

The Relationship between Binge Watching and Loneliness among Youth

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Abstract

Binge-watching can be defined as the act of consuming multiple episodes or an entire season of a television series in a single sitting or over a short period of time. The term "binge-watching" gained popularity with the advent of digital streaming platforms, where viewers have easy access to a vast library of TV shows and can watch them at their convenience.

This study aimed to explore the relationship between binge watching and loneliness among youth in Kottayam District, Kerala State of India. A sample of 60 youth having binge watching behaviour aged 18 to 25 was collected using snowball sampling method. The 11-item De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale and the Binge-Watching Addiction Questionnaire were used to collect data through an online survey.

Results showed that 78.3% of the respondents were moderately lonely, and 58.3% exhibited high binge-watching behaviour. A significant positive correlation ($r = 0.304$, $p < 0.05$) was found between binge watching and loneliness, suggesting that excessive binge watching might be associated with increased feelings of loneliness among youth.

Gender-based analysis revealed no significant statistical difference in binge watching behaviour ($p = 0.561$) or loneliness ($p = 0.217$) based on gender. Hence, gender did not play a significant role in influencing binge watching or loneliness among the participants. Overall, this study highlights the growing prevalence of binge watching among youth and sheds light on its potential consequences, particularly in terms of loneliness. Understanding these associations can aid policymakers, educators, and mental health practitioners in promoting healthier media consumption habits and supporting youth in maintaining positive social connections. Further research involving diverse age groups and different regions is recommended to gain a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon.

Introduction

The advent of digital streaming platforms has revolutionized television consumption, giving rise to the phenomenon of binge-watching. Binge-watching is defined as the practice of watching multiple episodes or an entire season of a TV series in one sitting, and it has become increasingly widespread, particularly among younger audiences (Jenner, 2017). This shift in media consumption habits has been facilitated by the occurrence of Video-on-Demand (VoD) services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Hulu, which have transformed the entertainment landscape by offering viewers unprecedented control over their content consumption (Brandon, 2020).

The rise of VoD platforms has led to a drop in traditional TV viewership and an increase in cord-cutting behaviours (Jenner, 2018). Netflix, the leading streaming service, claims over 204 million global subscribers, a number that has seen significant growth during the COVID-19 pandemic as people spend

extra time streaming content (Barney, 2020). This gush in binge-watching behaviour has prompted researchers to examine its potential impacts on psychological well-being, particularly among youth.

Existing literature has identified various motivators for binge-watching, including its use as a coping mechanism for loneliness and a means of diversion from everyday life (Flayelle et al., 2019). Personality traits such as lack of self-control, high impulsivity, high neuroticism, and low conscientiousness have been identified as potential interpreters of binge-watching behaviours (Tukachinsky & Eyal, 2018). Moreover, studies have found a positive association between binge-watching and loneliness, suggesting that individuals may engage in this behaviour to alleviate feelings of isolation (Dixit et al., 2020).

However, the relationship between binge-watching and psychological well-being is complex. While it may serve as a temporary coping mechanism, extreme binge-watching has been linked to adverse effects on both physical and mental health. These include insomnia, exhaustion, sedentary lifestyle, neglect of tasks, and reduced social relationships (Chang & Peng, 2022). Furthermore, binge-watching has been associated with psychological issues such as stress, depression, attention deficits, and mood swings, mainly among individuals undergoing loneliness (Starosta et al., 2021).

The concept of loneliness, defined as a subjective feeling of social isolation or lack of meaningful social connections, has been a significant focus in relation to binge-watching behaviour. Loneliness has been associated with increased morbidity, mortality, cognitive decline, and other adverse health outcomes (Peplau, 2009). The loneliness model proposed by Cacioppo (2009) suggests that perceived social isolation prompts a state of hypervigilance for social threats and negative cognitive biases, propagating feelings of loneliness and leading to adverse health behaviours.

Even though previous studies have shed light on the linking between binge-watching and loneliness, there are still a number of unanswered questions in the field. Further research is needed to define the precise mechanisms through which binge-watching may affect social contacts and feelings of loneliness. Secondly, the directionality of the relationship is not fully understood: does excessive binge-watching contribute to feelings of loneliness, or does loneliness lead to increased binge-watching? In conclusion, further investigation is necessary regarding the lasting consequences of binge-watching on mental health, specifically with regards to younger generation. In light of these gaps in the literature, the current study tries to answer the following research questions: How common is binge-watch among young people? Does it significantly correlate with feelings of loneliness among young people? Does binge-watch differ depending on the gender of the young person?

