



Binge Watching on Internet Television Networks & Its Effects on Youth

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Abstract

There is an increase trend of binge watching on the Internet Television Network (ITN) particularly among youth. Scholarly interest in this new concept has produced many researches focusing on the phenomenon of internet (ITN) with particular focus on binge watching. Limited studies, however, have been conducted on the effects of binge watching on ITN. Present study was an attempt to fill this gap. The theoretical foundations were based on Uses and gratifications theory and the Model of the antecedents and consequences of Binge Watching. The major objectives of this study were to find out the consumption patterns and effects (physical, psychological and social) of binge watching on youth. Considering the nature of the study, survey was found to be the most appropriate method for data collection. Data on consumption patterns and self-perceived physical, psychological and social effects of binge watching on youth was collected from 500 students of Lahore by applying the purposive sampling technique. SPSS Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the hypotheses. The results discovered that youth were profound to binge watching, especially at night to avoid disturbance and watch back to back episodes without interruption. The needs which motivate the youth to binge watch included, companionship, stress-relief, escape from the tension and worries, avoid negative feelings and to be able to present oneself as updated in peers. The findings revealed significant correlation between binge watching and physical ($r(500) = .179, p < .05$), psychological ($r(500) = .174, p < .05$) and social ($r(500) = .178, p < .05$) effects. The major effects of binge watching on physical health were disturbed sleeping habits, muscles ache, weight gain and weak eyesight. Isolation, depression, absent mindedness during day time and anxiety were main psychological effects as identified by the results of the study. The most social effect reported was to prefer binge watching over human relations. The research shows that binge watching may be a fun for the youth, but they are highly addictive to them, which ultimately causing many physical, psychological and social effects.

Keywords: Binge Watching, Internet Television Networks (ITN), Netflix, Effects, Youth

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INTRODUCTION:

Media and communications are such part of science and technology that is under constant advances (Kaul, 2012). The emergence of the 21st century come up with a new digital media, which has phenomenally grown the manifold for accessing digital services (Freedman, 2010, p. 35). With the explosion of multi-channel environment which came by Internet gives countless options and direct sources to the audiences to choose their content independently (Lee-Wright, 2010). The advent of the Internet and subsequently new media transformed the world communication landscape and increased all sorts of information on-demand (Kaul, 2012).

This media demand is constantly rising and ultimately causing many effects. Over the past ten years, rapid technological innovations have disrupted every genre, especially the distribution of entertainment, as personal computers, laptops, tablets, smartphones and smart TV's have become common household goods. Now, the emerging companies starts making content for Internet users more (Aliloupour, 2016). Sadq believed when technology and society develops, it started to change peoples' daily lives, like the habits of study, communication and entertainment (2013). One of them is the Internet Television, by its competing content and the large amount of time spent by audiences in the online environment allows them to view television programs distributed via online streaming to smart TVs, desktops, and portable devices (Becz, 2016; Li, 2013; Matrix, 2014 & Raikar, 2017).

Internet TV is like a conventional television comes through the Internet. In spite of viewing programs which are broadcast over the air or cable, they are accessed over the Internet and then watched at any time, via video streaming (Noll, 2004). Internet Television Network (ITN) are Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime Video etc. provide content to their viewers, which is generally more easily accessible than ever (Tukachinsky. 2015b).

The reason for the acceptance of this media which attracts the audience is improved speed of internet technology that enable them to access many of the programs which are once available only via cable are now disseminated online (Noll, 2004). The availability of conventional TV content along with the distinctive content of Internet TV itself made it more feasible for the audience to watch on portable devices (Li, 2013).

