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BINGE WATCHING ADDICTION, PARASOCIAL ATTACHMENT AND NARRATIVE TRANSPORTATION AMONG YOUNG ADULTS: A CORRELATIONAL STUDY

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to explore the relationship between binge-watching addiction, parasocial attachment, and narrative transportation among young adults. The study also examined the predictive role of binge-watching addiction on parasocial attachment and narrative transportation, as well as gender differences across the study variables. A correlational research design was employed. A sample of 271 young adults (18-25 years) was recruited through purposive sampling from various universities in Lahore, Pakistan. A Demographic Information Sheet, the Binge-Watching Addiction Questionnaire (BWAQ) (Forte et al., 2021), the Celebrity Persona Parasocial Interaction Scale (CPPSI) (Bocarnea & Brown, 2007), and the Narrative Transportation Scale (NTS) (Green & Brock, 2000) were used as assessment measures. Pearson product-moment correlation, simple linear regression analysis, and independent-samples t-test were used to analyze the data. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between binge-watching addiction, parasocial attachment, and narrative transportation among young adults. Binge-watching addiction significantly predicted both parasocial attachment and narrative transportation. However, no significant gender differences were found for binge-watching addiction, parasocial attachment, or narrative transportation. The findings contribute to a better understanding of the psychological effects of excessive binge- watching and highlight the importance of promoting healthy media consumption habits and awareness regarding emotional involvement with fictional characters and immersive media experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Watching lots of episodes of a series in succession, has become a hallmark of today's media diet. It was possible due to streaming services like Netflix, Amazon Prime and Hulu that have started to air entire seasons at one time, instead of waiting for

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the next day's episode, as traditional TV schedules provided (Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020). The transition is also part of broader technological, cultural and economic evolution: New production methods enable the creation of complicated storylines that span several seasons, and on-demand access allows quality content to be delivered anytime (Erickson et al., 2019).

With rise in binge watching trends, researchers have started to think of its effects on behaviour and mental health. Researches indicate it can become addictive and compulsive when users use it to deal with stress, loneliness or challenging emotions (Flayelle et al., 2020). The treatment as potentially addictive behaviour is important because it reflects the psychological mechanisms that are involved and its influence on interpersonal relationships (Panda & Pandey, 2017).

Two concepts are useful here, namely, parasocial attachment and narrative transportation. Parasocial attachment refers to the one-sided relationship viewers develop with media characters, a relationship that is akin to friendship, though there is no real exchange of communication between the two (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Initial studies have indicated that people could be treated as friends in television viewing (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Recent studies indicate that bingeing increases these attachments, as characters become more emotionally accessible and personally relevant following longer, more intense experiences of the stories (Schweitzer & Zuckerman, 2020). The emotional continuity of shorter gaps between the events of the story also imbue viewers with greater sense of this continuity than weekly releases could (Stever, 2017) and the resulting relationships can be as deep and involving as real relationships (Eyal & Cohen, 2006).

Narrative transportation is defined as a lack of self-awareness of the surrounding environment in the fictional world (Green & Brock, 2000). It is associated with higher enjoyment, persuasion and emotional appeal and binge-watching increases this effect by eliminating interruptions and providing the viewers with continuous access to the story (Erickson et al., 2019). This deepens the effect, given that streaming services deliver high-quality, engaging content that does not tend to overlook the narrative, and allows viewers to spend significant moments in a virtual world (Chung & Kim, 2021). High transportation is correlated with high emotional reactions, high empathy and changes in beliefs/attitudes (Van Laer et al., 2019), and it enhances the attachment to characters, supporting parasocial bonds (Sood, 2002). Experimental evidence backs this up: those who saw three back-to-back episodes experienced increased transportation and parasocial identification with their favorite characters than those who only saw them once a week (Erickson et al., 2019). The manner in which people interact with the content, that is, affects their emotional and intellectual reactions more than the content itself does.

