AL-HAYAT Research Journal

ISSN (Online): 3006-4767
ISSN (Print):: 3006-4759

Volume 3 Issue 3 (April-June 2026)

Streaming Media Gratifications as Predictors of Subjective Happiness among Pakistani Youth

Fajar Iftikhar

MS Media and Communication Studies Scholar, Department of Media Studies,

Government College University Lahore, Pakistan

Email: Fajarmirza0@gmail.com

Dr Mukhtar Ahmmad

(Corresponding Author)

Assistant Professor, Department of Media Studies,

Government College University Lahore, Pakistan

Email: mukhtar.ahmmad@gcu.edu.pk

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8117-1861

Prof. Dr. Jamal Abdul Nasir

Professor / Chairperson, Department of Statistics,

Government College University Lahore, Pakistan

Email: dr.jamal@gcu.edu.pk

Abstract

As streaming platforms expand rapidly among young people, it is worth asking what psychological needs streaming serves and how those needs relate to well-being. This quantitative cross-sectional study examined three streaming motivations, escapism, entertainment, and social interaction, as predictors of subjective happiness among Pakistani youth (N = 308, aged 18-35). Motivations were measured with the Streaming Gratifications Scale and happiness with a shortened Subjective Happiness Scale, analysed in SPSS using correlation and multiple regression. None of the three motives significantly predicted subjective happiness; together they explained virtually none of its variance (R^2 = .000, p = .988), and each predictor was individually non-significant. A test of whether viewing time moderated the escapism-happiness link could not be trusted because of severe multicollinearity. The happiness scale also needed attention: the original four-item version showed weak internal consistency, so a culturally problematic item was removed to produce an acceptable three-item measure. Overall, streaming motivations were unrelated to happiness in this sample, a result that highlights the importance of cultural context, measurement validity, and the distinction between gratifications sought and gratifications obtained when applying Uses and Gratifications Theory.

Keywords: streaming media, Uses and Gratifications Theory, escapism, entertainment, social interaction, subjective happiness, Pakistani youth, digital well-being

Introduction

Over the past decade, the cultural ritual of waiting for a scheduled TV broadcast has largely given way to the convenience of on-demand streaming. For young adults today, specifically those between 18 and 35, scrolling through platforms like Netflix, YouTube, Amazon Prime Video and TikTok has become the default way to experience entertainment in Pakistan. Statista (2024) reports that the global over-the-top (OTT) video market in 2024 was valued at over USD 316 billion, and OTT video user penetration is increasing in both developed and developing countries. The Pakistan OTT market is no different: it is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of about 11.20%, reaching roughly USD 406.50 million and continuing on that trajectory through 2029 (Statista, 2024). Locally, services such as YouTube and Netflix are among the most widely used platforms. As of 2024, Pakistan's internet penetration has reached over 45.7%, with 111 million users, and the affordability of smartphones has given a large middle-class access to streaming media for entertainment (DataReportal, 2024).

Streaming has become embedded in the daily routines of young Pakistanis, with regular and often heavy use reported among university-aged audiences. This pattern highlights the pressing need for empirical research into the psychology of streaming consumption in this population.

Media use can be seen from a psychological point of view as a behavior that is not passive but rather a means of fulfilling some needs (Katz et al., 1973). Motivations behind media use, such as entertainment, escape from daily life stress, and a sense of social belonging, are intertwined with psychological well-being. The on-demand, content-rich, and social (viewing conversations) nature of streaming media creates a unique environment for satisfying a variety of psychological needs. However, the area where study of Pakistani youth is lacking is the understanding of which factors are more dominant among them and what the relationship is between subjective happiness and their factors.

Problem Statement

Although in Pakistan streaming media consumption has dramatically increased in recent years, psychological reasons for streaming and the links between streaming and well-being have been investigated empirically to a limited degree. Most of the presently available literature has focused on the Western world, while very little has been found on the developing world, where cultural, social, and economic settings are different (Büchi, 2021). The existing literature on streaming motivations has focused mainly on behavioral outcomes, including the frequency of binge-watching and the platform loyalty of users, while paying a lesser attention to the underlying motivations of streaming in terms of their predicting power on subjective happiness (Panda & Pandey, 2017; Steiner & Xu, 2020). One of the under-researched aspects is the moderating effect of viewing time on the effect of escapism-motivated streaming on subjective happiness. Although watching moderate amounts of escapist content can provide temporary psychological relief, frequent consumption of escapist content could lead to increased avoidant coping styles and a worsening of well-being (Gabbiadini et al., 2021; Kardefelt-Winther, 2014). This moderating effect has been largely neglected, and very few studies have examined it in the context of Pakistani youth.

