

# CRITICAL REVIEW OF BINGE WATCHING BEHAVIOUR THROUGH THE PRISM OF VROOM'S EXPECTANCY THEORY

**Arvin Subramanian, S P Jain School of Global Management**  
**Dr. A. Seetharaman, S P Jain School of Global Management**  
**Dr. K. Maddulety, S P Jain School of Global Management**

## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study is to investigate the various motivation factors for binge watching. Binge watching is defined as watching two or more episodes of a web series, one after the other. Since the advent of internet, binge watching behaviour has become very popular among youngsters. The Methodology of the study comprises of two aspects. (i) Through systematic literature review, the various motivation factors are identified. They are – Information attainment, Entertainment, Hobby/ Companionship, Escape/ Mood management. (ii) The second aspect of the study is to showcase the identified motivational factors in a theoretical framework. The study intends to make a significant contribution to Vroom's Expectancy Theory, by incrementing with additional variables (both positive and negative) impacting the motivational force. The study will be useful to (i) Video streaming platforms to offer binge-worthy videos and (ii) Marketers to understand how to drive audience, towards binge-watching.*

**Keywords:** Binge Watching, Digital Videos, Appointment Viewing, Online Video Viewing, Online Viewing Behaviour, Addictive Online Behaviour.

## INTRODUCTION

Binge watching is defined as the impulsive behaviour of the user to consume one episode after another, completing seasons of a web series at one time in order to curb curiosity (Dhanuka & Bohra, 2019). This behaviour is gaining popularity among young people, primarily due to the availability of various types of video content on the internet and their accessibility due to the increase of the internet's accessibility and availability across the world. The key point of binge watching is to let the viewers have full control over their viewing behaviour (Susanno et al., 2019). Due to their busy life style, young people are unable to adapt to "appointment viewing". It is becoming increasingly difficult for young people to sit in front of the television and wait for their favourite series to be played at a particular time. Rather, they prefer to watch all of their favourite episodes one after the other whenever they find some free time. Tapping on this insight, the various content providers are coming up with methods to make the viewer indulge in the behaviour of binge watching. They are: (i) releasing entire season in one go; (ii) ending every episode on a cliff-hanger to keep viewers hooked (Dhanuka & Bohra, 2019). Binge-watching can have both positive and negative effect on users. It can positively influence user's enjoyment and give them complete autonomy, while it can also make them feel guilty for missing out on goals and obligations (Granow et al., 2018). Binge watching is associated with college students skipping workouts, exercises and indulging in poor eating habits (Vaterlaus et al., 2019). Hence, it is imperative to

investigate why users indulge in this behaviour, and the reasons behind its popularity. This study, will explore both positive and negative motivations of binge watching.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A critical review of literature available on the concept of binge watching was carried out in various databases of online journals. They were Google Scholar, EBSCO, DOAJ, Proquest, Sage Journals. For selecting an article to include in the study, the following criteria were followed. Firstly, the articles which were published in refereed journals were selected. Conference papers, thesis, unpublished work and dissertations were excluded. Secondly, the scope of the study is restricted to binge watching behaviour. Hence only search terms such as “*Binge Watching*” and “*Marathon Watching*” were used. To maintain the scope of the study, Various research studies done on other viewing habits such as appointment viewing, second screen viewing, live streaming, Mukbang watching etc. were excluded from this study. Thirdly, Binge watching is a very new phenomenon and the popularity of the behaviour has increased across the globe in the recent time. To maintain the relevancy, only the research studies done from 2018 are selected for the literature review. After the procedural selection criterion, 40 articles entered analytical stage. The selected articles are reviewed in the following method. (i) Major motivation factor, mentioned in the study is identified. (ii) The various gratifications provided by the motivation factor is explored. (iii) The negative factors mentioned in the study is analyzed. In the second part of the study, Vroom’s expectancy theory is incremented based on the identified motivation factors and its impact on binge watching. For each motivation factor, a theoretical framework is constructed.