The popularity of these Internet services rapidly increased after 2010, due to its long form content (Jenks, 2010; Sachoff, 2010; Nielsenwire, 2012 as cited in Li, 2013). The benefits these ITN offers to their viewers are numerous. As, these services gave more decision-making authority to their viewers than conventional TV (Li, 2013). Actually, these networks attract audiences by combining technology and advance programing via giving eloquence control, quality content and viewer's freedom of choice (Jenner, 2016; Napoli, 2012; Raikar, 2017; Wayne, 2018, as cited in George, 2018). This concept drop the viewing style of cable TV to embrace these platforms subscriptions (Becz, 2016).

The constant advancement in dissemination of information and communication technologies in recent years has changed the media consumption and viewing patterns (Devasagayam, 2014). Today viewers take pleasure from the prodigious control on the unlimited content they watch ITN (Raikar, 2017). This infinite amount of content which is available on these platforms give birth to the phenomena of marathon viewing which is called binge watching. These networks give people facility of watching shows by just clicking the button and now they are no longer limited to follow linear schedule of watching one episode a week (Sodano, 2012; Devasagayam, 2014 & Hirsen, 2015 as cited in Shim & Kim, 2018).

Collins Dictionary defines binge watching as to watch a large amount of episodes or shows in one sitting. Wheeler (2015) described binge watching as a behavior of watching back to back episodes of the same series in a single sitting. According to a survey hold by Netflix (2016), binge watching has been described as “consuming a minimum of 2 episodes in one sitting, with a session average 2.3 episodes”.

Although, Binge watching seems to be a new phenomenon, but this concept already exists before the entry of ITN in the world. Actually, this notion brought up with the rise of DVD boxes in the 1980's, when DVD's were started available for home watching. The capacity of storing large amount of data in them, provoke people to watch an entire season at a time. After the inception of these platforms where people access the shows at once with the convenience of their pace gives binge watch more limelight and make it a global phenomenon (Watson, 2018).

Binge watching serves the concept of Video on Demand which is run by ITN such as Netflix, Amazon and Hulu. The distributors of original content makers of these services produces the content by following binge model to bind their customers (Jenner, 2015). Amongst the various networks that are consumed and influenced by the viewers, Netflix commands a pioneering position (Becz, 2016). It is the world's foremost and prominent streaming service having more than 167 million paid subscribers in above 190 countries (Netflix, n.d., & Watson, 2020). According to Pittman & Sheehan (2015) Netflix has changed the concept of TV production, manuscript and consumption by fostering binge watching.

Since, the popularity of these networks increased, binge watching has become a global phenomenon. And after the Netflix began releasing episodes of their series in blocks, binge-watching is becoming the norm rather than the exception. In the press release by Netflix (2017), label binge watchers as a “new type of fan” and binge watching as a “new status symbol”. Matrix (2014) and Roxborough (2014) termed this popularity as “Netflix Effects”. In fact, according to a survey conducted in 2016, almost 90% of Millennials and 88% of Gen Z category engaged in binge-watching TV series (Watson, 2018).

LITERATURE REVIEW:

The demand of viewing ITN had increased so much that it gets profound importance among youth. Latif, Ridzuan, Mohideen, Anuar & Shukri (2016) in their study explored how internet television had become significant among youngsters of

Malaysia. According to the researchers, in Malaysia, internet TV became prominent in 2012 as compare to other countries like USA where it has been in use above 18 years ago. The study used a quantitative methodology and conducted purposive survey of 30 university students whose age were between 19 and 25. The researchers made a conclusion that the usage pattern and viewing practices of young people on internet TV were different from conventional TV.

The ease in watching content on ITN motivate people to watch more. Devasagayam (2014) in the research stated that the growth in viewing freedom was because of internet media providers which had given users more access to television. The convenience in watching television had caused over consumption of media, which is named media bingeing. To understand the motivation behind binge watching, the researcher led a qualitative study which were in two phased by conducting four focus groups and short survey from same respondents. After the analysis, the researcher concluded that viewers had an unconscious bond with the characters which was the main factor that lead to binge behaviors. Matrix (2014) in the study uncovered the two evolving patterns in youngsters which were on-demand media engagement such as Netflix (binge worthy), the rising popularity of television watching new practices and new expectation regarding the accessibility of commercial free original high quality content. The researcher through online discourse analyses discovered that when Netflix releases their series such as House of Cards, Orange is the New Black and Arrested Development, it gets huge popularity and also inspired audience from 18-34 years of age. Viewers binge watched and post their reviews on social media very positively. The researcher argued that since Netflix came, it changes the viewer's concept of what, when and how commercial free television watched. Subsequently, they were indulging in watching large amount of content which caused negative impacts on teens by creating health risks like obesity and banality etc.

