



Binge-watching and its relation to Impulsivity, Loneliness, and Social Anxiety among youth in Mumbai

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Abstract: Binge-watching is an emerging behavior pattern of spending free time, especially among young people where they watch more than 2 episodes/movies continuously. This behavior can become a problem and addictive leading to feeling lonely, impulsive, and experiencing social anxiety. Thus, the study attempts to evaluate the relationship of Binge-Watching with Loneliness, Social Anxiety and Impulsivity. The sample consisted of 100 college students from Mumbai in the age range of 18-25 years. Binge Watching Addiction Questionnaire (BWAQ)(Forte, Tedeschi, Favieri & Casagrande, 2021), UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell et al., 1978), Barratt Impulsivity Scale (Patton et al., 1995), Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Ferguson, 1978) were administered. Subsequent data analysis yielded a significant positive association between binge-watching and loneliness, binge watching and social anxiety, binge watching and impulsivity, loneliness and social anxiety. While a negative association emerged between social anxiety and impulsivity, and loneliness and impulsivity.

Key Words: binge-watching, loneliness, social anxiety, impulsivity.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Addictions can be classified into two types: chemical addiction and behavioural addiction. Chemical addictions can be referred to as induced by the use of substances and drugs, while behavioural addictions are compulsive behaviours that are persistent and repeated even when it does not offer any benefit. Behavioural addictions include gambling and internet gaming addiction. While research experts opine that certain behaviour patterns can be problematic over time however, the evidence about when can these behaviours be accounted as addiction is debatable. Certain behaviours that can be problematic when in access and are recently considered as addictive are shopping, social media, exercise, binge watching/TV, sex, etc. However there is lack of scientific evidence to develop standard criteria for these behaviours to be considered as addictions⁽¹⁾.

Binge-watching is a relatively recent phenomenon that has become growing in recent years. It is characterized by watching multiple episodes of a television show or movie in a single sitting, generally on Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, YouTube, etc. Recent evidence implies that Binge-watching is associated with lack of sleep, procrastination, negligence of work, being socially withdrawn, and increase in unhealthy food consumption⁽²⁾. Thus, it can have a linkage with a number of negative consequences like loneliness, impulsivity, and social anxiety. Loneliness is a subjective feeling of discomfort and uneasiness by perceiving disconnection from others⁽³⁾. It is a common experience, especially among young people. Loneliness has been linked to a number of negative consequences, including poor mental and physical health. Loneliness can induce social anxiety⁽⁴⁾. Social anxiety is an intense and disabling fear of social situations. It is a common anxiety disorder that can have a significant impact on people's lives on emotional, physical and cognitive levels, causing distress. Social anxiety can make it difficult to interact with others, due to apprehension and anticipating negative outcomes, which can lead to social avoidance and isolation⁽⁵⁾.



Impulsivity has been linked to several addictive behaviours like gambling and alcohol usage. Thus it would be interesting to elucidate the role of impulsivity with Binge-watching, loneliness, and social anxiety⁽⁶⁾. Impulsivity is a tendency to act without thinking about the consequences of one's actions. It is associated with undesirable outcomes rather than desirable. Characteristics of impulsive individuals are being hot-headed, unpredictable, unstable, and rash⁽⁷⁾.

Thus, the study aims at understanding the associations between binge-watching, impulsivity, social anxiety and loneliness among youth in Mumbai. Research in the past has cited linkage between the variables.

2.LITERATURE REVIEW:

An individual can indulge in binge-watching behaviour in two situations, either due to peer pressure or inclination/interest towards watching a particular show, or when one feels lonely and isolated is when they may indulge in such behaviours in order to avoid the discomfort and distress arising from feeling lonely. Researcher⁽⁸⁾ suggested another viewpoint, that individuals engage in binge watching to escape from reality as it is distressing for them. This avoidance of facing reality is analogous to addiction as the viewers have the need to watch more episodes/movies to either escape from reality or to achieve the desired level of relief, and the threshold of binge watching increases eventually.

Researchers⁽⁹⁾ found that problematic binge-watching was correlated with an increase in depression, social interaction anxiety, and loneliness among adults in Taiwan. They found that the problematic behaviour was related with expanded melancholy, social communication uneasiness, and dejection takes a chance among grown-ups in Taiwan. Similarly a systematic review found that binge-watching is associated with a number of mental health problems, including anxiety, depression, and sleep problems⁽¹⁰⁾. In 2021, the Impact of Binge-Watching on Impulsivity and Social Anxiety in Young Adults was studied. It was found that binge-watching behaviour was associated with increased impulsivity and social anxiety in young adults⁽¹¹⁾. They also concluded that impulsivity mediated the relation between binge-watching and social anxiety. It suggests that impulsivity plays a key role in the relationship between binge-watching and social anxiety.

