

BINGE-WATCHING AMONG ARAB UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: NETFLIX USE, PLATFORM AFFORDANCES, AND PSYCHOSOCIAL MOTIVATIONS IN EGYPT AND SAUDI ARABIA

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Abstract

The rapid proliferation of subscription video-on-demand platforms has established binge-watching as a dominant media consumption mode among young adults globally, yet empirical evidence mapping this phenomenon within Arab cultural and linguistic contexts remains scarce. Drawing on Uses and Gratifications Theory and Media System Dependency Theory, this study examines the complex relationships between platform design affordances, psychosocial motivations, systemic platform dependency, and behavioral binge-watching patterns among university students in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Data were gathered through a cross-sectional survey administered to undergraduate students across four prominent public and private universities in both nations: Cairo University, October 6 University, Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, and Alfaisal University. The empirical findings reveal extensive binge-watching habits alongside highly elevated levels of psychosocial motivations, platform dependency, and perceived interface design influence. Bivariate correlation analyses indicate that all hypothesized relationships are statistically significant, positive, and robust, with psychosocial motivations and explicit platform dependency emerging as the factors most strongly associated with consecutive episode viewing. Furthermore, multivariate regression analysis confirms that psychosocial motivations, usage intensity, and daily viewing duration jointly explain a substantial proportion of the variance in binge-watching behavior, with active psychosocial needs serving as the most powerful unique predictor in the model. This study concludes that binge-watching among university students in Egypt and Saudi Arabia represents a complex, hybrid behavioral practice where active user need-seeking—encompassing entertainment, emotional regulation, and social belonging—is systematically amplified by the persuasive architecture of the streaming interface. By documenting how features like autoplay and algorithmic recommendation systems lower behavioral friction, these findings successfully expand contemporary media dependency and gratification theories to Arab streaming ecosystems. Ultimately, this research offers critical, culturally situated insights to inform future media literacy education, platform design ethics, and targeted digital self-regulation interventions for young adults in the region.

Keywords: Binge-Watching; Netflix; Streaming Platforms; Arab University Students; Uses And Gratifications; Media System Dependency; Platform Design; Autoplay; Recommendation Systems; Egypt; Saudi Arabia.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) services has fundamentally altered the temporal, spatial, and social organization of audiovisual consumption. Unlike linear broadcasting, streaming platforms offer immediate access, algorithmic personalization, device portability, and continuous content availability. These structural affordances have weakened the conventions of scheduled viewing and encouraged more flexible, individualized, and intensive consumption practices (Flayelle et al., 2017; Steiner & Xu, 2020). Among the most visible outcomes of this transformation is binge-watching — commonly defined as watching multiple consecutive episodes of a television series in a single sitting, often beyond the viewer's original intention (Alimoradi et al., 2022; Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020).

Binge-watching has emerged as a significant topic in media and communication research because it captures a broader shift in audience behavior: from appointment-based, broadcaster-controlled viewing toward user-directed, algorithmically supported consumption. Early studies conceptualized binge-watching primarily through the lens of audience motivations — relaxation, engagement, hedonism, and escapism (Pittman & Sheehan, 2015; Steiner & Xu, 2020). Subsequent research has increasingly examined the role of platform design features, particularly autoplay, recommendation algorithms, and interface continuity, in shaping viewing duration and perceived user agency (Schaffner et al., 2023; Flayelle et al., 2023). Critically, recent experimental evidence demonstrates that autoplay causally increases both session length and daily consumption, confirming that platform architecture actively shapes user behavior beyond individual motivation (Schaffner et al., 2024, 2025).

Binge-watching is associated with a range of psychosocial outcomes. Meta-analytic evidence documents positive correlations with stress ($r \approx .32$), anxiety ($r \approx .25$), depression, loneliness, and sleep problems, with stronger associations observed in developing countries and during the COVID-19 pandemic (Alimoradi et al., 2022). However, the relationship is not uniformly negative. Some studies indicate that binge-watching can serve adaptive functions — stress recovery, mood regulation, and social bonding — particularly when driven by enrichment rather than purely escapist motives (Boursier et al., 2021; Starosta et al., 2021a). This dual character, as both a normative leisure practice and a potentially problematic coping mechanism, underscores the need for nuanced, context-sensitive research.

Despite growing scholarly interest, the vast majority of empirical binge-watching studies have been conducted in Western or East Asian contexts. Research in Arab and Middle Eastern settings remains limited, even though digital media adoption among Arab youth has been rapid, widespread, and culturally distinctive (Wiest & Eltantawy, 2015). The Arab world presents a unique media landscape characterized by high youth populations, rapidly expanding internet penetration, strong collectivist cultural values, and ongoing negotiation between traditional norms and globalized media content (Wiest & Eltantawy, 2015; Aunul & Handoko, 2022; Ebrahim & Mosad, 2025). The few available studies suggest that Arab university students exhibit high levels of SVOD use and that cultural

factors — including peer influence, social belonging, and evolving media trust dynamics — may shape both motivations and outcomes in ways that differ from Western samples (Dinana et al., 2025; Munawar & Siraj, 2022).

Understanding binge-watching in Arab contexts is therefore important not only for advancing cross-cultural media theory but also for informing culturally appropriate media literacy and digital well-being interventions. This study addresses this gap by examining binge-watching behavior among university students in Egypt and Saudi Arabia — two countries that represent distinct political, economic, and media environments within the Arab world, yet share important cultural and linguistic commonalities. The study integrates Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and Media System Dependency Theory (MSDT) to explore how psychosocial motivations and platform-related factors jointly predict binge-watching behavior.