## FINDINGS

The behaviour of video watching has changed because of technology (Susanno et al., 2019). The internet has enabled users to access huge amounts of video content from across the world. Internet connections have enabled the delivery of media content anytime and anywhere, and are responsible for people binge watching (marathon watching) content in immediate succession with online streaming (Shim & Kim, 2018). Binge watching is very popular among users because it is a self-determined viewing behaviour. The user decides what to watch, when to watch and not the broadcasting schedule (Horeck et al., 2018). 88% of Netflix subscribers watch at least three episodes of the same program within one day (Shim & Kim, 2018). Although this can be viewed as a great technological development, binge-watching can have both positive and negative effect on users. It can positively influence user's enjoyment and give them complete autonomy, while it can also make them feel guilty for missing out on goals and obligations (Granow et al., 2018). Binge watching can lead to dysfunctional technology use and diverse mental health conditions (Flayelle et al., 2020). High frequency binge watching also leads to negative outcomes such as loss of control and dependency (Anozie, 2020). Excessive binge-watching leads to disturbances in one’s personal life like becoming anti-social, having an increased emotional sensitivity, a disrupted sleep cycle and other health issues (Dhanuka & Bohra, 2019). Through the analysis of the selected literature, it can be found that there are four major motivation factors for binge watching behaviour. They are – Information Attainment, Entertainment, Companionship/Hobby and Escape/Mood Management.

## Information Attainment

Many previous studies in this area suggest that one of the key reasons why users watch content for longer time periods is to learn new skills and information from the internet. Jones et al. (2018) in their study, found that users who binge watch often return back to their real life, learning new insights to make their own lives better. Sharma (2020) in their study, note that binge watching helps users to expand their mindset, acquire different viewpoints and gain new perspectives. Gänßle & Kunz-Kaltenhaeuser (2020) in their study, find that users who accumulate knowledge from media content, binge watch to acquire knowledge faster. They fear that if they leave a gap between one session and another, they would forget details or miss the story line. One of the biggest fears among internet users who binge watch is the fear of missing out. Users have a constant feeling of anxiety, dissatisfaction and unhappiness when their peers consume different content and share details about it, on social media. Steiner & Xu (2020) in their study, mention that one of the primary reasons for binge watching for users is cultural inclusion. Users want to be aware of the shows, content, new information, so that they can be a part of the group discussions in their office or other gatherings. They binge watch new shows, serials, documentaries to gather new information to share and discuss with their network.

Video streaming platforms must come up with effective solutions, for users to overcome their fear of missing out on their favorite web shows. Netflix, a popular OTT video streaming platform, constantly sends notifications to its users regarding the release of its new shows (Behera et al., 2019). This is a great solution to keep users informed about and aware of their favorite shows. The major video streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon and Hulu have all evolved to be global services. For instance, Netflix has nearly 100 million global subscribers residing outside the United States, its country of origin (Lobato, 2018). Users now get access to international content in various languages. There may be a problem with information transfer to users, due to language barriers. An effective solution to this problem is the localization of international content. Netflix is directly working with local users from the region to add subtitles for the content in their own language so that the local flavor is retained (Pedersen, 2018). Also, given the busy lifestyle of users, the urge to binge watch video content and learn about new updates and information, can arise at anytime and anywhere. Impulsivity is a salient factor in binge watching, leading to it being an automatic behaviour (Walton-Pattison et al., 2018). Video platforms should be able to satisfy users on this front. Those who engage in binge watching, do so on various platforms such as mobiles, TVs, computers, laptops, iPads and tablets (Merrill Jr & Rubenking, 2019). Therefore, video streaming platforms must ensure the availability of their content in all such interfaces.