Research Gap

Several critical gaps in the literature were identified by conducting a literature review, which this study fills. First, the theory of Uses and Gratifications (UGT) is well researched and applied in the context of traditional television, social media, but not in the context of streaming platforms and subjective happiness in South Asian contexts. Second, previous research in the streaming domain has focused on one dimension of motivation while neglecting to test more than one motivation at a time (Panda & Pandey, 2017). Third, the influence of viewing duration as a moderator has been largely neglected in the research that has tested the associations between viewing motives and happiness outcomes. Notably, no study has examined the combined

relationships among escapism, entertainment, social interaction, and subjective happiness among youth in Pakistan.

Significance of the Study

The present study offers some preliminary exploratory evidence of the applicability of Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) in the context of streaming media in Pakistan. The results did not support the presumed relationships between streaming motives and subjective happiness but rather showed that these relationships could be different in collectivistic and developing countries. The study thus brings to the fore significant questions about the cross-cultural transferability of Western frameworks of gratification. The study combines media psychology and subjective well-being research, and will be of interest in the ongoing discussions about whether or not media motives are meaningful for determining happiness in non-Western societies. The results can practically help mental health professionals, educators, parents, and digital policy decision makers to have a more evidence-informed understanding of youth streaming behaviors in Pakistan.

Research Objectives

This study aimed to answer four questions: (a) What is the most common psychological streamed media motivation of Pakistani youth, (escapism, entertainment, or social interaction?); (b) How are psychological motivations (escapism, entertainment, or social interaction) related to subjective happiness?; (c) What is the prediction power of the psychological motivations for overall happiness?; and (d) Does viewing duration moderate the relationship between escapism and subjective happiness?

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the major motivations (escapism, entertainment, social interaction) for using streaming media among youths of Pakistan, and which is the most dominant?

RQ2: How is escapism related to entertainment and social interaction motivations and how are they related to subjective happiness among Pakistani youth?

RQ3: To what extent are streaming motivations, collectively and individually, associated with subjective happiness among Pakistani youth?

RQ4: Does viewing duration moderate the relationship between escapism and subjective happiness among Pakistani youth?

Hypotheses

H1: Streaming motivation for escapism will have a negative relationship with Pakistani youth's subjective happiness.

H2: Entertainment and social interaction motivations will have a positive relationship with subjective happiness of Pakistani youth.

H3: Streaming (escapism, entertainment, and social interaction) will account for a substantial amount of variance for subjective happiness.

H4: Viewing duration moderates the relationship between escapism and subjective happiness, such that longer viewing strengthens the negative relationship.

Literature Review

Streaming Media and Youth Behavior

Media amplification tools are provided by streaming platforms: access on-demand, personalized algorithms, and portability across devices (Panda & Pandey, 2017; Tefertiller, 2023). These affordances eliminate barriers

such as spatial and temporal constraints, allowing youths to stream more easily into their everyday lives. Globally, the age group most actively involved in streaming are the 18-35 age group (Steiner & Xu, 2020). In Pakistan, there's been a noticeable surge in the use of platforms like Netflix, YouTube, and TikTok, especially among university students who are the major users of these platforms as their go-to entertainment and socialization tools since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Important nuances are added by the sociocultural context of Pakistan. In Pakistan, youth live in a collectivist society where the importance of social belonging, family, and peer approval is paramount. Streaming is a leisure activity, but it's also a social currency, a common culture to engage in peer conversations and group viewing experiences (Statista, 2024). Concurrently, psychological escape can be a highly appealing option in a developing country, where academic demands, financial insecurity, and social demands may all push students toward streaming. This study is one of the first in Pakistan that empirically explored the said dynamics using validated scales.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The theory that primarily guides this study is known as Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) generated by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973). The theory suggests that audiences are not passive recipients of media, but rather active agents who seek out media to satisfy various psychological needs. The three underlying premises of UGT are: (a) audiences are goal-oriented in their choice of media; (b) they are self-aware enough to express their motives; and (c) media compete with other media for gratifying needs (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Katz et al. (1973) described five types of media gratifications: cognitive (information), affective (emotional experiences), personal integrative (self-identity), social integrative (social bonds), and tension release (escapism). McQuail (2010) subsequently reduced these to four main classes: information, personal identity, social integration, and entertainment. The tension-release motivation, including escapism, has always been seen as a strong motivator for media use, particularly when facing difficult life phases like young adulthood. In the context of streaming, researchers have found that motivations beyond the traditional ones encompass affordances of streaming platforms like personalization of content and binge-watching facilitation (Steiner & Xu, 2020; Tefertiller, 2023). According to Tefertiller (2023), social motivations were positively related to viewers' sense of relatedness, and entertainment and escapism motivations were linked to various aspects of self-determination. In the present study, the authors used UGT with a sample from Pakistan and explored subjective happiness as an outcome variable in this cross-cultural context.