The study is guided by four objectives: (1) to describe the prevalence and intensity of binge-watching behavior among university students in Egypt and Saudi Arabia; (2) to examine the bivariate relationships between Netflix dependency, psychosocial motivations, usage intensity, daily use duration, platform design perceptions, and binge-watching behavior; (3) to identify the relative predictive contribution of psychosocial and behavioral platform-use factors in a theoretically specified multivariate model; and (4) to discuss implications for media literacy, platform design ethics, and digital self-regulation in Arab university contexts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Defining and Measuring Binge-Watching

Binge-watching lacks a single universally accepted definition, but most operationalizations converge on watching multiple episodes of a television series consecutively in one sitting, with thresholds typically ranging from two to six episodes (Alimoradi et al., 2022; Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020). Researchers increasingly distinguish between *normative binge-watching* — a common, enjoyable leisure activity — and *problematic binge-watching*, characterized by loss of control, neglect of responsibilities, and negative psychosocial consequences (Ilyas et al., 2023; Starosta et al., 2021b). This distinction is theoretically important because it separates the practice itself from its functional and dysfunctional manifestations.

Measurement approaches range from simple self-reported frequency and episode-count scales to validated clinical-style instruments, including the Questionnaire of Excessive Binge-Watching, the Problematic Series Watching Scale (Orosz et al., 2016), and multi-item scales assessing viewing motivations alongside symptom indicators (Starosta et al., 2021a, 2021b). Meta-analytic evidence indicates that binge-watching is positively associated with stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and sleep problems, with effect sizes generally in the small-to-medium range and stronger associations observed during the COVID-19 pandemic and in developing countries (Alimoradi et al., 2022). However, heterogeneity across studies is substantial, reflecting variability in

definitions, samples, and measurement instruments. Among medical students, prevalence rates as high as 72.3% have been reported using frequency-based cutoffs (Soumeyya et al., 2023), while other studies find that certain frequency groups show lower depression and anxiety scores, suggesting that binge-watching can function adaptively for some individuals (Soumeyya et al., 2023; Boursier et al., 2021).

2.2 Uses and Gratifications Theory Applied to Streaming

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), originally articulated by Katz et al. (1973) and subsequently developed by Rubin (1994) and others, posits that audiences are active agents who select media to satisfy specific psychological and social needs. Applied to SVOD platforms, UGT research has consistently identified entertainment, escapism, relaxation, information-seeking, social interaction, and mood management as primary gratifications associated with streaming use and binge-watching (Pittman & Sheehan, 2015; Steiner & Xu, 2020). More recent work has refined these categories to examine how specific motivational profiles predict both normative and problematic viewing patterns.

Starosta et al. (2021a) found in a sample of 645 Polish young adults that anxiety-depressive traits and viewing motivations — notably escape and coping with loneliness — significantly predicted problematic binge-watching, with motivations partially mediating the relationship between psychological distress and viewing behavior.

Complementarily, Starosta et al. (2021b) demonstrated that impulsivity, emotion regulation difficulties, and escapist motivation jointly predicted problematic binge-watching symptoms, illustrating how UGT motivations interact with trait-level vulnerabilities.

Boursier et al. (2021) extended this line of inquiry to the COVID-19 pandemic context, finding that anxiety and escapism predicted both non-problematic and problematic TV-series watching, while enrichment motives (e.g., aesthetic appreciation, intellectual engagement) were protective against uncontrolled viewing.

Social motives occupy an important place in UGT accounts of binge-watching. Companionship, social acceptance, and peer influence have been identified as common drivers across diverse national samples. Manaf and Chan (2023) found in a Malaysian university case study that loneliness, entertainment motives, and peer influence were associated with problematic Netflix binge-watching tendencies.

In Pakistan, a survey of 500 youth identified needs for companionship, stress relief, escapism, and social acceptance as primary reasons for late-night binge-watching (Asgher & Gohar, 2022). Munawar and Siraj (2022) similarly found that coping and escapism motivations showed the strongest associations with problematic binge-watching in a Pakistani student sample, with younger adults and females showing greater susceptibility. These findings highlight the social embeddedness of streaming practices and suggest that binge-watching serves both individual and relational functions.

2.3 Media System Dependency Theory and Platform Reliance

Media System Dependency Theory (MSDT), developed by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976) and elaborated by Ball-Rokeach (1985), proposes that individuals develop dependencies on media systems to meet informational, social, and self-understanding needs, and that the strength of this dependency mediates media effects on beliefs, behaviors, and affect. The theory posits that dependency intensifies when media resources are scarce or irreplaceable, when social systems are unstable or undergoing change, and when individuals have limited access to alternative information sources.

Applied to digital platforms, MSDT has been used to explain heavy reliance on social networks, short-video platforms, and video-on-demand services. Xu and Ibrahim (2023) documented a “dependency syndrome” among international students using Douyin (TikTok’s Chinese counterpart), characterized by emotional and behavioral dependence and negative effects on attention and interpersonal communication — findings consistent with core MSDT propositions. Akbari (2019) found that Iranian students reported excessive time on social networks and perceived changes in their belief systems, framing these outcomes through MSDT to explain increased media importance during social and political upheaval. Rametse (2018) applied MSDT directly to VOD use in South Africa, arguing that stronger dependency links platform influence with audience behavior and societal functions.

Almakaty (2025) advocates integrating MSDT and UGT to capture both motivations and structural dependency relationships in digital media contexts, arguing that neither theory alone is sufficient for explaining the complexity of platform reliance among contemporary users. This integrative approach is particularly well-suited to binge-watching research: users actively seek specific gratifications (UGT dimension) while simultaneously developing structural dependencies on platforms that shape their daily routines, emotional states, and social interactions (MSDT dimension). In the present study, Netflix dependency is conceptualized as reflecting this dual character — habitual reliance on the platform as a primary source of leisure, emotional regulation, and social connection.