It looks like these three phenomena reinforce each other. Binge-watching leads to a higher level of narrative exposure and, in turn, raises the likelihood of escaping into the story world and, consequently, emotional involvement with characters (Broom et al., 2021). Characters that are well-transportable are also well-received, making the process of parasocial attachment even easier (Tukachinsky & Stever, 2019), and viewers who already feel attached to the characters are more likely to binge-watch related content, feeding into their sense of immersion and emotional dependency (Shim & Kim, 2018). These are also the conclusions reached in research on motivation, which indicates that people engage in binge drinking to alleviate boredom, reduce stress, enhance their mood or for the purpose of connecting with characters (Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020). Parasocial contact can come into play in the process here, as lonely viewers are more likely to develop unbalanced relational bonds with characters and thus engage in greater binge-watching (Shariffadeen, 2023).

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Given the increased popularity of binge-watching globally, its relationship with the concept of being a parasocial attachment and a transported narrative needs further investigation. As media use patterns evolve, they can influence identity development, emotional well-being and problem-solving, especially for adolescents and young adults who constitute the biggest group of streaming users (Perryman & Jansen, 2020). This paper explores the emotion of fictional story and characters created by binge-watching and some questions concerning media-related well-being and the psychological mechanisms underlying the current entertainment habits in binge-watching (Sung et al., 2015). The importance of the topic is there for a number of reasons. Media makers will have clearer insight in the impact of packaging and releasing a story. Understanding parasocial attachment and transportation also allows for the risks and benefits to be identified, as binge-watching may lead to addiction-like behaviours (Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020). The concepts described above offer more broadly insights to the changing relationship between the consumption of the fictional world and the characters and the implications for media literacy and platform design.

Rationale

Binge viewing, defined as watching several episodes of one TV program in succession, is a popular media diet among young adults. Parasocial Interaction Theory proposed that repeated viewing of media characters creates one-sided relationships, called parasocial attachments, and that binge-watching leads to increased parasocial attachments, as viewers spend longer periods of time in the characters' lives (Horton & Wohl, 1956). It also helps to increase the level of engagement with stories: the Transportation-Imagery Model suggests that people can be mentally transported by a story, feeling more emotion and identification with the characters, and that more watching will lead to more vivid narration (Green & Brock, 2000). When combined, these three facets of media involvement (binge-watching, parasocial attachment, and narrative transportation) create a continuum of engagement with media that can be pleasurable and emotionally satisfying while posing potential psychological and social risks, and examining these relationships can help explain the pros and cons.

Objectives

- To examine the relationship between Binge Watching and Parasocial Attachment.
- To examine the relationship between Binge Watching and Narrative Transportation.
- To explore the role of Binge Watching, Parasocial Attachment and Narrative Transportation among Young Adults.
- To explore differences in binge-watching addiction, parasocial attachment, and narrative transportation between men and women.

Hypotheses

H1: There is likely to be a significant positive correlation between Binge Watching and Parasocial Attachment among Young Adults.
H2: There is likely to be a significant positive correlation between Binge Watching and Narrative Transportation among Young Adults.
H3: Women are more likely to experience more Parasocial Attachment and Narrative Transportation as compared to men.
H4: Binge Watching is likely to be a significant positive predictor of Parasocial Attachment and Narrative Transportation among Young Adults.

Method

Research design

Correlational research design was used in this research.

Sample and sampling strategy

Purposive sampling was used to collect data. Sample comprised of N=271 (n1=70 men, n2=201 women) Young adults.

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Inclusion criteria

- Only those Young Adults who will be in the age range of 18 to 25 years were included.
- Students who have binge watched at least once in the past month (watched 4 or more episodes in one setting or watched continually for at least 4 hours.
- Participants who had watched television series or web series through online streaming platforms (e.g., Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+, YouTube, or similar) were included.
- Participants who were willing to take part in the research.

Exclusion criteria

- Participants suffering from any psychological or physical problems will be excluded.
- Participants that do not understand the language of questionnaire will not be included.
- Participants with incomplete forms were excluded.
- Participants who do not watch tv shows regularly were excluded.

Table I Description of Sociodemographic Characteristics of Sample (N=271).