## Entertainment

Researchers note that the new technology developments in the video streaming services on the internet have given viewers a sense of control over their entertainment. Users are starting to move from television sets and cinema theatres towards internet to binge watch for seeking sensation and entertainment. Gangadharbatla et al. (2019) in their study, find that the factors which predict users' intention to binge watch, are the addictive nature of the content and its entertainment value. In their study, Steiner and Xu (2018) establish that catching up and binge watching the episodes of a past series before the release of new episodes, is a convenient and empowering form of entertainment. Users in their study explain the various uses of binge watching, such as i) using binge watching to unwind, relax and fall to sleep ii) playing familiar programs in the background as '*background music*' while multi-tasking. Shim & Kim (2018) in their study found that users are

driven by entertainment to indulge in binge watching behaviour. The study further adds that the amusement of having unrestricted access to content, enables them to watch continuous videos and get entertained at their own convenience.

Users crave for good narratives and audiovisual content to satisfy their entertainment needs. The best way to attract users to binge watch is by providing entertainment, through original content of high quality, that is available for immediate consumption (Sobral, 2019). Binge watching allows users to consume more content per unit time. This makes users deplete the available video catalogue in the platform, resulting in reduction of interest on binge watching. User's interest can be renewed by the platform by sending out well crafted, personal recommendations of content to them (Godinho de Matos & Ferreira, 2018). Noting the globalization of the video streaming platforms, content appropriate in one country may not be appropriate in another. This may lead to user's binge watching inappropriate and unsuitable video content. But the efforts to establish protections will be challenging in today's digital media and communications landscape (Mamat et al., 2020). Users have indefinite access to uncensored dramas and movies through video streaming platforms. This can potentially harm people and create negative impacts on society, especially on children and teenagers (Isa et al., 2019). Entertainment is a great gratification but the video streaming platforms should not expose users, to inappropriate content. To address this issue, major OTT Players like Voot, Hotstar, Netflix, Eros Now, Alt Balaji, Zee5 and Jio agreed in 2019 to self-censor their content in India in order to tackle this sensitive issue (Fitzgerald, 2019). Such initiatives from video streaming platforms will help in safeguarding their users from unsuitable content.

### **Companionship/ Hobby**

One common feature among binge watchers, is that they relate to the on-screen characters and discuss about them with their friends and online groups (Jones et al., 2018). Tukachinsky & Eyal (2018) in their study, find that Binge-watchers actively engage with content, at both emotional and cognitive levels. They develop deeper meaningful bonds with onscreen characters. They continue to binge-watch, because they engage in deep reflection with these characters and not just merely get entertained by them. However, Walter et al. (2018) state that when viewers indulge in fast-paced '*marathon viewing*', in order to complete the video series within a specific time - they connect lesser with the '*on screen*' characters.

Binge watchers wish to be complemented every single episode, to travel along the storylines across multiple episodes. They wish to be left with unresolved questions at the end of each episode, leaving them filled with suspense. This kind of content, will increase their expectations about outcome (Flayelle et al., 2019). The type and quality of the narrative, along with storyline is the most influential factor, in driving binge watching behaviour. Common storyline across episodes and complex narratives engage users on a higher level. Factors such as relativity, originality, attractiveness of story and its characters, influence binge watching behaviour (Flayelle et al., 2019).

Individuals binge watch TV series, to avoid getting the thoughts of being '*lonely*' and the feeling of missing their companions. The video series acts as their companion in solitary moments (Starosta et al., 2019). Users should be able to relate to the characters inside the TV series, in order to see them as their companion. However, when video streaming platforms offer various foreign content, users will find it difficult to stay connected to the characters. The solution, is to maintain the region's cultural relevance like language, customs and practices. Video streaming platforms like Netflix have grown globally in the era of video streaming and binge watching. However, in

the process of a global expansion, it is important to note how relevant, they are with local tastes (Pedersen, 2018). In strategically important markets, Netflix has invested resources to understand local content preferences (Lobato, 2018). Initiatives like setting up local teams to understand regional markets, will help the streaming platforms significantly.