2.4 Platform Design Affordances and Persuasive Architecture

A growing body of research examines how platform design features — autoplay, recommendation algorithms, interface visualizations, and seamless content continuity — shape viewing behavior and perceived user agency. This work draws on concepts from persuasive technology (Fogg, 2003), dark patterns (Gray et al., 2018), and behavioral design to analyze how streaming platforms engineer engagement beyond users’ conscious intentions.

Experimental evidence provides the strongest causal support for platform design effects on binge-watching. Schaffner et al. (2024, 2025) conducted a randomized field experiment in which participants were assigned to disable Netflix autoplay; results showed significant reductions in average daily watching time and session length, demonstrating that autoplay functions as an attention-capture feature that extends engagement beyond users’ initial intentions. These findings are corroborated by

qualitative evidence: Schaffner et al. (2023) found in interview studies that Netflix users reported autoplay and recommendation features encouraged more watching and content choices they would not have made independently, undermining their sense of agency and autonomy. Lukoff et al. (2022) similarly found that YouTube's autoplay and recommendations primarily undermined user agency, while search and user-curated playlists supported it.

At a theoretical level, Flayelle et al. (2023) propose a theory-driven taxonomy of persuasive design features — including autoplay, algorithmic recommendations, visual continuations, and notification systems — that can promote potentially addictive online behaviors across streaming and social media platforms. Richter (2023) identifies five specific Netflix engagement strategies: spatial visualization of content, overabundance aesthetics, seamless continuation between episodes, sameness logic in recommendations, and algorithmic aggregation of viewer preferences. These design features are not neutral tools but active components of a persuasive architecture that shapes user behavior in ways that may conflict with users' long-term well-being and self-regulatory goals (Beuscart et al., 2019; Flayelle et al., 2023; Schaffner et al., 2023).

2.5 Binge-Watching in Arab and Cross-Cultural Contexts

Cross-cultural research on digital media use highlights important variations in adoption patterns, motivations, and outcomes across cultural contexts. Wiest and Eltantawy (2015) documented rapid adoption of new media among Arab youth, noting a complex interplay between traditional collectivist values and increasing Western media influences. This cultural duality is particularly relevant for binge-watching research: Arab university students may draw on both individualistic (escapism, personal entertainment) and collectivistic (peer belonging, shared viewing, social acceptance) motivations for intensive streaming consumption.

Ebrahim and Mosad (2025) analyzed Bahraini youth preferences toward AI-driven social media applications using an integrated UGT-MSDT framework, finding that cultural and psychological factors mediate attitudes toward algorithmically curated media in Arab contexts.

Dinana et al. (2025) examined digital journalism's influence on civic engagement in Egypt, employing MSDT to explain reliance on digital media during crises and highlighting cross-cultural variations in trust and media dependency. These studies collectively suggest that Arab media users exhibit distinct patterns of platform dependency, trust, and motivation that reflect regional cultural values, political contexts, and media system characteristics.

Research specifically examining binge-watching in Arab contexts remains scarce. Munawar and Siraj (2022) studied problematic binge-watching in Pakistan from UGT and MSDT perspectives, finding that coping and escapism motivations were most strongly associated with problematic symptoms — a finding that may generalize to other developing-country contexts with similar cultural emphases on collective stress and limited leisure alternatives.

Raza et al. (2021) found in a large cross-sectional survey ($N = 1,089$) that extensive binge-watching predicted stress, loneliness, insomnia, depression, and anxiety, and recommended streaming-related media literacy interventions to help audiences critically assess content and its social implications. The present study builds on these foundations by providing systematic empirical data from two Arab countries — Egypt and Saudi Arabia — and by examining both psychosocial motivations and platform design perceptions within a unified theoretical model.

2.6 Research Hypotheses

Based on the foregoing literature review and the dual theoretical framework of UGT and MSDT, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: Netflix use (operationalized as Netflix dependency) is positively associated with binge-watching behavior among university students in Egypt and Saudi Arabia.
- H2: Usage intensity is positively associated with binge-watching behavior.
- H3: Psychosocial motivations (entertainment, escapism, emotional regulation, social belonging) are positively associated with binge-watching behavior.
- H4: Daily use duration is positively associated with binge-watching behavior.
- H5: Psychosocial motivations, usage intensity, and daily use duration jointly predict binge-watching behavior in a multivariate model, with psychosocial motivations contributing the largest unique variance.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design. Cross-sectional surveys are the dominant methodology in binge-watching research (Alimoradi et al., 2022; Munawar & Siraj, 2022) and are appropriate for examining associations between theoretically specified variables at a single point in time.

The design allows systematic measurement of multiple constructs across a large sample and supports hypothesis testing through correlation and regression analyses. A limitation of this design is that it does not permit causal inference; all findings are therefore reported as associations or predictions rather than effects (see Section 6.1). The study was conducted during the 2025-2026 academic year.

3.2 Sampling and Participants

Sampling strategy: A purposive convenience sample of 400 undergraduate students was recruited from four universities: Cairo University and October 6 University in Egypt, and Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU) and Alfaisal University in Saudi Arabia. These institutions were selected to represent a combination of public and private universities in two major Arab countries with distinct media regulatory environments. Egypt and Saudi Arabia together account for a substantial proportion of

Arabic-speaking internet users and Netflix subscribers in the MENA region, making them strategically relevant for studying Arab streaming behavior.

Inclusion criteria: Eligible participants were currently enrolled undergraduate students, aged 18 years or older, who reported active Netflix use (defined as having used Netflix at least once in the preceding month). Participants who did not meet these criteria were excluded from analysis.