Indian researchers have also studied these variables and concluded similar findings. Studies⁽¹²⁾ concluded that an increase in binge-watching was related to an increase in feeling lonely and impulsive among Indian Adolescents. Studies⁽¹³⁾ have implied that an increase in social anxiety was found with an increase in binge-watching among college students in India. Similar findings⁽¹¹⁾ highlighting that increase in binge watching behaviour leads to increased levels of loneliness, anxiety and depressive symptoms. Thus, impacting how an individual perceives oneself and others.

3.METHODOLOGY:

Aim:

The study aimed to determine the relationship between binge-watching, loneliness, impulsivity and social anxiety among the youth in Mumbai.

Objectives:

The following were the objectives of the study:

- 1) To find out the relationship between Binge-watching and Loneliness among the youth in Mumbai.
- 2) To find out the relationship between Binge-watching and Impulsivity among the youth in Mumbai.
- 3) To find out the relationship between Binge-watching and Social Anxiety among the youth in Mumbai.
- 4) To find out the relationship between Loneliness and Social Anxiety among the youth in Mumbai.
- 5) To find out the relationship between Impulsivity and Social Anxiety among the youth in Mumbai.
- 6) To find out the relationship between Loneliness and Impulsivity among the youth in Mumbai.

Sample Characteristics:

The sample included 100 participants from Mumbai region (including Thane and Navi Mumbai) and fall between the age group of 18-25 years. It was ensured that they were familiar with the English Language and had an educational background. The participants also had experienced COVID-19 pandemic/lockdown.

Research Design & Sampling Method:

A correlation study will be employed using the survey method, to understand if a change in one variable corresponds to a change in another variable. Non-probability sampling methods of purposive and snowball techniques were employed. Data was collected online using Google Forms ensuring ethical considerations.



Scales/Questionnaires utilised:

- Barratt Impulsivity Scale (BIS) was developed by Patton et al. (1995)⁽¹⁴⁾. It is a questionnaire designed to assess the personality/behavioral construct of impulsiveness.
- UCLA Loneliness Scale – Version 3 Scale is a widely used measure for adolescents and adults developed by Daniel Russell, Letitia Peplau, Mary Ferguson in 1978⁽¹⁵⁾.
- Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) is a self-rating scale developed by Mattick and Clarke (1998)⁽¹⁶⁾.
- Binge Watching Addiction Questionnaire (BWAQ) was developed by Forte, Tedeschi, Favieri and Casagrande in 2021⁽¹⁷⁾. It is a short self-report questionnaire focused on assessing binge-watching behavior and determining whether it shows characteristics similar to addictive behavior.

4. RESULTS & DISCUSSION :

The present study investigated the relationships between binge-watching, loneliness, impulsivity, and social anxiety in a sample of young adults. Pearson’s product moment correlation was computed on the data collected from 100 participants. Mean for Loneliness, Social Anxiety, Impulsivity, and Binge watching was obtained to be 55.12, 33.00, 68.48, and 39.21 respectively. The Standard Deviation (SD) for Loneliness, Social Anxiety, Impulsivity, and Binge watching was obtained to be 4.55, 9.48, 6.86, and 12.30 respectively.

Table 1: Pearson’s Correlation between Variable (N=100)

Variables	Loneliness	Social Anxiety	Impulsivity	Binge Watching
Loneliness	1			
Social Anxiety	.291**	1		
Impulsivity	.059	.174	1	
Binge Watching	.304**	.487***	.424***	1

*.p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

The results obtained on Pearson’s product moment correlation is depicted in the table 1 above.

The results indicate that binge-watching is positively correlated with loneliness ($r = 0.304$, $p = 0.002$), impulsivity ($r = 0.424$, $p < 0.001$), and social anxiety ($r = 0.487$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that people who binge-watch are more likely to feel lonely, impulsive, and socially anxious.

The researchers of the current study believe that it is a vicious cycle where one indulges in binge-watching avoiding social interactions making them feel lonely and isolated. Pervasive feelings of loneliness may trigger social anxiety in individuals leading to experiencing discomfort. In order to avoid the negative emotional outcomes arising from feeling lonely and anxious in social situations the individual would indulge in binge-watching behaviours as an escape from the situations and reality. Indicating that those who feel ill-at-ease in social situations tend to indulge in binge-watching to avoid the discomfort and uneasiness, which eventually makes them feel lonely. The impulsiveness may increase may be because the individuals may generally act-out aggressively or rashly, when they are denied or restrictions are imposed on their watching time. They are not able to inhibit the gratification that they achieve from continuously watching, implying that it has become like an addictive behaviour that they indulge which gives them gratification, even when they know that it is excessive and sometimes unnecessary.