Binge watching, as a pastime activity is a fulfilling experience for users. However, binge watching can be an unfulfilling experience for users when linked with loneliness and depression (Merikivi et al., 2018). Like other habits, binge watching should be done in control. Keeping the health and safety of their users in mind, video streaming platforms should come up with features to safeguard them from addiction. As a solution, platforms should come up with features such as (i) Sending notifications for users, to take a break from binge watching, (ii) Setting up screen timers during a binge-watching session, to alarm the users on the time spent by them, (iii) Limiting the number of videos, a user can watch on a single session. To prevent lifestyle related disorders, users should limit their bingeing behaviour (Dixit et al., 2020).

### **Escape/ Mood Management**

Binge watching as a behaviour, is often considered as an escape technique, by users to move away from reality. Starosta et al. (2019) state that Frequent binge watchers have the motivation to escape from reality. Susanno et al. (2019) also found that users resort to binge watching to temporarily escape from their problems and worries, as it gives them an opportunity to escape to a different world. Rubenking et al. (2018) in their study, reveal that users indulge in binge watching to manage their mood and relax. "*Binge watching*" is considered by them, as a reward to repair their mood after a long and tiring day. Starosta et al. (2019) also find that people characterized by an escape motivation, have the highest likelihood of getting into binge watching behaviour. This is because binge watching, act as a tool to regulate their negative emotions. The study also finds that people with escape motivation also have the most negative gratifications from binge watching. Users who spend hours watching one episode after another, lose control over time and end up with the non-fulfilment of their duties. Erickson et al. (2019) in their study, found evidence that Binge-watching facilitates in transporting a user to an imaginative world, and helps user develop a para-social bond with the onscreen character.

Users turn to binge watching to manage their mood and help them to distract from reality. For this purpose, the content that the user chooses to watch is critical. If the content does not compliment the user's need for mood management, the user will not be satisfied with the binge-watching experience. Binge watching takes a lot of the user's time, which can be disconcerting on occasion (Merikivi et al., 2018). Jones et al. (2018) in their study, found the following critical features about binge watchers. (i) Through binge watching, users are immersed into the world of the onscreen characters. They identify with them and transport their personal concerns for them. (ii) Binge watchers lose the track of time, in reality. They calculate time by the number of episodes, they watch. They even sacrifice their sleep to continue binge watching a video series. (iii) Binge watchers, find it difficult to cope up with the end of a video series. They end up disappointed about not being able to binge watch the series and escape into the alternative world. This allows them to immortalize the on-screen characters and events in their own lives.

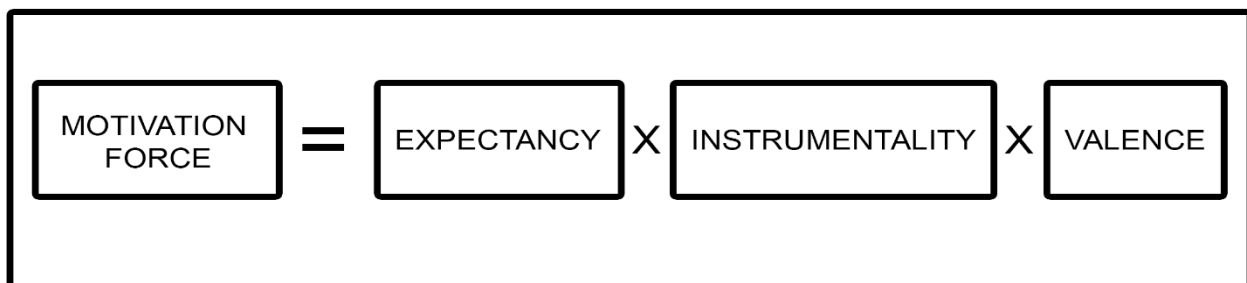
Binge watching is led by the motivation to find out what happens next, in a pursuit of the imaginative world. Users get captivated by the narration, while they unravel the mysteries. But narrative completion is about being self-aware in the process, being cognizant in the approach, measure the travel and acquire knowledge out of it (Pittman & Steiner, 2019). Users should indulge in narrative escape, without getting addicted and getting completely lost from reality. However,

high engagement in binge watching is different from problematic binge watching. Binge watching which is a popular leisure activity, cannot be generalized as an addictive disorder (Flayelle et al., 2018).

