



Perceived Stress And Binge-Watching Behavior Among Indian College Students

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ABSTRACT

The use of digital media has become inevitable in our lives, shaping people's preferences for communication patterns, learning, entertainment and even leisure activities. The present study aims to investigate the nature of relationship between perceived stress and binge watching among Indian college students. It highlights the need to better understand the demographics of this popular leisure activity, perceived stress and its possible implications on the mental well-being of young adults from India. The data was obtained from a sample of 99 college students from various states in India were collected using an online survey method that included items from the BWESQ (Binge-Watching Engagement and Symptoms Questionnaire) and the PSS (Perceived Stress Scale), in addition to their sociodemographic information. The results of this study showed the presence of a significant positive correlation between perceived stress and binge watching to a moderate degree. The findings also demonstrated that there was a significant difference between male and female college students on perceived stress, but no such difference was observed in their binge-watching behavior. In conclusion, there is an association between perceived stress and binge watching. Further research is required to confirm these findings and understand the distinctive features of binge watching among young adults from India.

Keywords: Perceived stress, Binge watching, Digital media, Behavioral addiction, Public health, College students

Introduction

The use of digital media has evolved into a modern standard, becoming an indispensable part of our day-to-day activities. The government-led initiative "Digital India" launched in 2015, played a pivotal role in the digital transformation of the nation (Yadav, 2024) along with increased commercialization of the internet, affordable and enhanced internet connectivity became available across the nation. Today, there are typically six phones in every four-person household in urban India and about three phones in every five-person household in rural India (Panagariya, 2022).

Over the years, electronic media has shaped the way we connect, communicate, exchange information, express ourselves, learn or even take a break (Twenge et al., 2018). According to a recent article in the Economic Times, India has a user base of over 800 million internet users, typically using internet for OTT (over-the-top) streaming services (Roy, 2024). Development of various technological innovations has led to unprecedented changes in one's internet behaviors, emotions, thoughts and social interactions (Niskier et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024; Widyanto & Griffiths, 2011; Cutuk & Soyer, 2024).

The present study aims to investigate the relationship between perceived stress and binge watching behaviors of college students especially among the Indian population. Binge-watching has emerged as one of our favorite pastimes in recent years. The popularity of binge watching behavior can be observed mainly among young adults (Bastos et al., 2024). Studies regarding this public health phenomenon should be conducted on diverse populations to identify the role of demographics in binge watching and aids in the better generalizability of other research findings (Paulus & Aziz, 2023). Majority of the available literature comes from Western settings such as samples from the UK and United States (Gabbiadini et al., 2021), Poland

(Starosta et al., 2020), UAE (Ahmed, 2017), Taiwan (Sun & Chang, 2021) and Pakistan (Akram et al., 2024) among others, indicating a significant gap in the body of knowledge on specifically Indian college students.

The popularity of binge watching has tremendously grown in recent years due to the emergence of several streaming sites. It basically refers to watching between two to six episodes of a TV series/shows in one sitting to the extent where it compromises one's physical and mental health (Netflix, 2013; Mento et al., 2024). A chapter in the book *Binge-Watching and Contemporary Television Studies* (Stevens, 2021) indicated that the start of the age of binge-watching can be traced back to 1979, with the introduction of Video Cassette Recorder (VCR). This enabled people to re-watch their favorite TV show episodes at a later convenient time as opposed to traditional appointment viewing. Therefore, viewer's consumption pattern of television has radically changed over the years (Climaco & Larguinho, 2024).

Perceived Stress refers to the way a person perceives/thinks about the stress they are under at a given point of time along with the level of uncontrollability and unpredictability they feel in their lives (Cohen et al., 1983). A college student's experience of stress can potentially affect their lifestyle and academic performance (Varghese et al., 2015). Studies regarding gender differences in the experience of stress show that female college students were found to undergo higher levels of perceived stress compared to their male counterparts (Graves et al., 2021).

One theoretical framework explaining an association between perceived stress and binge watching is the media habits theory by Robert LaRose (2010). It states that repeated media consumption behaviors can be due to deficient self-regulation impairing a person's sense of control. According to him, media habits emerge when we continuously associate any external or internal stimuli with any media consumption behaviors ultimately turning that particular behavior into a habit driven activity. Therefore, this theory sheds light on the possibility of feeling stressed or worried prompting them to engage in binge-watching which may later emerge as a media habit of the person.