Variable	F	%
Age		
18-21	138	50.9
22-25	133	49.1
Gender		
Male	122	45
Female	149	45.9
Educational Status		
Undergraduate	264	97.4
Graduate	7	2.6
Employment Status		
Full time employed	13	4.8
Part time employed	40	14.8

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Unemployed student	185	68.3
Unemployed	33	12.2
Average Daily Screen Time		
Less than 2 hours	11	4.1
2-4 hours	55	20.6
4-6 hours	91	33.6
More than 6 hours	114	42.1
Perceived Stress Level		
Low	46	17
Moderate	165	60.9
High	60	22.1
Perceived socioeconomic status		
Low	31	11.4
Middle	190	70.1
High	50	18.5

Note. F= frequency, %= percentage, M= mean, SD=standard deviation

Assessment measures

Demographic information sheet

A demographic sheet was used to collect individual demographic data from participants, including age, education, employment status, average daily screen time, perceived stress level and perceived socioeconomic status.

Binge Watching Addiction Questionnaire

This addiction questionnaire comprises 20 questions with 5-point liker scale (1= never, 5= always) in order to measure the severity and frequency of maladaptive viewing tendencies of young adults aged between 18 and 25, to be able to differentiate between recreational binge watching and patterns disrupting psychological, social, or academic functioning. The BWAQ proved to possess adequate psychometric qualities such as internal consistency and construct validity, which is why it is a valid and suitable tool to study the issue of binge-watching addiction among young adult groups (Forte et al., 2021).

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Celebrity Persona Parasocial Interaction Scale

Celebrity Persona Parasocial Interaction Scaleconsists of 20 questions that comprise a 5-point Likert-scale and 4 reverse questions which can be used to measure the degree and frequency of parasocial engagement. A greater score suggests greater levels of parasocial bonds that can be reflected in attitude, behavior, and media consumption habits. The CPPSI has possesses satisfactory psychometric qualities such as sufficient levels of internal consistency and construct validity and this is why it can be considered as a good measure of celebrity-centered parasocial interaction among young adult groups (Rubin et al., 1985).

Narrative transportation scale

Narrative Transportation Scale is defined as 15 items that are rated on a Likert-type scale, usually with a strong disagree to strongly agree, which measures the amount of absorption one has when exposed to narrative material. The increase in the scores shows the increased transportation, which means the more profound involvement and vulnerability to the attitudes and beliefs that are consistent with the story. The scale has also proven to be internally consistent and construct valid with different samples and is therefore reliable in measurement of narrative engagement in experimental and correlational research conditions (Green and Brock, 2000).

Procedure

Permission to use the scales was taken from the developers of the scales. Participants were included keeping the inclusion and exclusion criteria in mind. informed consent was taken from each participant stating their right to withdraw at any time without penalty and assurance of confidentiality. Once their consent was taken, they were asked to fill in the questionnaire which took about 15 minutes. All the collected data was then analyzed on Statistical Pakage for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to find their statistical significance.

Ethical consideration

The research followed ethical considerations by maintaining academic integrity, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity. Permissions for instruments were taken and participants were made aware of their right to withdraw.

Statistical analysis

Demographic analysis, descriptive and psychometric analysis, Pearson correlational analysis, Regression analysis and T-test was used in this research.

Results

The current study aimed to examine the relationships between Binge watching addiction, parasocial attachment, and narrative transportation among young adults.

Psychometric Properties

This section provides the descriptive statistics and reliability estimates of the BWAQ (Forte et al., 2021), the PSA (Rubin et al., 1985), and the NT (Green & Brock, 2000).

Table 2 Psychometric Properties of Binge-Watching Addiction, Celebrity-Persona Parasocial Interaction and Narrative Transportation Scale

Scale	*k*	M	SD	Actual Range	Potential Range	Cronbach's α
1. BWAQ	20	55.53	10.97	20-80	0-80	.96

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2. PSA	20	57.51	9.38	22-100	20-100	.89
3. NT	12	35.84	9.52	12-67	12-84	.95

Note. N = 271; k = Total number of items; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; α = reliability; BWAQ= Binge Watching Addiction Questionnaire; PSA= Parasocial Attachment Scale; NT=Narrative Transportation).