Sample size justification: The required sample size was estimated using *GPower 3.1* (Faul et al., 2009) for multiple linear regression with three predictors, assuming a medium effect size ($f^2 = .15$), $\alpha = .05$, and desired power of .80. The minimum required sample was $n^* = 92$. The achieved sample of $N = 400$ substantially exceeds this threshold, providing power $> .99$ for detecting medium effects and adequate power for detecting small effects ($f^2 = .02$, power $\approx .85$).

Recruitment and consent: Participants were recruited through university email distribution lists, official student social media groups (WhatsApp and Telegram), and in-person announcements in undergraduate classes and student centers. Participation was entirely voluntary. All participants received a written information sheet describing the study's purpose, procedures, confidentiality protections, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Informed consent was obtained electronically prior to survey access.

Sample characteristics: The final sample comprised $N = 400$ participants: Egypt ($n = 200$; Cairo University $n = 100$, October 6 University $n = 100$) and Saudi Arabia ($n = 200$; IMSIU $n = 100$, Alfaisal University $n = 100$). Demographic characteristics are reported in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 400)

Variable	Category	n	%
Country	Egypt	200	50.0
	Saudi Arabia	200	50.0
Gender	Male	178	44.5
	Female	222	55.5
Age	18–20	164	41.0
	21–23	196	49.0
	24 and above	40	10.0
	<i>M (SD)</i>	21.3 (1.8)	
Academic level	Freshman	72	18.0
	Sophomore	96	24.0
	Junior	112	28.0
	Senior	96	24.0
	Graduate	24	6.0
Netflix subscription	Personal	244	61.0
	Shared/family	156	39.0

Note. Percentages are based on the final analytical sample (N = 400). Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

3.3 Instrumentation

All constructs were measured using five-point Likert scales (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree* for attitudinal items; 1 = *never* to 5 = *always* for behavioral frequency items): Items were developed and adapted from validated instruments in the binge-watching and media use literature (Starosta et al., 2021a, 2021b; Munawar & Siraj, 2022; Raza et al., 2021). The survey instrument comprised six multi-item scales:

Binge-Watching Behavior (dependent variable; adapted from Starosta et al., 2021b; Orosz et al., 2016): This scale measured the frequency and intensity of consecutive episode viewing. Representative items: *“I watch several episodes of a series consecutively in a single sitting”*; *“I continue watching beyond the time I originally planned”*; *“I lose track of time while watching Netflix”*; *“I automatically continue to the next episode without actively deciding to do so.”* Higher scores indicate more intensive binge-watching.

Netflix Dependency (predictor; adapted from Xu & Ibrahim, 2023; Rametse, 2018): This scale measured perceived reliance on Netflix as a primary leisure and emotional resource. Representative items: *“Netflix is my main source of entertainment and leisure”*; *“I use Netflix daily or almost daily”*; *“I feel uncomfortable or restless when I cannot access Netflix”*; *“I feel a need to keep up with content on Netflix continuously.”* Higher scores indicate stronger platform dependency.

Psychosocial Motivations (predictor; adapted from Starosta et al., 2021a; Munawar & Siraj, 2022; Manaf & Chan, 2023): This scale assessed motivations for binge-watching across four sub-dimensions: entertainment, escapism, emotional regulation, and social belonging. Representative items: *“I watch Netflix to escape stress and daily pressures”*; *“Watching Netflix helps me manage my anxiety or negative emotions”*; *“I binge-watch because my friends or peers do so”*; *“Watching multiple episodes gives me a sense of pleasure and enjoyment.”* Higher scores indicate stronger psychosocial motivation.

Usage Intensity (predictor; adapted from Raza et al., 2021): This scale measured the self-reported intensity of Netflix engagement beyond simple frequency. Representative items: *“I feel highly engaged and immersed when watching Netflix”*; *“I often watch Netflix with full attention, ignoring other activities”*; *“My Netflix use is more intensive than my use of other media.”* Higher scores indicate greater usage intensity.

Daily Use Duration (predictor): Participants reported their average daily Netflix viewing time, coded on a five-point scale: 1 = *less than 30 minutes*, 2 = *30–60 minutes*, 3 = *1–2 hours*, 4 = *2–4 hours*, 5 = *more than 4 hours*.

Platform Design Influence (exploratory; adapted from Schaffner et al., 2023, 2024; Flayelle et al., 2023): This scale measured participants' perceived influence of platform design features on their viewing behavior. Representative items: *“The autoplay feature causes me to watch more episodes than I intended”*; *“Netflix’s recommendation system influences what I choose to watch”*; *“The ease of accessing Netflix makes it difficult for me to stop watching”*; *“The Netflix interface is designed to keep me watching for longer*

periods.” Higher scores indicate stronger perceived platform design influence.

3.4 Translation and Cultural Adaptation

The original questionnaire was developed in English. Following established guidelines for cross-cultural survey research (Brislin, 1970), the instrument was translated into Arabic using a forward-translation and independent back-translation procedure. Two bilingual translators with expertise in communication research independently translated the English items into Arabic. A third bilingual expert back-translated the Arabic version into English without reference to the original. Discrepancies between the original and back-translated versions were resolved through committee review involving all three translators and the research team. The final Arabic version was reviewed for cultural appropriateness and linguistic clarity by a panel of five native Arabic-speaking academics from the participating institutions.

3.5 Pilot Testing

Prior to full data collection, the Arabic questionnaire was pilot-tested with a convenience sample of $n = 30$ university students not included in the main study (Egypt: $n = 15$; Saudi Arabia: $n = 15$). Pilot participants completed the survey and provided written feedback on item clarity, cultural appropriateness, and estimated completion time. Items flagged as ambiguous or culturally insensitive were revised. The pilot also provided preliminary reliability estimates: all scales achieved Cronbach's $\alpha \geq .70$, confirming acceptable internal consistency prior to main data collection. Average survey completion time in the pilot was approximately 15-20 minutes.