## DISCUSSION

### Vroom's Expectancy Theory

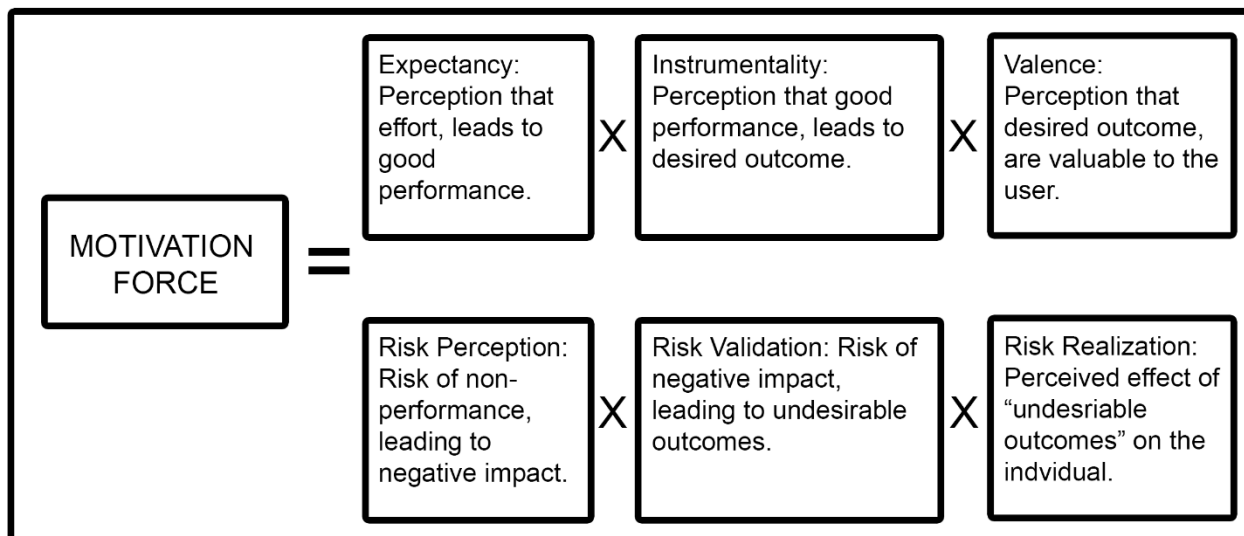
Victor Vroom's Expectancy theory is used to measure user's motivation force towards an activity. It provides a mechanism to measure motivation, through a specific calculation method. Using this theory, the motivations to binge watching can be investigated. There are four variables that impacts an individual's motivation. They are (i) Effort; (ii) Performance; (iii) Outcome; and (iv) Personal goal. The relationship between these variables form the crux of the Vroom's Expectancy Theory. The relationship between how an individual's effort, results in good performance forms Expectancy. The relationship between how an individual's performance, results in good outcomes forms Instrumentality. And how the individual values the outcome, in relation to his personal goals and ambition forms the Valence. The Motivation force of an individual is the product of the multiplication of Expectancy, instrumentality and valence (Parijat & Bagga, 2014). However, through the review of literature, it is found that users experience both positive and negative motivations to indlude in binge watching activity. Therefore, in addition to the existing variables, new additional variables must also be presented to showcase the factors, that drive a user to binge watch. This study, proposes three additional variables to the existing expectancy theory. They are (i) Risk Perception; (ii) Risk validation; (iii) Risk Realisation. This study, thus intends to contribute to the existing Vroom's expectancy theory by incrementing with new variables and providing new utility to the theory among internet audience (Zhou et al., 2017).