The study's theoretical foundation is the uses and gratifications theory, which holds that people actively select media to fulfil particular needs or desires (Katz et al. 1973). This framework helps to explain why young people might binge watch to pass the time when they're bored or lonely. Furthermore, the study examines how exposure to idealized depictions of relationships and social interactions in media content may exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and social disconnection in young people by drawing on the social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954). This study looks at the association between binge-watching and youth loneliness in an effort to add to the growing body of research on the psychological effects of contemporary media consumption habits. As they develop strategies to support youth psychological health in an increasingly digital environment and promote responsible media consumption, mental health professionals, educators, and legislators will be greatly impacted by the findings.

Rationale of the study:

The growing popularity of binge-watch as a recreational activity is the driving force behind this investiga-

tion into the connection between loneliness and binge-watch behaviour among young people. Long stretches of time spent alone in front of a screen during binge-watch can reduce opportunities for in-person social interactions, which are vital for overcoming loneliness. Moreover, excessive media consumption can lead to improper social comparisons, which impairs loneliness. Understanding the effects of binge-watch on mental health is important for creating interventions that support young people's strong social networks and balanced media consumption as the behaviour becomes more common. Researchers can add to the body of knowledge on the effects of media on mental health by investigating the association between loneliness among youngsters and binge watch behaviour. Policymakers, educators, and mental health professionals can use the findings to guide the development of interventions and strategies that encourage media consumption habits that are balanced, reduce the potential risks associated with binge watch, and assist young people in establishing positive social networks.

Specific objectives of the study were to determine the prevalence of binge-watch behaviour among young adults, to assess the levels of loneliness experienced by young adults, to examine the relationship between binge-watch behaviour and loneliness among young adults and also to investigate potential gender differences in binge-watch behaviour and loneliness among the respondents.

Hypotheses of the Study were:

1. There is no significant correlation between the frequency of binge-watching and levels of loneliness among young adults.
2. There is no significant difference in levels of loneliness between male and female young adults.
3. There is no significant difference in the frequency of binge-watching between male and female young adults.

Method: The study used a descriptive research design to systematically describe binge watching and loneliness in adolescents. Additionally, this study focuses on the connection between binge watching and loneliness. A quantitative research approach was chosen to conduct the study. For the study, the researchers used the snowball sampling method. The study included adolescents with binge-watching behaviour in Kottayam district, Kerala state of India, aged between 18 and 25 years. The data was collected using an online survey from 60 adolescents with binge-watching behaviour. The researcher used the questionnaire method and the data collection tool was De Jong Gierveld's 11-item loneliness scale in Loneliness and Binge-Watching Addiction Questionnaire (BWAQ).

Results:

Male respondents make up 70% of the sample, while female respondents make up 30%.

The percentage of respondents who report being somewhat lonely is 78.3%; those who report being extremely lonely are 16.7%; and those who report being least lonely are 5%.

Extent of Binge Watching Behaviour: 58.3% of the respondents have high binge watching behaviour, 6.7% of the respondents have moderate binge-watching behaviour, 10% have extreme binge-watching behaviour and five percent have low binge watching behaviour.

Association between Binge Watching and Loneliness

Table 1
Pearson Coefficient of correlation test

Variable	n	M	SD	r	p
Loneliness	60	22.52	5.14367	.304**	.018
Binge Watching	60	9.92	3.59044		

Table 1 shows the mean score of loneliness is 22.5167. The mean score of binge watching is 9.9167. The ‘p’ value obtained is .018 which is less than .05 so there exists a significant association between binge watching and loneliness. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected.

Difference in Binge Watching Based on Gender

Table 2

Gender	Male		Female		t (58)	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Binge Watching	9.74	3.26892	10.33	4.32503	-.585	.561

The Table depicts out of 60 participants 42 participants are male and 18 participants are female, even though the mean score of males is 9.7381 and the mean score of females is 10.3333. The ‘p’ value obtained is .561 which is greater than .05 so there exist no significant statistical difference in binge watching behaviour of youth based on gender. Hence, we fail to reject the null hypothesis. Gender does not influence binge watching.

Difference in Loneliness Based on Gender

Table 3

Gender	Male		Female		t (58)	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Loneliness	21.98	5.021913	23.78	5.33088	-1.249	.217

Table 3 depicts even though the mean score of males is 21.9762 and the mean score of females is 23.7778. The ‘p’ value obtained is .217 which is greater than .05 so there exists no significant statistical difference

in loneliness of youth based on gender. Hence, we fail to reject the null hypothesis. Gender of the participants is not a causative factor for loneliness.

DISCUSSION

The interpretation was developed based on the empirical data from studies scrutinising the relationship between binge-watching behaviour and loneliness among youngsters. Studies show a positive relationship between binge-watching and loneliness, signifying that feelings of loneliness tend to increase along with binge-watching behaviour. In certain studies, possible intervening factors can be found that help explain the association. Excessive binge-watching can lead to spending less time on other social activities or social interactions, which can increase feelings of loneliness (Kilic, 2020). Although most studies link binge-watching with increased levels of loneliness, it is important to consider the possibility of reverse causality. The results also suggest that there are no statistically significant differences in loneliness and binge-watching habits among young people by gender.