The concept of binge watching on ITN encourage people to gratify their needs. Shim & Kim (2018) in their research employed an exploratory approach to identify the exact motivations behind binge watching. The researcher applied the uses and gratification theory to examine the relationship between binge watching behaviors and motivational factors. They conducted the online survey of 785 binge watchers to investigate the effects of sensation seeking and needs for the cognition of binge watching behaviors. The results proved that respondents noticed binge watching to satisfy their needs and desires. Steiner and Xu (2018) studied how the technology and culture of binge watching changes the way of watching television. The study applied the uses and gratifications theory as a theoretical framework. According to the researchers, the motives of binge watching could aid to diversify the U&G theory. They did qualitative research by doing semi structured interviews to collect deep information on why and how people binge watch. The findings revealed that they usually binge watch for relaxation and catch ups and secondly easily accessible on portable devices influence them to binge watch. Li (2013) aimed to identify the type of gratification audiences feel while watching shows on internet TV. The research applied the uses and gratification theory to compare the audiences who watch shows on conventional sets of TV and on internet TV. The gratification included content, process and social. The results highlighted that

process of watching shows on internet television was the most leading gratification among the audience and the audience who watched shows on conventional TV their motivation was the content of the shows. Schouw (2018) aimed to examine how and why Dutch millennials (aged between 18 and 34) consume television through online streaming services. With the help of thirteen qualitative interviews, the study explored the viewing patterns and practices of Dutch millennials who were the users of Netflix and/or Videoland. Through coding and thematic analysis of interviews, the results show that respondents consume online streaming services to gratify the need for relaxation, entertainment, narrative immersion, escapism, and cultural inclusion. Respondents also said that with these platforms they were able to participate in cultural conversations. So, this was the reasons which enable them to binge watch particular shows. Moreover, in the viewing habits of Dutch millennials binge watching has become a significant aspect.

People during COVID-19 watch more ITN's. Sigre-Leirós, Billieux, Mohr, Maurage, King, Schimmenti, & Flayelle (2022) in their study highlighted that lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 epidemic have had a serious negative impact on people's mental and psychological wellbeing. When alone at home, people may indulge in pastimes like binge watching as a way to manage their emotions. This is the first long-term study that evaluates changes in TV show viewing habits during the initial COVID-19 lockdown and investigates if binge watching was linked to shifts in both positive and negative impact during this time. Viewers' habits and motives for watching TV series, binge-watching tendencies, psychopathological symptoms, and emotional states were all evaluated, through a 6-week longitudinal online survey, in Belgium, France, and Switzerland. Results revealed that people's viewing behaviors had significantly increased (e.g., higher daily time spent viewing, expansion of covieing practices). Findings from the longitudinal analysis mainly indicated that male gender and social reasons for watching TV shows predicted a decline in the levels of negative affect. The only factor that consistently predicted an increase in negative affect over time was a problematic binge watching style marked by losing control. These results imply that TV series viewing habits actually changed during the initial COVID-19 lockdown. Watching TV shows for social reasons turned out to be a protective component, while problematic binge watching appeared to serve as an unhelpful method of emotion management within these novel conditions. Anghelcev, Sar, Martin, & Moultrie, (2020) 2021 The psychological underpinnings of binge-watching serialized video content were looked at in this study. The findings highlight how important mobility is in influencing how viewers evaluate their binge-watching experiences and how they binge watch.