Table 2 shows that all three scales used in this study have good to excellent reliability: the Binge-Watching Addiction Questionnaire (α = 0.96) and the Narrative Transportation Scale (α = 0.95) showed excellent internal consistency, while the Celebrity-Persona Parasocial Interaction scale (α = 0.89) showed acceptable to good reliability. Based on these results, the scales appear to be suitable for further inferential statistics on the hypothesized relationships between binge-watching addiction, parasocial attachment and narrative transportation for young adults.

Table 3 Intercorrelation for Binge-Watching Addiction, Parasocial Attachment and Narrative Transportation among Young Adults (N=271).

Variables	1	2	3
1.Binge Watching Addiction	-		
2. Parasocial Attachment	.42**	-	
3.Narrative Transportation	.25**	.29**	-

Note. N = 271. *p < .05. **p < .01.

Binge-watching (BW) is positively and significantly related with both PSA and NT, indicating that higher levels of binge-watching are associated with higher levels of PSA and NT. People who have stronger parasocial relationships are more likely to become immersed in narratives, as well (r = .294, p < .01). There are no negative associations overall, and all were statistically significant, lending credence to the notion that there is a positive association between binge-watching and emotional connection and engagement with media content.

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Table 4 Linear Regression for Binge Watching Addiction as Predictor of Parasocial Attachment and Narrative Transportation among Young Adults (N=271).

Variables	Parasocial Attachment			Narrative Transportation		
	B	*β*	*SE*	*B*	*β*	*SE*
Constant	29.55		3.60	24.74		2.89
Binge Watching Addiction	.48	.42**		.22	.25**	.051
R^2	.176			.063		
ΔR^2	.176			.063		

Note. N = 271. ***p ≤ 0.001.

As revealed in Table 4, binge-watching addiction significantly and positively predicted the parasocial attachment of young adults (β = .42, p < .001) and the transportation of young adults (β = .25, p < .001), indicating that as binge-watching addiction scores increase, the scores of the parasocial attachment and transportation of young adults also increase. Model 1 accounted for 17.6% of the variance in parasocial attachment (R^2 = .176) and model 2 accounted for 6.3% of the variance in narrative transportation (R^2 = .063).

Table 5 Gender Differences in Binge Watching Addiction, Parasocial Attachment and Narrative Transportation among Young Adults (271).

Variables	Men		Women		t(269)	*p*
	M	*SD*	M	*SD*		
Binge Watching Addiction	54.21	12.40	56	10.43	-1.08	.28
Parasocial Attachment	57.32	12.53	56.06	12.69	.72	.47
Narrative Transportation	36.87	10.60	36.82	9.14	.03	.97