The objectives and hypotheses of the present study are as follows:

- To assess the demographics of perceived stress among Indian college students specifically with respect to their age and gender.
- To assess the demographics of binge watching behavior among Indian college students specifically with respect to their age and gender.
- To investigate the correlation between perceived stress and binge watching behavior among Indian college students.
- To contribute to the existing literature on the topic of perceived stress and binge watching behavior in the Indian population.

Hypotheses

H_{01} : There will be no significant difference between male and female on perceived stress.

H_1 : There will be significant difference between male and female on perceived stress.

H_{02} : There will be no significant difference between male and female on binge watching behavior.

H_2 : There will be significant difference between male and female on binge watching behavior.

H_{03} : There will be no significant difference based on the age of the participants in both perceived stress and binge watching behavior.

H_3 : There will be significant difference based on the age of the participants in both perceived stress and binge watching behavior.

H_{04} : There will be no significant correlation between perceived stress and binge watching.

H_4 : There will be significant correlation between perceived stress and binge watching.

Materials and Methods

The study on "Perceived Stress and Binge Watching Behavior among Indian College Students" followed a systematic research methodology. The major research question was focused on understanding the relationship between perceived stress and binge watching among college students in the Indian population. Hypotheses were formulated to guide the study as well as address the specific areas of our research problem. A comprehensive review of literature was also undertaken for identifying research gaps and to refine the research questions. A cross-sectional research design was chosen along with a convenience sampling technique that resulted in a sample of 99 participants. Data was collected via an online survey comprising of standardized questionnaires which also included questions related to socio-demographics, perceived stress and binge watching behavior.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Participants who belonged to Indian nationality
- Students from any College or Universities in India
- Male and female participants
- Age range should be within 18-25 years

- Those who identified themselves as binge watchers based on either the frequency of engaging in a binge watching session, episodes watched or time spent binge watching in a day.
- Those who belonged to middle socio-economic status

Exclusion Criteria:

- Participants belonging to categories such as home makers, working professionals, school students and many others
- Those belonging to Other nationalities
- Participants outside the age range 18-25
- Those identifying with different genders other than male or female
- Those who reported not to engage in binge watching behavior frequently

Therefore, these exclusion criteria helped us to narrow down the focus and scope of this study.

Measures

Two main tools that was used in this research were: Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and Binge Watching Engagement and Symptoms Questionnaire (BWESQ).

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is a popular standardized assessment tool for evaluating an individual's subjective experience of stress. The PSS is a 10-item self-report scale designed to measure the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful. Responses are provided on a Likert scale that ranges from 0 = Never to 4 = Very Often. The items in PSS aims to find out how uncontrollable or unpredictable the respondents find their lives to be during the last one month. PSS-10 also demonstrated adequate internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = .78$) and moderate concurrent criterion validity with the amount of stress experienced during an average week.

Binge-Watching Engagement and Symptoms Questionnaire (BWESQ)

The Binge-Watching Engagement and Symptoms Questionnaire (BWESQ) is a 40 item self-report questionnaire developed by Flayelle et al., (2019) in order to assess a person's binge-watching habits, engagement and different symptoms associated to this phenomenon thereby aiding research on media consumption effects. BWESQ consists of a 7-factor model including engagement, positive emotions, desire-savoring, pleasure preservation, binge-watching, dependency and loss of control. A higher average score on any of the subscale will indicate either greater involvement or problematic binge-watching (Flayelle et al., 2019).

For the purpose of this particular research, an evaluation of the participant's problematic binge watching behavior and its potential negative outcomes needed to be assessed. Among other dimensions, only three BWESQ factors (i.e., binge-watching, dependency, loss of control) were found to be specifically suited to assess problematic involvement in binge-watching (Jain, 2022). Therefore, only 18 items comprising representing these three factors of BWESQ was taken into account for the purpose of assessing problematic binge watching and for collecting data from the participants.