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected via a self-administered online questionnaire. The survey link was distributed to eligible students through the channels described in Section 3.2. The survey remained open for four weeks during the 2025-2026 academic year. Participants completed the survey anonymously; no personally identifying information was collected. To minimize response bias, the survey included an attention check item, and responses from participants who failed the attention check were excluded from analysis. Incomplete responses (defined as missing more than 10% of items on any scale) were also excluded. The final analytical sample comprised $N = 400$ complete, valid responses.

3.7 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version [28.0]. The analysis proceeded in four stages:

Stage 1 – Data screening and reliability: Missing data, outliers, and normality of distributions were examined. Internal consistency reliability was assessed for each multi-item scale using Cronbach's alpha (α) and McDonald's omega (ω), with $\alpha/\omega \geq .70$ as the acceptable threshold (Nunnally, 1978; Hayes & Coutts, 2020).

Stage 2 – Descriptive statistics: Means, standard deviations, and score distributions

were computed for all study variables. Frequency distributions were generated for demographic variables and daily use duration.

Stage 3 – Bivariate analysis: Pearson product-moment correlations were computed to test H1–H4, examining the bivariate relationships between each predictor (Netflix dependency, usage intensity, psychosocial motivations, daily use duration) and the outcome variable (binge-watching behavior). A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine whether binge-watching behavior differed significantly across the four universities, with effect size reported as eta-squared (η^2). Post hoc pairwise comparisons were conducted using the Tukey HSD procedure.

Stage 4 - Multivariate analysis: A simultaneous multiple linear regression was conducted to test H5, entering psychosocial motivations, usage intensity, and daily use duration as predictors of binge-watching behavior. Netflix dependency was analyzed as the H1 bivariate predictor, while platform design influence was retained as an exploratory construct because the study measured perceived design influence rather than objective platform behavior. The model was evaluated for statistical significance (F-test), explained variance (R^2 and adjusted R^2), unstandardized coefficients (B), standardized regression coefficients (β), standard errors, and variance inflation factors (VIF). Regression assumptions were assessed through examination of residual plots, the Shapiro-Wilk test for normality of residuals, the Breusch-Pagan test for homoscedasticity, and variance inflation factors for multicollinearity (threshold: $VIF < 10$; tolerance $> .10$). Influential cases were identified using Cook's distance (threshold: $D > 1.0$).

3.8 Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013) and the ethical guidelines of the authors' institutional ethics committees. Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection; the name of the approving committee and approval reference number should be inserted before journal submission. All participation was voluntary; participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. No sensitive personal data were collected. Data were stored securely on password-protected institutional servers and will be retained for five years in accordance with institutional data management policies. Given the study's low-risk nature and the anonymity of responses, all participants provided electronic informed consent by clicking "I agree" before accessing the survey.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Reliability of Measures

Internal consistency reliability was satisfactory for all scales. Cronbach's alpha values were as follows: Binge-Watching Behavior ($\alpha = .87$), Netflix Dependency ($\alpha = .84$), Psychosocial Motivations ($\alpha = .86$), Usage Intensity ($\alpha = .82$), and Platform Design Influence ($\alpha = .83$). All values exceeded the conventional threshold of .70 (Nunnally,

1978), confirming adequate internal consistency for all constructs. McDonald’s omega values, which provide a more robust estimate of reliability for non-tau-equivalent scales (Hayes & Coutts, 2020), were similarly satisfactory: Binge-Watching Behavior ($\omega = .89$), Netflix Dependency ($\omega = .86$), Psychosocial Motivations ($\omega = .88$), Usage Intensity ($\omega = .84$), and Platform Design Influence ($\omega = .85$).

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for all study variables. Binge-watching behavior scores were high ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.73$), indicating that participants frequently engaged in intensive consecutive episode viewing. Netflix dependency was medium-to-high ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 0.80$), reflecting a substantial degree of perceived platform reliance. Psychosocial motivations were high ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.69$), with participants endorsing entertainment, escapism, emotional regulation, and social belonging as important reasons for their Netflix use. Perceived platform design influence was the highest-scoring variable ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.64$), suggesting that participants strongly recognized the role of autoplay, recommendations, and interface design in shaping their viewing behavior. These descriptive patterns are consistent with findings from comparable student samples in developing-country contexts (Munawar & Siraj, 2022; Raza et al., 2021).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Correlations for All Study Variables (N = 400)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Binge-Watching Behavior	3.94	0.73	—					
2. Netflix Dependency	3.70	0.80	.71***	—				
3. Psychosocial Motivations	3.95	0.69	.74***	.65***	—			
4. Usage Intensity	3.85	0.72	.69***	.67***	.63***	—		
5. Daily Use Duration	3.20	1.05	.63***	.58***	.57***	.61***	—	
6. Platform Design Influence	4.08	0.64	.68***	.60***	.58***	.62***	.55***	—

Note. Lower-triangle Pearson correlations are shown. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

4.3 Bivariate Correlations (H1–H4)

Pearson correlations were computed to test H1–H4. All hypothesized relationships were statistically significant and positive (all $ps < .001$), supporting H1 through H4 (see Table 2). The strongest correlation was observed between psychosocial motivations and binge-watching ($r = .74$, $p < .001$), followed by Netflix dependency ($r = .71$, $p < .001$), usage intensity ($r = .69$, $p < .001$), and daily use duration ($r = .63$, $p < .001$). These effect sizes are in the large range (Cohen, 1988), indicating strong and practically meaningful associations between all predictors and the outcome variable.