Escapism and Psychological Outcomes

Escapism is defined as the temporary escape from real-life stressors, frustrations, and demands through media. It includes cognitive disengagement (forgetting problems) and affective relief (decreasing negative affect). In UGT, escapism is equivalent to tension release or diversion (Greenberg, 1974). In a thorough study, Gabbiadini et al. (2021) found that loneliness and escapism are important factors that lead to more prolonged streaming time.

The results indicate that those who reported consuming media mainly to offset negative feelings are likely to be more prone to problematic viewing patterns and thus have lower levels of psychological well-being. The compensatory model of Internet use (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014) suggests that escapist media use is essentially an unhelpful coping mechanism: It can be a way to alleviate unpleasant feelings in the moment, but it is unlikely to resolve issues and may even worsen them if it is used to avoid negative emotions. But the escapism-welfare connection is not definitively an adverse one. During the COVID-19 confinement, Eden et al. (2020) found that escapist media use was associated with adverse effects, whereas need-satisfying media use was associated with positive effects.

Uram and Skalski-Bednarz (2024) found positive correlations between symptoms of depression, fear of missing out, addiction, and social media escapism. Overall, the current literature indicates a potential negative correlation between escapism motives and subjective happiness, which led to the development of H1, and an increasing negative correlation with more time spent watching movies, which led to the development of H4.

Entertainment and Well-Being

Use of media for entertainment purposes reflects an approach-oriented engagement, which is related to seeking pleasure, fun, mood enhancement, and positive affect. There is extensive research providing evidence of a positive link between entertainment seeking and well-being, although the mechanisms are complex and context-dependent. Wirz et al. (2025) demonstrated a positive relationship between well-being and psychologically rich entertainment experiences (viewer engagement, narrative immersion, aesthetic pleasure).

This is consistent with the hedonic approach to psychology, which posits that "pleasure" is an integral element in happiness (Diener, 1984; Zhai et al., 2024). Likewise, Zhai et al. (2024) reported that the positive relationship between active viewing of short videos and life satisfaction was driven by reduced social anxiety, whereas passive viewing of short videos was associated with negative effects. The results highlight the need to differentiate motivational quality and not consider all media to be the same. In the context of streaming, Panda and Pandey (2017) found that enjoyment and positive gratification of binge-watching were related to relaxation and positive life disposition.

In addition, the need-satisfying and hedonic use of the media is correlated with flourishing, as evidenced by the research of Tamborini et al. (2021) especially in the context of college students. Thus, it was expected that the entertainment motive would be positively related to subjective happiness in H2.

Social Interaction via Streaming Media

Streaming is unique in terms of its social aspect. Whereas traditional television was a lone, solitary experience, contemporary television streaming is part of a social practice whereby viewers discuss the episodes with peers, engage in online fan communities, post their reactions on social media, and utilize shared viewing experiences as conversation starters (Panda & Pandey, 2017; Pittman & Reich, 2016; Tefertiller, 2023). This is in line with UGT's social integrative dimension. The perception of social connectedness and social belonging is one of the most consistent predictors of subjective wellbeing and is a key factor in this (Smith et al., 2021; World Health Organization [WHO], 2024). Smith et al. (2021) broadened the review of the literature to include social media, belonging, and loneliness, and found that the evidence regarding the impact of social media on well-being is strongly dependent on how social media is used; positive findings are related to the use of features that encourage meaningful social exchange and a sense of belonging, while passive uses of social media are not associated with positive outcomes. Popular series in the streaming domain have created virtual communities (Mahesh et al., 2024). In Pakistan, digital platforms are vital for fostering friendships and a sense of community. Therefore, it was also expected that there would be a positive correlation between social interaction motivation and subjective happiness in H2. More broadly, social connectedness is recognized as a key determinant of well-being (WHO, 2024).