Data Analysis

The obtained data from the present study was analyzed using IBM SPSS version 22. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were utilized for assessing the obtained data. Descriptive statistics included mean, standard deviation and frequency distribution in terms of bar graphs and scatterplots. It was used to summarize the characteristics of the chosen psychological constructs. Inferential statistics utilized for data analysis comprised of correlation analysis, independent sample t-test and ANOVA (analysis of variance) for the purpose of testing our hypotheses.

Results

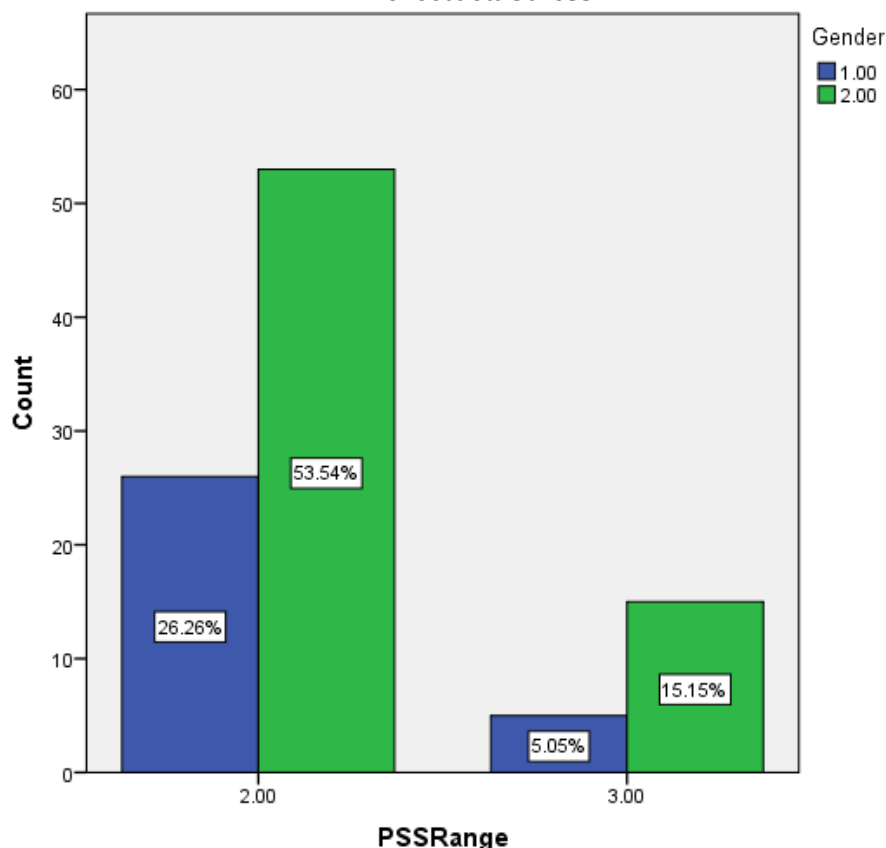
Table 1 Independent Samples t-test on Perceived stress and Binge watching with respect to Gender

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	S.D	df	t-value	Sig
Perceived stress	Male	31	21.25	4.381	97	-2.031	0.045
	Female	68	23.04	3.903			
Binge Watching	Male	31	44.32	10.628	97	-1.128	0.262
	Female	68	47.50	13.927			

The results of the Independent Samples t-test are reported in Table 1, which indicates that the calculated t-value of Perceived stress ($t = -2.031$) was significant at p value < 0.05 level among the male ($M = 21.25$, $SD = 4.381$) and female participants ($M = 23.04$, $SD = 3.903$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and H_1

stood supported. There was a significant difference between male and female participants on perceived stress. The calculated t-value of Binge watching behavior ($t = -1.128$) was found to be not statistically significant at p value > 0.05 level among the male ($M = 44.32$, $SD = 10.628$) and female participants ($M = 47.50$, $SD = 13.927$). Therefore, we failed to reject the null hypothesis and H_2 stood unsupported. There was no significant difference between males and females on binge watching behavior.