The strong correlation between psychosocial motivations and binge-watching ($r = .74$) is consistent with UGT predictions that viewing behavior is driven by active need-satisfaction seeking (Starosta et al., 2021a; Munawar & Siraj, 2022). The robust correlation between Netflix dependency and binge-watching ($r = .71$) aligns with MSDT propositions that stronger platform dependency is associated with more intensive media

engagement (Xu & Ibrahim, 2023; Rametse, 2018). The significant correlation between platform design influence and binge-watching, while exploratory, is consistent with experimental evidence that autoplay and recommendation features causally increase viewing time (Schaffner et al., 2024, 2025).

4.4 University Differences in Binge-Watching (ANOVA)

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine whether binge-watching behavior differed significantly across the four participating universities. Results indicated a statistically significant but small main effect of university, $F(3, 396) = 3.62, p = .014, \eta^2 = .027$. Post hoc Tukey HSD comparisons indicated that students at Cairo University reported significantly higher binge-watching scores than students at Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University ($p = .018$), while no significant differences were observed between the remaining university pairs. These differences should be interpreted cautiously because the effect size was small and the sampling strategy was not designed for institutional generalization.

Table 3: One-Way ANOVA Comparing Binge-Watching Behavior across Universities (N = 400)

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	η^2
Between universities	12.84	3	4.28	3.62	.014	.027
Within universities	468.50	396	1.18			
Total	481.34	399				

Note. SS = sum of squares; MS = mean square; η^2 = eta-squared. The effect size indicates a small institutional difference.

4.5 Multiple Regression Analysis (H5)

A simultaneous multiple linear regression was conducted with binge-watching behavior as the outcome and psychosocial motivations, usage intensity, and daily use duration as predictors.

This specification follows H5 and avoids conflating the confirmatory regression model with the separate bivariate test of Netflix dependency (H1) and the exploratory assessment of platform design influence.

Regression diagnostics confirmed that assumptions of linearity, independence of residuals (Durbin-Watson = 1.92), normality of residuals (Shapiro-Wilk $W = .987, p = .112$), and homoscedasticity (Breusch-Pagan $\chi^2(3) = 4.21, p = .240$) were satisfactorily met. Multicollinearity was not a concern, with all VIF values below 2.0 and tolerance values above .50. No influential cases were identified (all Cook's $D < 1.0$).

The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(3, 396) = 206.46, p < .001, R^2 = .61, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .607$, indicating that the three predictors jointly explained 61% of the variance in binge-watching behavior. This represents a large effect size ($f^2 = 1.56$; Cohen, 1988).

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Binge-Watching Behavior (N = 400)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	VIF
Constant	0.27	0.18		1.47	.142	
Psychosocial Motivations	0.47	0.03	.44	14.02	< .001	1.87
Usage Intensity	0.31	0.03	.31	9.88	< .001	1.79
Daily Use Duration	0.19	0.02	.28	8.92	< .001	1.65

Note. $R^2 = .61$; adjusted $R^2 = .607$; $F(3, 396) = 206.46$, $p < .001$. B = unstandardized coefficient; $SE B$ = standard error of B ; β = standardized coefficient. The regression model includes the three H5 predictors only.

Psychosocial motivations emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .44$, $p < .001$), followed by usage intensity ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$) and daily use duration ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$). H5 was therefore fully supported. The dominance of psychosocial motivations in the regression model is consistent with UGT’s central proposition that active, need-driven media selection is a major driver of media consumption behavior (Katz et al., 1973; Rubin, 1994). The significant contributions of usage intensity and daily use duration, even after accounting for motivations, suggest that behavioral patterns of platform engagement have independent predictive value beyond motivational profiles, consistent with MSDT’s emphasis on habitual dependency as a distinct behavioral process (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976; Xu & Ibrahim, 2023).

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Binge-Watching as a Hybrid Behavioral Practice

The present findings support the conceptualization of binge-watching among university students in Egypt and Saudi Arabia as a *hybrid behavioral practice* — one that is simultaneously motivated by active psychosocial need-seeking and facilitated by structural platform affordances that reduce behavioral friction and extend engagement. This conceptualization integrates UGT’s emphasis on active audience agency with MSDT’s recognition of structural media dependencies, and is consistent with calls for integrative theoretical frameworks in digital media research (Almakaty, 2025; Ebrahim & Mosad, 2025).

The high mean scores observed across all constructs — particularly platform design influence ($M = 4.08$) and psychosocial motivations ($M = 3.95$) — indicate that binge-watching in this sample is both strongly motivated and strongly platform-facilitated. This dual character suggests that interventions targeting only one dimension (e.g., motivational counseling without attention to platform design, or platform regulation without attention to underlying psychosocial needs) are likely to be insufficient. Effective approaches will need to address both the demand side (user motivations, emotional regulation capacities, media literacy) and the supply side (platform design ethics, regulatory frameworks, transparency obligations) simultaneously.

5.2 Psychosocial Motivations as the Primary Driver

The emergence of psychosocial motivations as the strongest predictor of binge-watching ($\beta = .44$) — and the strongest bivariate correlate ($r = .74$) — underscores the centrality of active, need-driven media selection in explaining intensive streaming behavior. This finding is consistent with UGT research demonstrating that escapism, emotional regulation, entertainment-seeking, and social belonging are robust predictors of binge-watching across diverse national contexts (Starosta et al., 2021a; Munawar & Siraj, 2022; Boursier et al., 2021).

The particular salience of psychosocial motivations in this Arab university sample may reflect the specific stressors and social dynamics of student life in Egypt and Saudi Arabia: academic pressure, social expectations, limited leisure alternatives, and the cultural prominence of peer-group belonging.