**FIGURE 1**  
**VROOM'S EXPECTANCY THEORY**

### Modified Vroom's Expectancy Theory

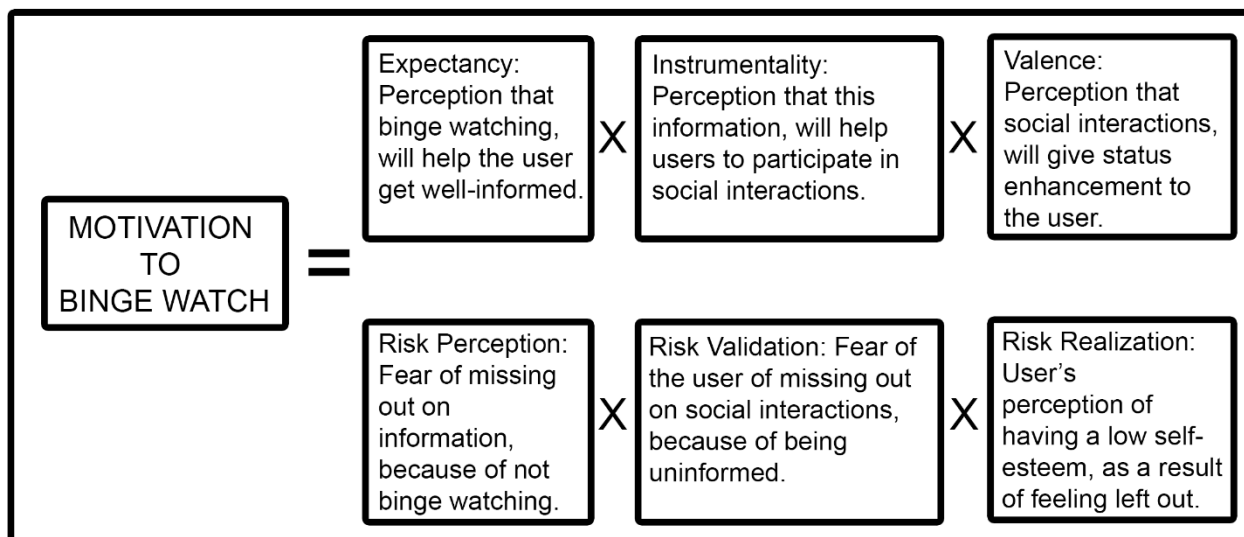
There are two types of motivation variables in this modified theory, Positive Motivation variables, drive a user by motivating through the benefits that one can achieve because of performing an activity. Negative motivation variables drive a user by creating a fear of the negative impacts caused, due to not performing the activity. The positive and negative variables of this theory is further explained by the various factors that motivate a user to indulge in binge watching behaviour in this study. From the review of the available literature, the below motivation variables are identified, showcased and discussed in the prism of this theory.



**FIGURE 2**  
**MODIFIED VROOM'S EXPECTANCY THEORY**

**Information Attainment**

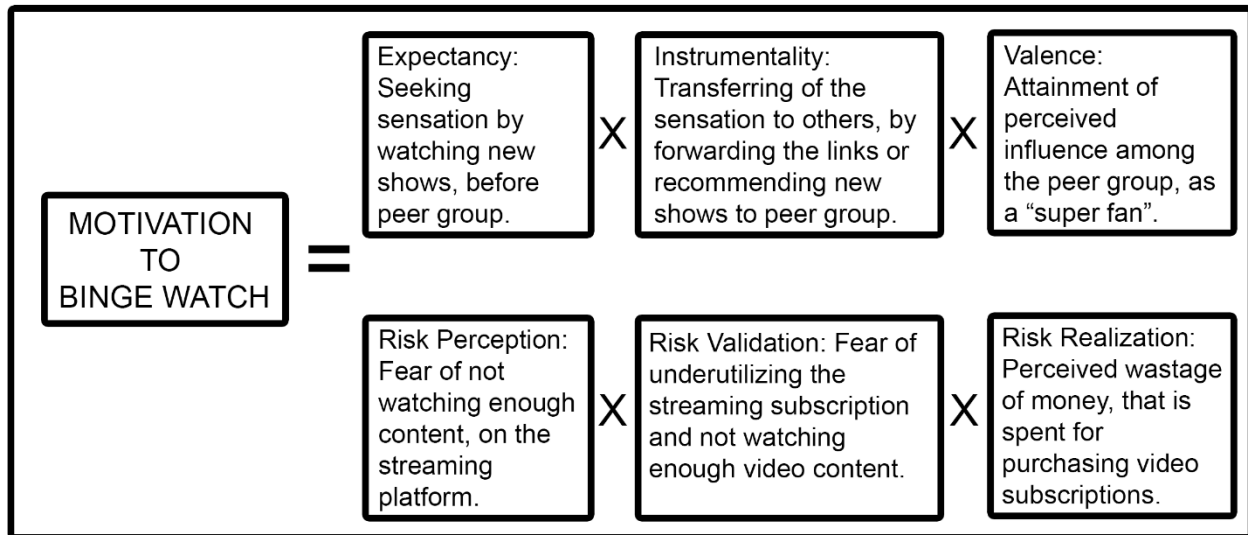
The users are positively motivated to binge watch, to share information to their peer group and attain a status enhancement. The fear of missing out on information, also motivates users to indulge in binge watching. The risk of not being able to participate in social interactions because of not being informed, drives a user towards binge watching behavior. The motivation to binge watch, through information attainment is explained in the figure below.



