) revealed that the majority of viewers are more used to online video streaming compared to traditional broadcast channels. Back in the day, viewers are used to watching shows by following the schedule and sequence given by the broadcaster one series each week. Now, with the advancement of technology, online movie platform provides viewers with more control because they can create their schedule through Video-OnDemand (Littleton, 2014). The pattern of media consumption is changed according to the needs of the consumers. Netflix as one of the subscriber-based companies has been releasing several episodes at the same time and it increased the demand for VOD on an international scale. The OTT format enables varied ways of viewing content with cost and time efficiencies along with compatibility with multiple devices offered because of the advances in telecommunications technology like family subscription, access to two or more devices from a single account holder, etc.

Hypotheses Development

Summarising the literature review on pre-binge, this study focuses on 3 socio-cognitive motivations (Social influence, Enjoyment and Escapism) and one marketing reason (convenient access) for spending more time binge-watching. We believe that understanding the binge-watching phenomenon among college students is important because technology usage is very high among this generation. Students are continuously spending their time binge-watching rather than focusing on their academic goals and daily routine making the internet an essential part of their life.

Students tend to watch TV series that/her friend suggest his watch. In certain cases, students watch a particular TV show just to be part of a group. It is also possible for college students to binge-watch because of the easy access to content. In this regard, the price might be another factor, the Subscriptions fee that the platforms are charging are not much and students can easily afford it out of their pocket money. As discussed, earlier students used to spend their time Binge-watching to escape from their daily responsibilities, life problems which are their reality. They binge-watch because they enjoy doing it and it’s their way of spending their own quality time.

Under the goal of the research, we have built up a relationship between binge-watching and the considered variables. We have hypothesized that

- $H_1$: Enjoyment influences college students’ attitude toward Binge-watching.
- $H_2$: Social Influence motivates college students’ attitudes toward Binge-watching.
- $H_3$: Escapism positively motivates college students’ attitudes toward Binge-watching.
- $H_4$: Convenient Access positively motivates college students’ attitudes toward Binge-Watching.
- $H_5$: Attitude towards binge-watching is influenced by education levels.

Research Methodology

The current study mainly aimed to evaluate motivating factors that motivate College Students to Binge-watch. The study followed a mixed design both exploratory and descriptive design for this objective. The study demanded a heterogenous respondent sample that represents the characteristics of a general population. For this reason, the study initially followed a snowball technique to collect data using WhatsApp, Instagram, Emails, Personal meetings, Facebook and Phone calls. Structured Questionnaires were sent to students across various parts of the country. A request was made to forward the questionnaire to their known people after completing the sent Questionnaire. However, the procedure only obtained only 220 filled responses usable for analysis.
Research Instrument

The study listed 4 possible motivation factors that motivate college students to Binge-watch. The survey started with some questions that gathered the demographic information of the respondents. Respondents were asked to rate the reason based on their opinion. Some of these questions were adapted from existing and developed scales in the mark (Schweidel, 2016) literature. Scale items for measuring the constructs were developed based on the word-association study from the first stage and existing literature. Scale items for measuring social influence, enjoyment was motivated by (McQuail, 2010). Items for measuring escape were developed based on (Greenberg, 1974). Accessibility was based on (Ruggiero, 2000), and attractive pricing was based on (Solis, 2014). Items for positive gratification and negative gratification were developed from the word association exercise conducted in the first stage. Words such as “enjoyment” and “relaxation” were clubbed under positive gratification and “anxious” “guilty” and “tired” was clubbed under negative gratification. These 4 items were measured on a Likert’s Scale of 1-5 with 1 as ‘strongly disagree’ and 5 as `strongly agree.

| Construct                  | Author and Year | No. of items |
|----------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Attitude to Binge-watching | Schweidel, 2016 | 3            |
| Social Influence           | McQuail, 2010   | 6            |
| Enjoyment                  | McQuail, 2010   | 3            |
| Escapism                   | Greenberg, 1974 | 4            |
| Convenient Access          | Ruggiero, 2000  | 4            |

Source: Literature Review

The Research Model

This study examines four motivating variables (Enjoyment, Escapism, convenient-access and social influence) as factors on users’ attitudes towards binge-watching. The research model for the present study based on the hypotheses listed is illustrated in Figure 1.

![Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework or the Research Model](http://www.shanlaxjournals.com)

Result and Analysis

First, data were cleaned and participants who straight-lined to complete the survey were removed from the dataset. In addition, respondents who provided subpar answers such as nonsense words in the open entry text question at the end were also eliminated from the sample. In all, this process of data cleaning resulted in a total of N=107 valid completed responses after eliminating speeders, straight-liners and other sources of corrupt data.
All of the respondents provided their demographic information. The breakdown of the sample was 57% female and 43%, male. The median age was 20 with a range of 17-28 years. 10.3% of them were from post-graduation and 89.7% being under-graduate.

Out of 107 samples, 90.7% of the sample stated that they watch TV series and 9.3% of them don’t watch TV series. Out of that 90% who watch TV series 76.6% of them Binge-watch and 23% don’t Binge-watch. 77.6% of the respondent Binge-watch only a particular TV series while the remaining 22.4% don’t watch only a particular TV series.
When asked about how often they Binge-watch 57% of them watch only when they are free, 21.5% only during holiday, 1.9% of them watch every alternate day, 6.5% of them binge-watch regardless of their routine and 13.1% of them don’t Binge-watch at all.

Based on the descriptive statistics in table 2, it is evident that the standard deviation for enjoyment and escapism was the highest. Initially, a standard deviation of attitude towards binge-watching was the highest, however, an item in the measurement scale had to be excluded owing to low reliability as a result of which the standard deviation of the variable also improved. The mean values were highest for the variables of enjoyment and escapism.

### Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

| Variables          | N    | Minimum | Maximum | Mean    | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------|------|---------|---------|---------|----------------|
| Binge attitude     | 107  | 1.00    | 5.00    | 2.7882  | .9320          |
| Social Influence   | 107  | 1.00    | 5.00    | 2.0421  | 1.081          |
| Enjoyment          | 107  | 1.00    | 5.00    | 3.6075  | 1.173          |
| Escapism           | 107  | 1.00    | 5.00    | 3.1986  | 1.131          |
| Convenient-access  | 107  | 1.00    | 5.00    | 3.0047  | .906           |
| Valid N (list-wise)| 107  |         |         |         |                |

**Source:** Research Survey Data

Based on Cronbach’s alpha, it is evident that all the constructs are above the acceptable value of 0.6 (Hulin et al., 2001).

### Table 3: Reliability Statistics: Cronbach’s Alpha

| Variables                      | Cronbach’s Alpha | No. of items |
|--------------------------------|------------------|--------------|
| Attitude towards binge-watching| .634             | 3            |
| Social Influence               | .940             | 6            |
| Enjoyment                      | .963             | 3            |
| Escapism                       | .892             | 4            |
| Convenient Access              | .715             | 4            |

Multiple regression analysis was used to assess the impact of independent variables on the dependent variable. Based on the model summary in table 4 it is evident that 16.6 per cent of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variables.

### Table 4: Model Summary: Regression Analysis

| Model | R       | R square | Adjusted R Square | Std. An error of the Estimate |
|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| 1     | .407a   | .166     | .133              | .86792                       |

a. Predictors: (constant), convenient access, social influence, escapism, enjoyment.

**Source:** Research Survey Data

### Table 5: ANOVA

| Model     | Sum of squares | df | Mean Square | F     | Sig   |
|-----------|----------------|----|-------------|-------|-------|
| Regression| 15.253         | 4  | 3.813       | 5.062 | 0.001b|
| Residual  | 76.835         | 102| .735        |       |       |
| Total     | 92.087         | 106|             |       |       |

a. Dependent Variable: Binge attitude
b. Predictors: Convenient Access, Social influence, Escapism, Enjoyment

**Source:** Research Survey Data
Table 6 gives the beta values, escapism has the strongest effect on attitude towards binge-watching followed by social influence. Of all the four variables considered, only social influence and escapism were statistically significant. Hence we accept, H1 and H3. We reject the hypotheses H2 and H4. The table also indicates that there is no multicollinearity between the variables.

| Model            | Unstandardized Coefficients | Standardized Coefficients | t      | Sig.  | Collinearity Statistics |
|------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------|-------|-------------------------|
|                 | B  | Std. Error | Beta  |       | Tolerance | View   |
| (constant)       | 1.564 | .354 | 4.417 | 0.00  |           |        |
| Social-influence | .178 | .83  | .207  | 2.135 | .035      | .874   | 1.144  |
| Enjoyment        | -0.072 | .104 | -.091 | -0.694 | .489      | .476   | 2.103  |
| Escapism         | .304 | .107 | .369  | 2.839 | .005      | .485   | 2.062  |
| Convenient Access| .050 | .107 | .048  | .461  | .705      | .750   | 1.334  |

**Source:** Research Survey Data

To assess if the level of education impacts the attitude towards binge-watching one-way ANOVA was used. Table 7 provides the results of one way ANOVA. The results indicated that there was no difference in the attitude towards binge-watching between UG and PG students.

| Model            | Sum of squares | df | Mean Square | F    | Sig   |
|------------------|----------------|----|-------------|------|-------|
| Between Groups   | 0.553          | 1  | 0.553       | 0.635| 0.428 |
| Within Groups    | 91.534         | 105| .872        |      |       |
| Total            | 92.087         | 106|             |      |       |

c. Dependent Variable: Binge attitude
d. Predictors: Convenient Access, Social influence, Escapism, Enjoyment

**Source:** Research Survey Data

**Conclusion**

The study in its attempt to explore the motivation behind college students’ binge-watching revealed that Escapism followed by social influence has positively impacted binge-watching patterns. The finding that escapism social influence impacts binge-watching is in line with the past research (Wang, 2019; Gangadharbatla et al., 2020.)

**Limitations and Scope for Future Research**

The sample size of this paper is relatively small and the data is not diversified. Vast research is required which is time-consuming. This research focuses only on TV series and not gaming and audio services. Our study is greatly affected by the covid19 pandemic as many students have developed the habit of binge-watching during the pandemic. A previous study (Auverset, 2016) reported that other people engage in binge-watching due to FoMO from their social groups, that is, people binge-watch to mingle with others. Thus, to fully understand the correlation between social influence and binge-watching, more research is needed to examine specific stimuli for binge-watching.
Our study focuses more on the urban population thus it can’t be generalised among rural populations. More research is required to understand the post-gratification after binge-watching and the effects of binge-watching on their student’s career and their health. Further research can also consider the price sensitivity of students in rural and urban areas. Also, OTT gaming and Audio platforms can be studied.

**Implications of the Study and Recommendations**

Managerially, this study will help the management to get an insight into the various motivation that motivates college students to binge-watch. They can prepare themselves better for the future and improve the OTT platform to accommodate students’ choices. Economically, this study will help traditional network operators to rethink their business and investments that are needed in Fiber-based-infrastructure.

The outcomes of the present study strongly recommend that OTT providers should examine their viewers’ psychological states and consider aspects such as addiction and loneliness to understand segmented consumer needs and viewing patterns.

Recommendation to OTT’s platform
- OTT platforms can add other interactive features on their application such as video calling, chatting and watching with friends.
- Bundling with telecom operators – OTT platforms can also partner with telecom operators such as Jio, Airtel and bundle their offering in their recharge plan.

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