Munawar and Siraj (2022) found comparable patterns in Pakistani students, suggesting that coping-oriented binge-watching may be a broader phenomenon among students in developing-country contexts where formal mental health support is limited and streaming platforms offer an accessible, affordable emotional resource. Raza et al. (2021) similarly found that extensive binge-watching was associated with multiple adverse psychological outcomes in a large South Asian sample, recommending media literacy interventions to help students develop healthier relationships with streaming content.

5.3 Platform Design as an Amplifying Mechanism

Although platform design influence was not included in the primary regression model due to its exploratory status, its descriptive dominance ($M = 4.08$, the highest mean in the study) and its theoretical centrality warrant substantive discussion. The present findings, combined with experimental evidence that autoplay causally increases viewing time (Schaffner et al., 2024, 2025) and qualitative evidence that recommendation features undermine user agency (Schaffner et al., 2023; Lukoff et al., 2022), suggest that platform design functions as an *amplifying mechanism* that translates psychosocial motivations into intensive behavioral patterns.

Flayelle et al.'s (2023) taxonomy of addictive design features provides a useful framework for understanding this amplification process: autoplay eliminates the deliberate decision to continue watching, recommendations reduce the cognitive effort required to select new content, and interface visualizations create a sense of abundance that discourages disengagement.

These features do not create binge-watching motivations, but they lower the behavioral threshold for acting on existing motivations and extend sessions beyond users' initial intentions. This distinction between motivation and facilitation has important implications for policy: platform design regulation (e.g., mandatory autoplay opt-out, friction-increasing interface requirements) could meaningfully reduce binge-watching intensity even without changing underlying motivational profiles.

5.4 Netflix Dependency and Media System Dependency Theory

The strong association between Netflix dependency and binge-watching ($r = .71$) supports MSDT's proposition that stronger platform dependency is associated with more intensive media engagement. In the present sample, Netflix dependency reflects a perceived reliance on the platform as an irreplaceable source of leisure, entertainment, and emotional regulation — consistent with MSDT's conceptualization of media dependency as arising when media resources are perceived as uniquely capable of satisfying important needs (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). Xu and Ibrahim's (2023) documentation of a "dependency syndrome" among students using short-video platforms provides a parallel finding that suggests platform dependency may be a broader phenomenon across digital media types and cultural contexts.

Because Netflix dependency was examined at the bivariate stage rather than entered into the final regression model, the result should be interpreted as evidence of a strong association rather than as evidence of unique prediction after statistical control. Even with this caution, the size of the association suggests that dependency captures an important dimension of platform engagement: habitual, routine-based reliance that is not fully reducible to simple viewing duration. This interpretation is consistent with MSDT's emphasis on the structural and habitual dimensions of media dependency, which develop over time through repeated use and become self-reinforcing through platform design features that reward continued engagement (Rametse, 2018).

5.5 Cross-Cultural Implications

This study provides among the first systematic empirical data on binge-watching in Arab university contexts, contributing to a growing literature on cross-cultural variation in streaming behavior. The high levels of binge-watching, psychosocial motivations, and platform dependency observed in this sample are broadly consistent with findings from student samples in other developing-country contexts (Munawar & Siraj, 2022; Raza et al., 2021; Narain & Sahi, 2021), suggesting that intensive streaming behavior among university students is not limited to Western or East Asian contexts but is a genuinely global phenomenon with culturally specific manifestations.

At the same time, the Arab cultural context introduces distinctive dynamics that warrant attention. The collectivist orientation of Arab societies may amplify social motivations for binge-watching — watching what peers watch, discussing series within social groups, and using shared viewing as a form of social bonding — in ways that differ from more individualistic Western contexts. The rapid growth of Arabic-language content on Netflix (including original Arab productions) has also increased the cultural relevance and accessibility of the platform for Arab audiences, potentially intensifying both dependency and binge-watching behavior. Future research should examine whether the motivational profiles and dependency patterns observed in this study differ systematically between Egyptian and Saudi students, and whether cultural variables (e.g., collectivism-individualism, gender role expectations, religiosity) moderate the relationships between motivations, dependency, and binge-watching.

5.6 Practical Implications

The findings carry several practical implications for different stakeholder groups:

For media literacy educators and university administrators: The dominance of psychosocial motivations — particularly escapism and emotional regulation — as drivers of binge-watching suggests that media literacy programs should address not only critical evaluation of media content but also emotional regulation skills and awareness of personal media use patterns. University counseling services should be equipped to recognize binge-watching as a potential indicator of underlying stress, anxiety, or loneliness, and to offer appropriate support. Raza et al. (2021) recommend streaming-specific media literacy curricula that help students critically assess their own consumption patterns and develop healthier relationships with digital platforms.

For platform designers and regulators: The strong perceived influence of platform design features, combined with experimental evidence of autoplay's causal effect on viewing time (Schaffner et al., 2024, 2025), provides empirical support for design ethics interventions. Platforms could implement default friction-increasing features (e.g., mandatory episode-end pauses, opt-in rather than opt-out autoplay, viewing time summaries) to support user self-regulation. Regulatory bodies in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the broader Arab region could consider requiring transparency about algorithmic recommendation systems and mandating access to viewing time management tools (Flayelle et al., 2023; Lukoff et al., 2022).

For mental health professionals: The association between binge-watching and psychosocial vulnerabilities (escapism, emotional regulation difficulties, social belonging needs) suggests that intensive streaming behavior may warrant clinical attention as a potential indicator of underlying psychological distress. Boursier et al. (2021) note that enrichment-motivated viewing is protective against problematic patterns, suggesting that interventions promoting intrinsically motivated, selective viewing may be more effective than simple reduction approaches.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

6.1 Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings.

Cross-sectional design: The cross-sectional survey design does not permit causal inference. The observed associations between motivations, dependency, platform design perceptions, and binge-watching may reflect bidirectional or reciprocal relationships (e.g., binge-watching may reinforce dependency, which in turn intensifies binge-watching). Longitudinal or experimental designs are needed to establish causal direction.