Binge watching and video streaming habits have been dramatically impacted by the global COVID-19 outbreak. In this case, it's crucial to think back to Kim, Affonso, Laran, & Durante study's from 2021, where it was shown that viewer satisfaction was directly connected with the "randomness" of programme recommendations. They said that Netflix's 2021 implementation of the "ideal hack" was due to the company's awareness of rising unhappiness with certain recommendations for a wider selection of videos.

Binge watching has grown in popularity as a way to pass the time in past years. Even while binge-watching is typically associated with fun, there are worries about some unfavourable and hazardous effects of this habit in excess. The study by Starosta, Izydorczyk, & Wontorczyk in 2021 looked at how well the symptoms of problematic binge-watching and the propensity to develop a particular drive to watch series might be predicted by the anxiety-depressive syndrome. According to the trail analysis's findings, the development of all harmful binge-watching symptoms is significantly influenced by the anxiety-depressive state and the desire to watch TV shows. Additionally, there is a strong correlation between the anxiety-depressive syndrome and the desire to watch TV shows, particularly with regard to the want to flee and the desire to deal with loneliness.

Watching content on ITN to gratify needs caused many effects. As, Wheeler (2015) in the psychological study investigated the new trend of binge watching different television programs. The research applied the cross sectional survey methodology to analyze the watching behaviors of television which include binge watching, motivations and affinity. The researcher also identified the relationship between these watching behaviors with attachment, depression, loneliness and psychological wellbeing. One hundred and eighty six college students participated in this. The results figured out that binge behaviors and motives both instrumental and ritualistic had a significant positive association with psychological factors i.e. attachment depression, loneliness and anxiety. Ahmed (2017) examined the relationship of binge watching with two psychological variables depression and loneliness, the researcher selected the sample size of 260 residents who binge watch the TV programs and dramas lived in the UAE. A constructed questionnaire was designed to collect data from different ages ranged from 18-48. The findings shown that binge-watching is more significant among the younger age people. And also the result disclosed that there is a significant positive correlation between binge watching and depression rather binge watching and loneliness. Wagner (2016) aimed to determine whether guiltiness is an essential consequence after binge viewership while comparing with other factors too. The study conducted the web based survey, which included both open and closed ended questions from 530 adults. The analysis of the responses identified that respondents who watch less television felt more guiltier regarding binge watching. Wang (2019) aimed to elucidate the binge watching behaviors, to identify the association among the gratifications obtained from the internet, television and binge watching and also discover the role of self-control, stress and escapism which shaping the behaviors of binge watching. From convenience sampling 157 participants selected who previously binge watched. The study found that people usually binge watched to avoid their common problems and to cope with stress. But, involving in binge watching purposefully as a coping tool to escape from problems resulted in the feelings of regret and guilt. And surprisingly, self-control had no impact on the gratification of binge watching.

The studies on ITN and binge watching were focused on the phenomenon of internet TV, a new TV services, and a new shift of nonlinear television, how it came into being and how it creates binge watching. Limited studies were found on effects. And the psychological, physical and social effects of binge watching are mainly unidentified, although previous researches proposes that binge watching

can be motivated by various needs such as escape, enjoyment, entertainment etc. However, the physical, psychological and social effects have not been addressed so far. This is the new area which need to be explored. The researcher sort binge watching as per sitting into two categories – less than 4 hours and more than 4 hours. Therefore, the study aimed to
identify the psychological effects of binge watching on ITN among youth.
find out the physical effects of binge watching on ITN among youth.
recognize the social effects of binge watching on ITN among youth.

HYPOTHESIS:

The following are the hypothesis:

H1: The more youth binge watch, the more likely to have physical effects.

H2: The more youth binge watch, the more likely to have psychological effects.

H3: The more youth binge watch, the more likely to have social effects.