Implications

The results of this study demonstrate the necessity of developing youth-focused intervention programmes. The social work practice, policy development, research, and social work education are all meaningfully impacted by this study.

Social work practice: Social workers can use the study's findings in social case work practice, to assess their clients' media consumption patterns, especially their inclination to binge watch, and how that behaviour may affect how lonely they feel. Social workers can design their intervention plans to instantaneously address loneliness and binge-watching, given the knowledge of the correlation between the two. Social workers can help clients to make more effective coping strategies to deal with loneliness. Encouragement of clients to partake in different activities that foster social interactions, like joining social groups or attending community events, may be one way to achieve this. The social workers can practice Social Group Work method through psychoeducation, media literacy and peer support to overcome loneliness and binge-watching behaviour. Social workers can educate groups about the possible connection between loneliness and binge-watching by leading psychoeducation sessions. Group members can acquire more about their media consumption patterns and how loneliness may be impacted by them by talking about the study's results. Working in groups gives participants a great chance to talk about their experiences and offer support to one another. Participants can talk about how binge-watching impacts their social relationships and come up with ideas together. Group sessions can benefit from incorporating media literacy instruction from social workers, so that the group members may adopt more conscientious media consumption practices, which result in better viewing habits and increased social well-being by learning important skills related to media consumption.

Policy development: Create policies to support responsible content creation and distribution in the media sector. Promote viewers' mental health themes in binge-worthy content that underlines social connections and realistic portrayals of relationships. Organize and launch public awareness campaigns to inform the public about the potential harm that excessive binge-watching can do to mental health and feelings of loneliness. Roll out awareness campaigns in schools and colleges to educate young people about loneliness and binge-watching through Government and academic partnerships.

Research: Researchers should examine the mediating factors such as social media use, perceptions of social support, or self-esteem to gain insight into the relationship between loneliness and binge-watching.

To improve generalizability and comprehensiveness when examining the association between binge-watching and loneliness in different demographic groups, future research should include a diverse range of samples, taking into account factors such as age, gender, cultural background, and media preferences. Additionally, as loneliness and binge-watching become more common, intervention research can be conducted.

Social work education: Media literacy in social work education will help future social workers to address the impact of media consumption on mental health and social well-being. Social work curriculum should include media literacy instruction. To better meet the mental health needs of clients, social work students should be taught how media, particularly binge-watching, influences emotions, perceptions, and interpersonal relationships. Support students in social work to point out groups at risk, such as young people living alone and isolated are more vulnerable to the harmful effects of excessive media use and loneliness. Taking into account clients' media preferences and social milieu to promote positive relationships and emotional health, focus should be given on individualized strategies and tailored interventions to combat loneliness associated with binge-watching. In order to encourage healthy media habits and promote balanced media consumption for overall well-being, future social workers should be encouraged to speak out against excessive binge-watching.

Developing innovative strategies and policies to address the mental health impacts of binge-watching requires interdisciplinary collaboration between social workers, media professionals, and mental health specialists.

Limitations

Other elements such as personality traits, life events, or mental health issues can also impact binge-watching and loneliness. The study's conclusions may be compromised if these confounding factors are not taken into account. It is possible that participants underreport the frequency or severity of their binge-watching habits because they believe it is socially acceptable behaviour.

Recommendations

Create media literacy initiatives to promote responsible media consumption and raise awareness of the ill-effects of binge-watching on mental health and loneliness. Encourage the youth in particular to manage their screen time judiciously by using digital platform features. Use group activities and social skills training as interventions to help at-risk individuals overcome loneliness and improve social connections. Educate parents about how undue media consumption affects mental health and feelings of loneliness, and offer suggestions for restrictive screen time. Encourage content producers to include themes like real relationships and social connections in their highly engaging content. Promote interdisciplinary collaboration among social workers, media specialists, mental health specialists, and educators to comprehensively address the mental health effects of binge-watching. To gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between loneliness and binge-watching in different populations, it is essential that future research uses a diverse sample. Launch public awareness campaigns to inform people about the potential negative effects of excessive binge-watching on loneliness and mental health, while providing resources for support.

Conclusion

This study shows a strong connection between loneliness and binge-watching in young people of age range

between 18 to 25 years old. The findings highlight the need for programmes that promote meaningful media consumption practices. Despite its limitations, the study provides insightful information about the impact of binge-watching on young adults' mental health and emphasises the importance of developing healthy social relationships.

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