Chart 1 Clustered Bar graph showing Percentage of Male and Female Participants with Perceived Stress

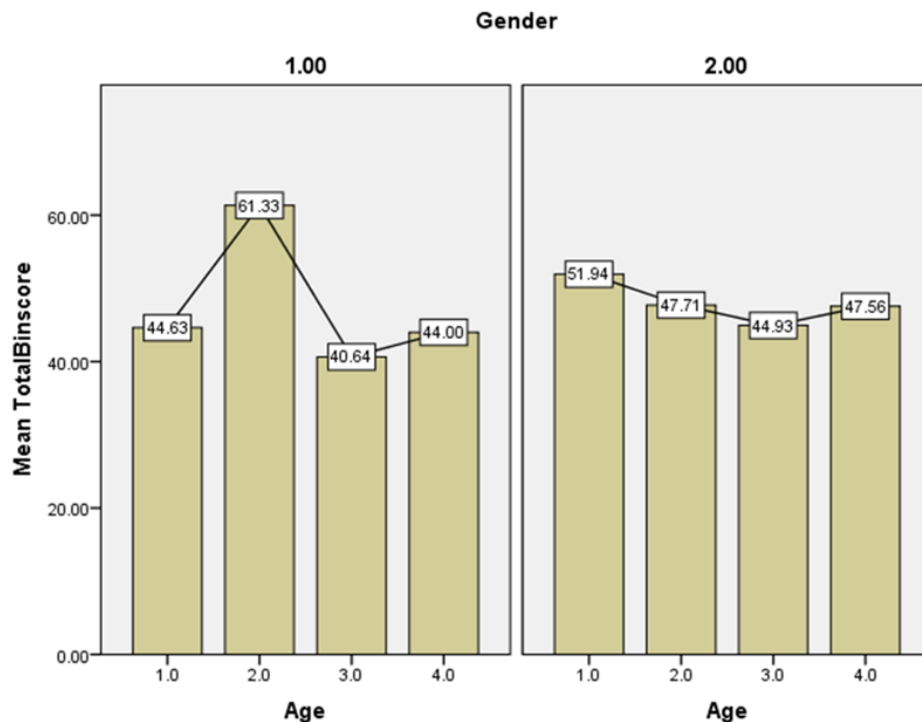


The Chart 1 showed that majority of the participants reported to experience moderate perceived stress. Among the participants, 53.54% of female and 26.26% of male students from the sample population reported to experience moderate levels of perceived stress. It was also found that about 15.15% of females and 5.05% males experienced high perceived stress.

Table 2 ANOVA on Perceived Stress and Binge Watching with respect to different Age groups

Variables	N	Mean Square	df	F value	Sig.
Perceived Stress	99	19.673	3	1.164	0.328
Binge Watching	99	272.851	3	1.642	0.185

The results of ANOVA are presented above in Table 2, which showed that the obtained f-value of Perceived stress (F value = 1.164) was found to not significant at p value > 0.05 level between different age groups. The obtained f value of binge watching (F value = 1.642) was also not significant at p value > 0.05 level between different age groups. Therefore, we failed to reject the null hypothesis and H_3 stood unsupported. There was no significant difference based on the age of the participants in both perceived stress and binge watching behavior.

Chart 2 Bar Graph Showing Binge Watching Scores of Males and Females across Different Age Groups

From the Chart 2 presented above, we can observe the mean of total binge-watching score obtained by male and female participants across different age groups. In case of male participants, the mean of their total binge-watching scores were found to be 44.63, 61.33, 40.64 and 44 across different age groups that ranged from 18 to 25 years respectively. Among female participants, the mean of their total binge-watching scores were found to be 51.94, 47.71, 44.93 and 47.56 across different age groups that ranged from 18 to 25 years respectively.