**FIGURE 3**  
**MOTIVATION THROUGH INFORMATION ATTAINMENT**

## Entertainment

The users are positively motivated to attain a perceived influence as a “*superfan*”, by binge-watching new shows before others. The fear of not watching enough content, also motivates users to binge watch. After paying for subscription and getting access to a huge content bank, the user is motivated to binge watch to avail services and make the most of their subscription. The motivation to binge watch, through entertainment is explained in the figure below.

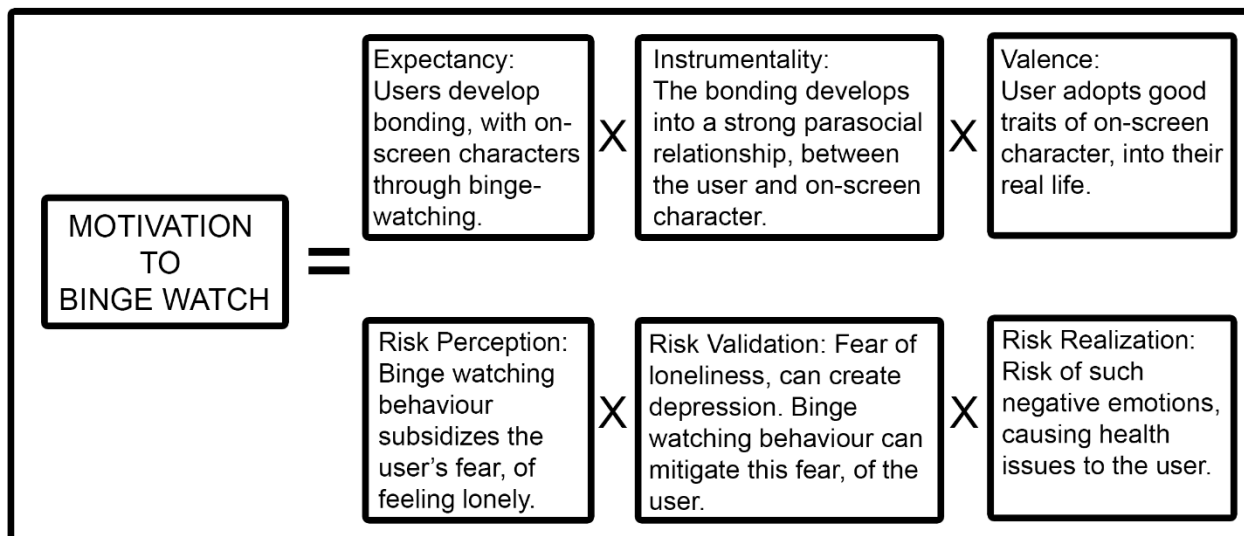


**FIGURE 4**  
**MOTIVATION THROUGH ENTERTAINMENT**

## Companionship/Hobby

The users are positively motivated to binge watch, to relate to online characters and imbibe good traits from them. The fear of coping with loneliness, also motivates users to binge watch. The risk of developing negative emotions due to missing out on having a companion, drives a user towards binge watching behavior. The motivation to binge watch, through companionship/hobby is explained in the figure below.