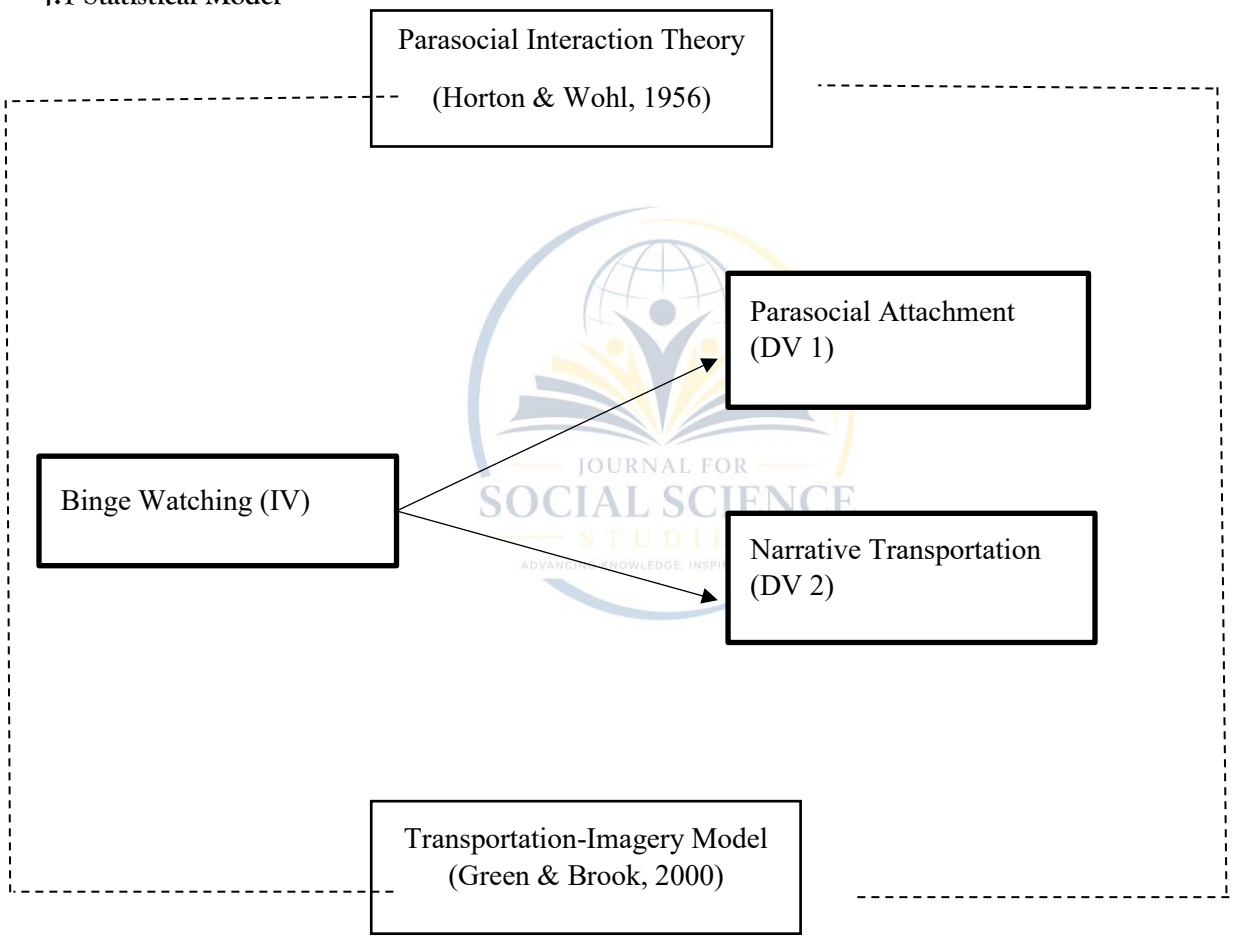
Note. N = 271. ***p ≤ 0.001.

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There were no gender differences for any of the three variables as revealed by independent samples t-tests. For binge-watching addiction, women (M = 56.00, SD = 10.43) scored slightly higher than men (M = 54.21, SD = 12.40), but the difference was non-significant, t(269) = -1.08, p = .28, with a small effect size (d = -0.16). For parasocial attachment, men (M = 57.32, SD = 12.53) scored slightly higher than women (M = 56.06, SD = 12.69), which was also non-significant, t(269) = .72, p = .47, d = .10. For narrative transportation, scores were almost identical for men (M = 36.87, SD = 10.60) and women (M = 36.82, SD = 9.14), t(269) = .03, p = .97, d = .00. In total, there were no significant differences between binge-watching addiction, parasocial attachment, or narrative transportation between the two sexes.

4.1 Statistical Model



Discussion

The present research explored the connection among binge-watching addiction, parasocial attachment, and narrative transportation in young adults. Based on previous literature, it was assumed that binge-watching addiction would positively correlate with both variables and predict them as binge viewing would cause emotional involvement with characters and increase immersion in stories (Erickson et al., 2019). All three scales had good to excellent reliability: Binge-Watching Addiction Questionnaire (α = .96),

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Celebrity-Persona Parasocial Interaction Scale (α = .89), and Narrative Transportation Scale (α = .95). It is also aligned with the findings of Anghelcev et al. (2021), where they were able to develop reliable measures for binge-watching and narrative engagement.

The hypotheses were supported by the results. As predicted by Horton and Wohl's (1956) Parasocial Interaction Theory, which states that repeated viewing creates one-sided emotional attachments, binge watching addiction was positively and significantly correlated with parasocial attachment. Extended viewing also enables characters to be seen in a more intimate and identifying way (Erickson et al., 2019). Also, binge-watching addiction was positively correlated with narrative transportation, agreeing with Green and Brock (2000) who report cognitive and emotional absorption in stories and with Warren (2020) who finds that viewing over time increases immersion. Narrative transportation was also significantly and positively related to parasocial attachment, consistent with Rain and Mar's (2021) finding that greater parasocial relationships correlates with greater immersion. The regression analysis results indicate that binge-watching addiction was a significant predictor for both parasocial attachment and transportation, as shown in the studies of Erickson et al. (2019) and Anghelcev et al. (2021), respectively. There were no significant gender differences with any variable, and this was consistent with the mixed gender results of previous studies (Pittman & Steiner, 2019), despite some literature indicating higher scores for females.