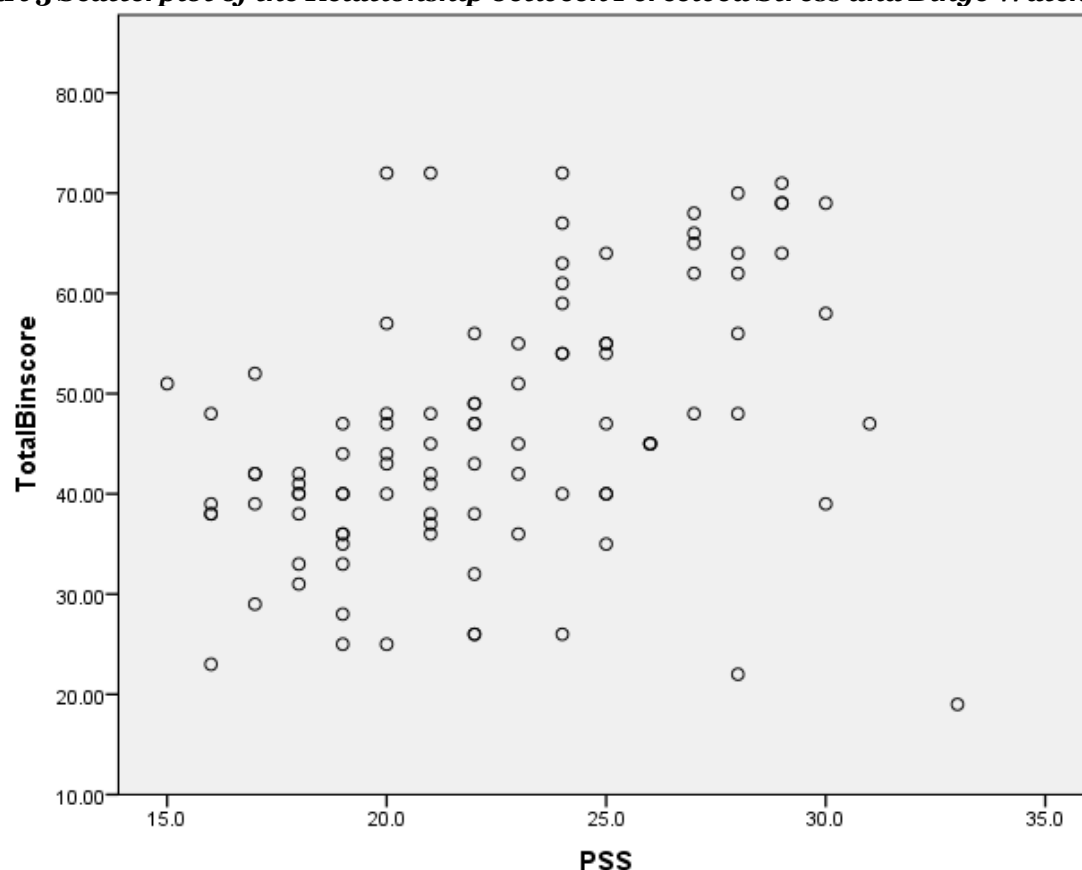
Table 3 Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Correlation between Perceived Stress and Binge Watching

Variables	N	Mean	S.D	Perceived Stress	Binge Watching
Perceived Stress	99	22.48	4.121	-	0.436**
Binge Watching	99	46.50	13.015	0.436**	-

***Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

The descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation between Perceived stress and Binge watching scores among the participants are presented in Table 3. It can be observed that there was a statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.436$, $p < 0.01$) between participant's perceived stress ($M = 22.48$, $SD = 4.121$) and binge watching ($M = 46.50$, $SD = 13.015$) to a moderate degree.

Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and H_4 was supported. There was a significant positive correlation between perceived stress and binge watching among the college students.

Chart 3 Scatterplot of the Relationship between Perceived Stress and Binge Watching.

The scatterplot presented above in Chart 3, showed clustering of perceived stress and binge watching scores of the participants in somewhat an upward direction indicating the possibility of a positive relationship between the variables.

Discussion

The present study intends to understand the nature of binge watching, a popular leisure activity among Indian college students. College students are one of the most vulnerable population to experience the adverse consequences of stress. An investigation regarding the relationship between perceived stress and binge-watching behavior of college students will create valuable insights into the way students experience and deal with different stressors in their life.

The current sample comprised more number of female participants than male participants, majority of the participants belonged to the 22-23 age group and almost everyone reported to belong to a middle socioeconomic status. Results from this study showed that college students in this sample were more likely to spend their time watching TV series/shows. This indicates the popularity of this phenomenon among Indian college students which is consistent with past findings which stated that majority of the Indian youth within the age group of 15-29 years preferred to watch videos on OTT platforms (Tiwari & Rai, 2021) and binge-watching being one of major motivations for both OTT subscription and continuation intentions among Indians (Menon, 2022).