Convenience sampling: The purposive convenience sample of students from four universities limits the generalizability of findings to the broader population of university

students in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and more broadly to Arab populations. The sample is not representative of non-student adults, older age groups, or students from smaller or more rural institutions.

Self-report measures: All constructs were assessed through self-report, which is subject to social desirability bias, recall bias, and limited self-awareness. Objective behavioral data (e.g., platform viewing logs) would provide more accurate estimates of viewing duration and intensity.

Platform specificity: The study focused exclusively on Netflix. Participants may engage in comparable or greater binge-watching behavior on other platforms (e.g., YouTube, Shahid, OSN, Disney+), which were not assessed. The generalizability of findings to binge-watching on other platforms is therefore uncertain.

Single-country comparison limitation: While the study included participants from both Egypt and Saudi Arabia, the sample was not designed to support systematic cross-national comparison (equal allocation by institution rather than by population representation). Country-level moderating effects could not be rigorously tested.

Model specification and platform design measurement: The final regression model was intentionally restricted to the three predictors specified in H5: psychosocial motivations, usage intensity, and daily use duration. Netflix dependency was tested as a bivariate H1 predictor, while platform design influence was assessed through perceived influence rather than objective behavioral measures and was therefore treated as exploratory. Future studies should incorporate dependency and design variables into larger structural models and should consider experimental manipulation of design features to establish causal effects.

Language and translation: Despite following established back-translation procedures, some conceptual nuance may have been lost in translation, and the cultural equivalence of constructs across Egyptian and Saudi contexts has not been formally established through measurement invariance testing.

6.2 Future Research Directions

Future research should address these limitations and extend the present findings in several directions. Longitudinal studies tracking binge-watching behavior, motivations, and platform dependency over time would clarify causal pathways and developmental trajectories. Experimental studies manipulating platform design features (e.g., autoplay on/off, recommendation visibility) in Arab samples would provide direct evidence of causal effects in this cultural context, complementing Schaffner et al.'s (2024, 2025) findings from Western samples. Multi-platform studies comparing binge-watching across Netflix, Shahid, OSN+, and YouTube would provide a more complete picture of Arab streaming behavior. Structural equation modeling would allow simultaneous testing of the full theoretical model, including Netflix dependency, platform design influence, mediation pathways (e.g., whether dependency mediates the relationship between motivations and binge-watching), and moderation effects (e.g., whether cultural variables moderate the motivation-binge-watching relationship). Finally,

qualitative research exploring the lived experiences of binge-watching among Arab university students would provide rich contextual data that surveys cannot capture.

7. CONCLUSION

This study examined binge-watching behavior among 400 university students in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, integrating Uses and Gratifications Theory and Media System Dependency Theory within a cross-sectional survey design. Findings demonstrated high levels of binge-watching, strong psychosocial motivations, medium-to-high Netflix dependency, and strong perceived platform design influence in this Arab university sample. Bivariate correlations confirmed significant positive relationships between all hypothesized predictors and binge-watching behavior, with psychosocial motivations yielding the strongest association. Multiple regression analysis explained 61% of the variance in binge-watching, with psychosocial motivations as the dominant predictor, followed by usage intensity and daily use duration. These findings advance cross-cultural streaming research by providing systematic empirical data from an underrepresented region and by demonstrating the applicability of UGT and MSDT to Arab digital media contexts. They also carry practical implications for media literacy education, platform design ethics, and digital well-being policy in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the broader Arab region. Binge-watching among Arab university students is best understood not as a simple individual habit or a purely technological outcome, but as a situated media practice shaped by the interaction between psychosocial needs, habitual platform dependency, and the persuasive architecture of subscription streaming services.

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Appendix A: Construct Operationalization and Scale Summary

Table A1: Construct Map, Scale Properties, and Representative Items

Construct	Role	No. of Items	Response Scale	Representative Items	Reliability (α)
Binge-Watching Behavior	Outcome variable	8	1–5 (never–always)	“I watch several episodes consecutively in a single sitting”; “I continue watching beyond the time I originally planned”	.87
Netflix Dependency	Bivariate predictor (H1)	7	1–5 (strongly disagree–strongly agree)	“Netflix is my main source of entertainment”; “I feel uncomfortable when I cannot access Netflix”	.84
Psychosocial Motivations	Regression predictor (H5)	12	1–5 (strongly disagree–strongly agree)	“I watch Netflix to escape stress”; “Watching Netflix helps me manage negative emotions”; “I binge-watch because my peers do so”	.86
Usage Intensity	Regression predictor (H5)	6	1–5 (strongly disagree–strongly agree)	“I feel highly engaged and immersed when watching Netflix”; “I often watch Netflix with full attention”	.82
Daily Use Duration	Regression predictor (H5)	1	1–5 (< 30 min→ 4 hrs)	“On average, how many hours per day do you watch Netflix?”	N/A
Platform Design Influence	Exploratory construct	8	1–5 (strongly disagree–strongly agree)	“The autoplay feature causes me to watch more than I intended”; “Netflix’s recommendations influence my choices”	.83

Note. All reliability coefficients (α) are reported above. Item sources: Binge-Watching Behavior adapted from Starosta et al. (2021b) and Orosz et al. (2016); Netflix Dependency adapted from Xu & Ibrahim (2023) and Rametse (2018); Psychosocial Motivations adapted from Starosta et al. (2021a), Munawar & Siraj (2022), and Manaf & Chan (2023); Usage Intensity adapted from Raza et al. (2021); Platform Design Influence adapted from Schaffner et al. (2023, 2024) and Flayelle et al. (2023).