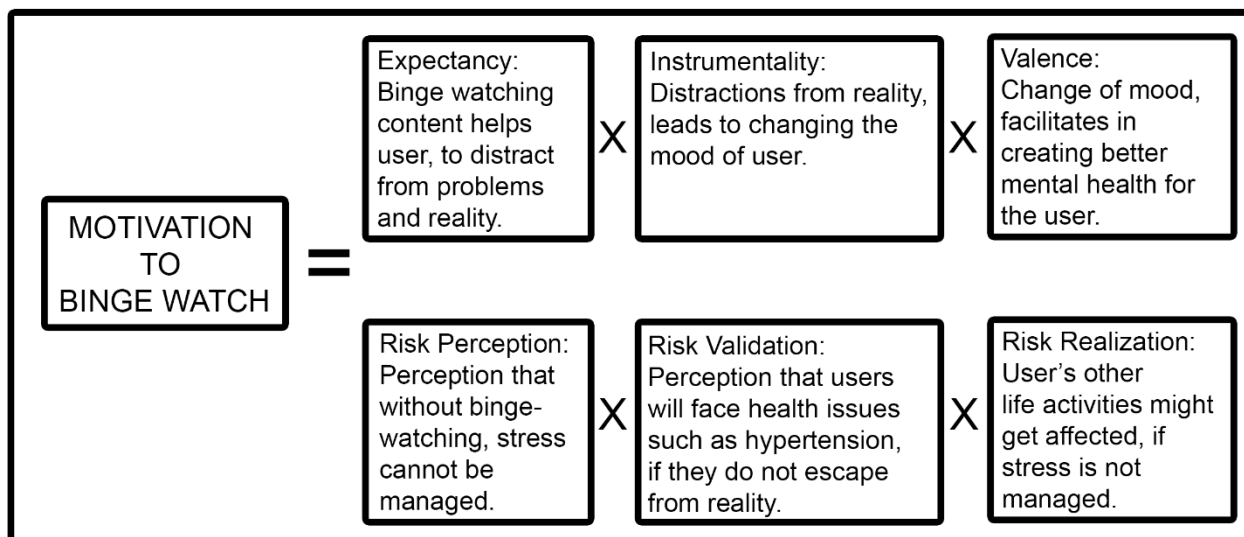




**FIGURE 5**  
**MOTIVATION THROUGH COMPANIONSHIP/HOBBY**

**Escape/ Mood Management**

The users are positively motivated to distract from reality and change their mood by binge watching. The fear of stress management, also motivates users to indulge in binge watching. The risk of mismanaging stress and getting negative health effects, also motivates user to binge watch. The motivation to binge watch, through escape/mood management is explained in the figure below.



**FIGURE 6**  
**MOTIVATION THROUGH ESCAPE/ MOOD MANAGEMENT**

## LIMITATIONS

The literature studied is completely based on secondary data. Secondary data may become obsolete over time. The future research can make use of primary data through surveys, focus group discussions and validate the impact of various motivational factors for binge watching.

## CONCLUSION

This study establishes the four main motivation factors that drive a user to binge watching through systematic literature review. They are information attainment, companionship/hobby, entertainment, escape/mood management. The various positive and negative aspects of motivations were also discussed through Vroom's Expectancy theory. To attract users towards binge watching, Video Streaming platforms should localise foreign content through subtitles and regional sensibilities. Though binge watching serves as a good option to escape from reality, but an addiction to binge watching can cause various health issues such as depression, anxiety and insomnia. To attract more users, video streaming platforms should come up with original content and shows. To erase the fear of missing out on their favourite content, platforms should come up with features such as "reminder notifications". To prevent users from binge watching unsuitable and inappropriate content, video platforms should set up stronger content regulations.

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