One of the most important findings from this study was the presence of a positive correlation between perceived stress and binge watching behavior among Indian college students. This shows that increase in one's perceived stress is associated with increase in their binge-watching behavior and vice-versa. The obtained correlation was also considered to be of moderate degree. A previous study consistent with this finding showed a significant positive correlation between binge-watching and perceived stress among adolescents during the COVID-19 lockdown (Kuppusamy et al., 2023; Alimoradi et al., 2022).

Students are more likely to engage in binge watching behavior during their stressful periods, probably as a coping strategy to feel better temporarily. The instant gratification that comes with binge-watching can have an opposite impact when extended TV series viewing raises stress levels since it can negatively affect a person's social, academic, professional, and personal performance. This is in line with the research results of Panda and Pandey (2017) wherein negative post-binge gratifications were found to further increase binge-

watching behavior in order to cope with the undesirable consequences, thereby depleting other adaptive coping strategies of a person and eventually creating a vicious cycle.

Few of the major motives of students for engaging in excessive TV series viewing included escapism from pressures, stress and loneliness among other factors (Vaterlaus et al., 2018; Ort et al., 2021; Starosta et al., 2020). Past research results highlighting the role of perceived stress both as a reason for binge watching (Parnami & Jain, 2021) and as its consequence (Raza et al., 2021; Buschmeyer, 2020), sheds light on the existence of an association between perceived stress and binge watching behavior.

Another major finding from this study was a statistically significant difference in the level of perceived stress among the participants based on their gender. Female participants were found to experience higher perceived stress compared to their male counterparts. This is consistent with previous studies which showed higher levels of perceived stress among female students making them prone to behavioral addictions (Tavolacci et al., 2013) and presence of increased perceived stress among women regarding school, work or interpersonal relationships (Day & Livingstone, 2003). This is in contrast to the finding that there are no differences in the level of perceived stress among male and female university students (Talib & Zia-ur-Rehman, 2012).

Perceived stress mainly refers to the degree to which an individual feels stressed at a particular point of time. Higher incidence of perceived stress among females may be attributed to the influence of negative sex role identities on one's perception of stress and health outcomes. Individuals who have adopted negative masculinity, femininity or androgyny traits are found to be more vulnerable to the experience of stress and other negative emotions (Bernstein and Chemaly, 2017). Furthermore, the present study also observed no statistically significant differences neither in the levels of perceived stress nor in the binge watching behaviors of the participants on the basis of their age groups. This is indicative of the popular nature of binge watching behavior among young adults irrespective of their age differences.

There was no statistically significant difference in the level of binge watching behavior among the participants based on their gender. This is consistent with previous results showing equal prevalence of binge-watching behavior among both male and female participants (Ahmed, 2017), rather the differences were observed in their genre preferences (Moore, 2015). The immersive and instant gratification nature of this behavior equally appeals to both the sexes. Previous studies in contrast to this finding show that, male adolescents who experienced loneliness were more likely to binge-watch (Singh & Singh, 2022) and increased frequency of binge watching was observed among females (Exelman & Bulck, 2017). Despite, the presence of no significant differences in the binge watching behavior among male and female participants in this sample. Female participants were more likely to spend more than 3 or 4 hours in a day on watching TV series. Similar results derived from a past study indicated that female college students engaged in binge-watching for longer periods of time (Merrill & Rubenking, 2019). On the other hand, another study reported that binge watching session lasted for longer duration among males (Exelman & Bulck, 2017).