METHODOLOGY:

To explore the physical, psychological and social effects of binge watching (per sitting into two categories i.e. less than 4 hours and more than 4 hours) on ITN among youth the researcher planned the following research design.

From quantitative method, survey design best answer to the aim and hypothesis of the study. To measure the level of effects, a self-completion questionnaire had been used - all questions are close ended based on a five point Likert scale. The sample of the study were students (250 males & 250 females) of five public sector universities of Lahore as per the HEC university ranking report. The purposive sampling technique was used for sampling the data as the questionnaire was only filled by the binge watchers.

STATISTICAL ANALYSES:

There are three main hypotheses in this research to validate the study. All hypotheses are based on the relationship between independent and dependent variable. Therefore, the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Test was applied to analyze the data in IBM SPSS Statistics 26. This test is used to find the significant relationship between dependent and independent variables.

To test the hypothesis 1, Pearson Correlation value i.e. $r(500) = .179$, $p < .05$ showed that there is a high significance of the hypothesis which is the more youth binge watch the more likely to have physical effects. So, on the basis of P-Value, it can be determined that the two variables binge watching and physical effects are highly associated. To test the validity of the hypothesis 2, Pearson Correlation value i.e. $r(500) = .174$, $p < .05$ which showed that there is a high significance of the hypothesis which is the more youth binge watch the more likely to have psychological effects. On the basis of P-Value, it can be concluded that the two variables binge watching and psychological effects are highly related. If youth binge watch more than the greater chances that they have psychological effects. To test the validity of the hypothesis 3, Pearson Correlation value i.e. $r(500) = .178$,

$p < .05$ which showed that there is a high significance of the hypothesis which is the more youth binge watch the more likely to have social effects. On the basis of P-Value, it can be concluded that the two variables binge watching and social effects are highly connected.

DISCUSSION:

The researcher categories the binge watching into two – one is less than 4 hours and second is more than 4 hours. The gathered data highlighted that around 64.6% youth liked to binge watch more than 4 hours and 35.4% less than 4 hours which shown that how much they are profound to binge watching.

In the model of the Antecedents and Consequences of Binge Watching Gangadharbatla et al. (2019) identified several physical effects such as headaches, tiredness, exhaustion, feel falling asleep, eyes hurting, feeling hungry, lack of hygiene and lethargic after long sittings for binge watching. However, this study added more physical effects in the above list, which were self-perceived by the respondents in recent times, since they have started binge watching on Netflix. They lose track of time as they were so involved in the show they are watching. Their sleeping habits were disturbed and sometimes had trouble falling asleep. They also felt trouble staying awoken during the day and they felt drowsy all day after the binge watching at night. After the binge watch they felt restless and tense. Due to the continuous viewing in the same posture create muscles ache in the body. Most often their eyes got strain and felt blurred vision because of the nonstop contact of light and for that reason they also had a headache. Youth also reported that their eye sight also got weak in recent time due to binge watching at night when the lights were off and they were so close to the screens. They become lazy due to binge watching. In recent times, they also gain weight as they ate more snacks while binge watching. There is no doubt that binge watching increases excessive exposure. Similarly, excessive exposure to well-curated, unrealistic images on digital platforms may provide consumers the impression that others are happier, making them feel unhappy as a result of social isolation comparison. The main issue with binge-watching is that it has a huge opportunity cost. That is, for every hour users spend watching TV, they are not doing anything else—not even moving. This has an impact on both users emotional and physical wellbeing. Obesity and associated problems such as diabetes and heart disease are increased by excessive sitting and munching. Obesity, according to recent studies, dramatically increases their chances of depression, and vice versa. More importantly, if they have a history of depression or anxiety, daily exercise is an essential component of a complete therapy strategy. All these physical effects of binge watching ultimately impact on the health in unexpected ways.