The study concludes that binge viewers are more likely to develop feelings of emotional attachment to fictional characters and of being transported within the media products, as this is in line with the Parasocial Interaction Theory of Horton and Wohl (1956) and the Transportation-Imagery Model of Green and Brock (2000). It suffers from the cross-sectional design (preventing causal statements), self-report (potential social desirability bias), limited to young adults, gender as sole demographic variable analyzed, and no measurement of content genre or other factors such as loneliness, well-being, emotional regulation, and social connectedness.

Longitudinal and/or experimental designs are recommended for future studies, as are greater diversity in terms of age, culture, and education, study of genre effects, study of other psychological correlates, and qualitative study (interviews or focus groups). The implications are that the study provides empirical evidence to media psychology, validates the two guiding theories, and provides insight to media streaming companies, content producers, and media consumers. It also aids mental health professionals and counsellors in grasping the connection with fictional characters, and offers a foundation for designing media-awareness campaigns with young adults to promote healthy media engagement and reduce binge-watching, while also serving as a foundation for research on the broader psychological and social impacts of binge-watching.

Conclusion

Psychometric analysis, Pearson correlation, linear regression, and independent-samples t-test were used in the study. All three scales (Binge-Watching Addiction Questionnaire, Celebrity-Persona Parasocial Interaction Scale, and Narrative Transportation Scale) had good to excellent reliability. The relationship between binge-watching addiction and parasocial attachment, and binge-watching addiction and narrative transportation was positive and significant, and the relationship between parasocial attachment and narrative transportation was also positive and significant, indicating that parasocial attachment is more closely related to binge-watching addiction than narrative transportation, and narrative transportation is more closely related to parasocial attachment than binge-watching addiction. There were no gender differences in any of the variables. The study points to the psychological effects of too much viewing, supplements Horton and Wohl's (1956) Parasocial Interaction Theory and Green

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and Brock's (2000) Transportation-Imagery Model, and advances media psychology by elucidating the connections between binge-watching addiction, parasocial attachment, and narrative transportation.

Limitations and suggestions

The sample was only made up of young adults, therefore it is possible that the results may not apply to others of different age groups; information on gender alone was examined, but other demographic factors, including differences in age, education, relationship status and socioeconomic status, were not included. Moreover, content genre (drama, romance, thriller, fantasy and comedy) was not tested, due to the possibility of having different effects on the parasocial attachment and on the narrative transportation, and other psychological constructs were not taken into consideration, including loneliness, well-being, emotional regulation and social connectedness.

Longitudinal design or experimental design is recommended for future research to establish the causal relationships between the binge-watching addiction, parasocial attachment and narrative transportation. Samples should also be more diverse in age, culture and education levels to increase generalizability, and variables such as demographic variables should be explored as moderators of these relationships. Future research should investigate the relationship between different media genres and parasocial attachment and transportation and other psychological factors associated with binge-watching, including loneliness, mental health problems, emotional regulation, and social functioning.

Implications of the Study

By empirically demonstrating a positive relationship between binge-watching and young adults' levels of story transportation and parasocial attachment, this study is one of the first in emerging media psychology studies to support this claim. It confirms two theories: the Parasocial Interaction Theory and the Transportation-Imagery Model and demonstrates how repeated interaction with media can lead to attachment to characters and immersion in a story. On a practical level, the outcomes can inform streaming services, content creators and viewers on psychological connections that are associated with longer engagement with media and how these relationships impact the perception and experience of the service and its content. They can also serve as a basis for future studies on the broader psychological and social effects of binge-watching in the digital streaming era and to inform educational programs and awareness campaigns aimed at encouraging young adults to manage their media consumption.

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