Implications

Some of the major implications of this research topic, "Perceived Stress and Binge-watching among Indian College Students" are as follows:

- **Mental Health Awareness:** Results from the study can assist in raising mental health awareness among college students specifically regarding the potential negative consequences of engaging in frequent binge-watching behavior as well as the role of perceived stress in encouraging excessive TV series viewing.
- **Media Regulation Policies:** Development of guidelines for streaming platforms and content creators considering the association of binge-watching with perceived stress among college students. This can be done in the form of revised content ratings, mandatory time limits, viewing reminders and information about responsible media usage.
- **Academic Outcomes:** Prolonged binge-watching is found to negatively affect a student's academic achievement or performance. Educational institutions can provide student support services focusing on stress management and adaptive coping strategies.
- **Role of Cultural Factors:** The present study focuses on Indian college students and helps to attain insights regarding the role of cultural factors in the level of perceived stress and media consumption behaviors. This can inform culturally sensitive approaches intended to address mental health issues as well as media habits within the Indian context.
- **Digital Media Usage:** Findings from this study shed light on the need for responsible integration of technology into educational settings and promote discussions on mindful media consumption.

In general, investigation of the connection between perceived stress and binge-viewing habits among Indian college students may have far-reaching implications for their mental health, academic outcomes, use of digital media and the formulation of related policies.

Limitations

1. **Sampling Bias:** One of the limitations of the present study is the limited sample size and the use of a convenience sampling technique. Therefore, the individuals in the population did not receive an equal chance to participate in the study in addition to placing restriction on the generalizability of the research results, as the present sample size may not be representative of the entire population.

2. Use of Self-Report Measures: Self-report measures are prone to different biases in the form of social desirability, acquiescence, dissent bias, wording bias, inclination towards neutral or extreme responses. This could lead to inaccurate or incomplete responses thereby affecting the validity and reliability of the study results.
3. Cross-sectional Design: The data was collected from a population and analyzed at a single point of time. This limits the ability to make causation, assess incidence rate and may also involve recall bias.
4. Generalizability: Another limitation of the present study may be due to its focus on a specific cultural context which can lead to the inability to generalize or apply the study findings to other settings.
5. Lack of an Operational Definition: Binge watching is a recently evolved phenomenon that lacks a clear definition and only employs watching television series/shows. Further research is required to adequately define binge-watching beyond the frequency and duration of the viewing session in order to develop a comprehensive understanding.
6. Online Data Collection: Use of an online survey method may have posed a limitation on the participation of individuals from remote areas, possibility of internet connectivity issues, survey fatigue, inability to assess non-verbal behaviors along with a sample that might not be entirely representative of the population.
7. Subjectivity of the Psychological Constructs: The way a person evaluates their degree of perceived stress or amount of binge-watching is subjective in nature. It may be influenced by their individual differences along with chances of recall bias in their responses.
8. Presence of Confounding Variables: Possible confounding variables creating a spurious association between perceived stress and binge-watching among Indian college students are as follows: academic workload, internet accessibility, affordability of streaming platforms, presence of different cultural norms and mental health status of the students.

Future Directions

Future research studies can build on these findings to conduct a cross-cultural study regarding binge-watching behavior and perceived stress among college students. New research studies using a large sample, from a cross-cultural and cross-generational perspective would be beneficial in gaining insight into this popular leisure activity. To better understand the proximity of binge-watching to behavioral addictions together with the role of personality traits and other environmental influences on it, additional research is necessary. Studies with longitudinal research designs are also preferred to gain insight regarding the course of binge-watching and perceived stress among college students.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between perceived stress and binge-watching among Indian college students. Major findings from this study showed that there was a significant positive correlation between perceived stress and binge-watching among college students in India. This indicates that students who reported to experience moderate to high perceived stress were more likely to engage in frequent binge-watching behavior and vice versa. Another important finding was the presence of high perceived stress among female college students compared to their male counterparts. When it comes to student's binge watching behavior, there was no discernible difference was observed among the participants based on their gender or age. Furthermore, this study provided insights regarding the nature of binge-watching behavior, perceived stress as well as it's relationship with each other among Indian college students. However, further research is needed to confirm the relationship between these psychological constructs specifically in this population.

Ethical Consideration and Informed Consent

The ethical guidelines of American Psychological Association (APA) with respect to research conduct and online survey were followed. Informed consent of the participants was obtained at the beginning of the study, which comprised of informing them regarding the voluntary nature of their participation, their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, aim of the research study, as well as usage of their responses for educational purpose. The confidentiality of their responses along with the anonymity of the participants were also ensured in order to protect the rights and welfare of the participants.

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Conflict of Interest

The author reports no conflicts of interest in this work

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