Researchers⁽¹⁸⁾ concluded that loneliness was positively correlated with binge-watching, indicating a tendency to watch more in order to cope with the loneliness. Binge-watching gratifies the need to escape from problems and regulate negative emotions manifested by loneliness⁽¹⁹⁾. Significant relationship between binge-watching and interaction



anxiety⁽²⁰⁾. Researchers⁽²¹⁾ found that socially anxious and lonely individuals tend to use social media in order to compensate for the lack of support in in-person relationships. Individuals with a high level of impulsivity often experience difficulties with delaying gratification, as well as focusing on the task and being persistent. The theory of gratification and uses⁽²²⁾ could be used to examine peoples' motivations around engaging in binge watching behaviors. Individuals engaging in excessive binge-watching tend to experience difficulties in planning and evaluating their behaviors before acting on a given impulse. Thus, it can be related to neglect of one's responsibilities, poor performance, an avoidance of social activities, and various negative health consequences when one loses control over the time spent on it. According to finding⁽²³⁾ when binge-watching becomes rampant, viewers may start to neglect their work and their relationships with others. Even when they know they should not, they have difficulty resisting the desire to watch episodes continuously.

The study also found that loneliness was positively correlated with social anxiety ($r = 0.291$, $p = 0.004$), confirming our hypothesis. The researcher echoes the perspective mentioned above that individuals with social anxiety generally avoid social interactions that may lead them to feel lonely. But, this behaviour of them avoiding social interactions leads to them preventing the possibility of establishing relationships that would offset the feeling of loneliness. Studies⁽²⁴⁾ indicated that loneliness predicted future states of social anxiety, paranoia, and depression. They implied that treating social anxiety may reduce the severity of loneliness. Past research⁽²⁵⁾ reviewed how adolescents use the internet and other channels of online communication to network with strangers, impacting the quality of their relationships, and social involvement. Higher internet use reduces time spent in-person with friends or family impacting general well-being and higher levels of loneliness. Similarly, we can conclude that binge-watching reduces the amount of time spent interacting face-to-face with near and dear ones impacting the social life of an individual, resulting in higher levels of loneliness.

The relationship between impulsivity and social anxiety ($r = 0.174$, $p = 0.085$), and between loneliness and impulsivity was found to be insignificant (Pearson's $r = 0.059$, p value = 0.563). Previous researches have found contrary results and the researchers of the current study also expected the same. However, the results obtained has put the researchers into a thought about the insignificant results. Even though there is some kind of relationship established between the variables, there is a probability that impulsivity, loneliness and social anxiety may not be independently correlated in this study due to various reasons. One of the reasons could be that at times in a study, one or more variables may play a mediating role or may moderate the relationship between other variables. The current study has not focused on understanding if the variables are mediators or moderators, thus it cannot establish the reasons for insignificant relationships between impulsivity and social anxiety, and among loneliness and impulsivity.

5.IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

Implications:

The findings of this study reflect implications for understanding the potential negative consequences of binge-watching. It can be anticipated that binge-watching may be a risk factor for loneliness, impulsivity, and social anxiety impacting one's social and emotional well-being. These are all serious problems that can have a negative impact on people's lives. The study implies the need for the development of interventions to help people who are struggling with these problems. Interventions that focus on reducing loneliness, impulsivity, and social anxiety may help to reduce binge-watching. Pharmacological therapy should be employed as and when needed.

Recommendations for future research:

Future research should use a longitudinal design to establish causality. Establishing causality will help us understand the intensity and impact of a variable on another, for eg: it would be interesting to understand if impulsivity, social anxiety and/or loneliness leads an individual to binge-watch or would binge-watching lead to feeling lonely, socially anxious and/or impulsive. Further research can use objective measures of binge-watching, such as tracking the amount of time people spend watching television. This would help to reduce the bias that is inherent in self-report measures. A larger sample size would help to ensure that the findings of the study are generalizable to the wider population. Exploring the potential mediating factors in the relationship between binge-watching and loneliness, impulsivity, and social anxiety, would help to understand the mechanisms by which binge-watching leads to these problems. Lastly, it is important to note that the study was correlational, which means that it cannot establish causality. Further research is needed to confirm the findings of this study and to establish causality.



6. CONCLUSION :

Binge-watching is a relatively new phenomenon involving watching episodes/movies or streamed content over different content platforms online. The findings for the study indicated that binge-watching was positively associated with Loneliness, social anxiety, and impulsivity. There was a positive relationship between Loneliness and Social Anxiety. The relationship between impulsivity with loneliness and social anxiety was found to be insignificant. Therefore, individuals indulging in binge-watching behaviour are likely to experience various mental health concerns and distress (Alimoradi et al., 2022). Further research is needed to confirm the causality and to address the limitations.

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