Gangadharbatla et al. (2019) recognized some of the emotional concerns that include feeling sad, depressed, mentally drained, feeling caged and alone. However, this study further added more emotional concerns under the name of psychological effects which were self-reported by the respondents. From the answers of the gathered data, the study finds out that most of the youth enjoyed to binge watch on the Netflix alone, more than four hours and most of the time at night. Due to the

excessive binge watching the youth perceived that they have become isolated. They escape from facing reality, such as they started avoiding emotions, relationships and real life etc. More often they fall into depression. They felt mood disorders since they started binge watching on Netflix. They had felt absent mindedness and memory deficits. They had anxiety due to the binge watching. According to them, binge watching also has some positive consequences. They relieve their stress of daily life. They binge watch to escape from tensions and worries. They also use to binge watch to diverse their negative feeling. In the process gratification of UGT, Cutler & Danowski, 1980; George, 2018 & Stafford et al. (2004) also identified similar positive and affirmative consequences. It is considered that excessive binge-viewing may result in negative results such as lack of control over watching. The level of experienced satisfaction lessens as the binge-watching progresses. Likewise, the amount of the “compensating impact” expands during the binge watching. As a result, it is conceivable that frequent binge-watching leads to a loss of control over certain digital activities. People who are exposed to this type of light before going to bed may have their circadian cycle disrupted, making it difficult to sleep. A performance may get them worked up, sometimes for hours, when they should be settling down for sleep. People appreciate good TV shows for their drama, tension, suspense, and action, but they also raise their heart rate, blood pressure, and adrenaline levels. When they eventually go to bed, they may feel as if they’ve just had a stressful or even moderately traumatic experience, which is not conducive to sleep. This sleep disturbance might have a negative impact on people’s mental health. Several studies have indicated that persistent sleep deprivation can swiftly impair mental skills such as attention, working memory, and emotional control. Insomnia has been related to an increased risk of serious depression and anxiety disorders in the long run.

From the collected findings, the youth binge watch because it makes them more upgraded in society. Most often they binge watch so that they could present themselves in their friends and peer groups as updated. Most importantly, they have similar topic of discussion with others. But often they preferred to binge watch instead of meeting people or family gatherings. They also got irritated when they are binge watching and someone came to visit them. Stafford et al. (2004) uncovered these basic factors in social gratifications of UGT which highlighted that for internet based medium this gratification plays an essential role as it covers the concern regarding audiences interpersonal, social interaction and social influence. Watching TV is mostly a behavior that involves immersing oneself in the world of the show. No company is obliged or even desirable. If a person is binge-watching with someone, it is rare that they are also having an interesting conversation or otherwise interacting in any meaningful way. Both are simply watching the show. Binge-watching may only be a symptom of loneliness, but it may also make individuals less willing to accept invitations, seek out to friends, or even leave the house, all of which contribute to loneliness. Nevertheless, it’s worth mentioning that many individuals say they binge-watch for social reasons. In other words, people want to be able to discuss a program with their friends or colleagues. Therefore, in this specific sense, binge-watching may have a prosocial benefit.

CONCLUSION:

This study was proposed to explore the consumption pattern and needs of binge watching on ITN like Netflix and identify the physical, psychological and social effects on youth as binge watching on ITN is an evolving trend in Pakistan. To support the study, different researches were considered in order to identify the work that has been done on this topic. Much studies were focused on the phenomenon of internet TV and proposes binge watching can be motivated by various needs but there is relatively little research connecting the physical, psychological and social effects so far. This study is a small step to provide meaningful data on all these aspects. On the context of the Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Model of the Antecedents and Consequences of Binge Watching the theoretical foundations were based. The results of the study revealed that youth were profound to binge watching, especially at night so that no one can disturb them and they can watch back to back episodes. The needs which motivate youth to binge watch were to kill their time, for enjoyment and companionship, to get material to discuss with their friends, to overcome their boredom so, they liked to binge watch with their siblings. The research shows that binge watching may be a fun for the youth, but they are highly addictive to them, which ultimately causing many physical, psychological and social effects.

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