Subjective Happiness: Theory and Measurement

A dispositional trait that is one of the fundamental constructs in positive psychology is subjective happiness, a general evaluation of one's happiness (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) consists of four items related to the general sense of subjective happiness and to subjective happiness compared with peers. The SHS has been extensively validated in various cultures, usually ranging from α = .79 to .94 (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999; Mattei & Schaefer, 2004). Being short, it is appropriate for survey research. The subjectively positive findings related to media and subjective happiness have been mixed but theoretically coherent. There is no strong evidence that high levels of media consumption predict happiness, but rather that the motivational quality and gratification type of media consumption do (Büchi, 2021). Positive relationship between active, social, and enjoyment-oriented media use and happiness, and negative or negligible relationship between passive, escapist, and compensatory media use and happiness (Eden et al., 2020; Zhai et al., 2024). Muñiz-Velázquez et al. (2021) discovered that the correlation between viewing and happiness across COVID-19 confinement was moderated by intensity of viewing and motivational type such that viewing for escapism was related to lower levels of happiness than viewing for entertainment. These findings also directly support the present study of hypotheses.

Gaps in Existing Literature and Contribution of the Present Study

Fourth, to the best of our knowledge, no study has utilized both the Panda and Pandey (2017) Streaming Gratifications Scale along with the Subjective Happiness Scale of Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999) in Pakistan. The present study aims to make a preliminary exploratory contribution to the literature of digital media and well-being in South Asian contexts by filling these four gaps with a quantitative, cross-sectional study of 308 Pakistani youth.

Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratifications Theory

It is based on the UGT theory (Katz et al., 1973; Ruggiero, 2000). The UGT perspective takes a different analytical stance than the media perspective, and from that perspective, it is more suitable for the streaming medium because it considers the user agency and motivational purposiveness of audiences. The central assumption of the theory is that the media consumption is goal-directed: people choose the media content and platforms for fulfilling their psychological needs. The needs trigger gratifications sought (GS), which are motivational antecedents, and gratifications obtained (GO), which are actual psychological needs or outcomes (LaRose et al., 2001). Theoretically, the difference between GS and GO is relevant to this study, which implies that there is no one-to-one relationship between motivation and happiness; what we get might not necessarily be what we want, particularly in terms of escapism.

Application to the Present Study's Variables

Each of the streaming motivations represents a UGT dimension. Escapism refers to tension release (McQuail, 2010), where media helps one to ignore real-life problems, lower tension, and obtain psychological comfort. The concept of escapism in this research is defined as streaming to distract oneself from stressful situations, to forget worries, to be able to relax when stressed. The dimension of affective gratification refers to the enjoyment and experience of media for entertainment and mood adjustment (playful entertainment). Social interaction is the social integrative dimension related to using the media to reinforce the social bond, to create a sense of belonging, and to enable conversation. This aspect is more significant in a collectivist society like Pakistan.

Contribution of UGT to the Present Study

Based on the support of the approach-oriented motives (entertainment and social interaction), the hypotheses are grounded in UGT that these motives are likely to have a positive relationship to happiness, whereas the avoidance-oriented motive (escapism) will be likely to have a negative relationship to happiness (H1, H2). UGT distinguishes between GS and GO, and as this distinction is higher, the more distance may be set between the sought gratification (escapism) and the obtained gratification (decreased happiness), which is what is hypothesized in H4. Lastly, the current research offers exploratory data on UGT in a non-Western, developing-nation streaming context (which does not provide confirmation of theoretical propositions).

These results indicate that Uses and Gratifications Theory need more cultural and conceptual adaptations to be used in a collectivist society where streaming media is concerned. Most significantly, the Gratifications sought (GS) on the Streaming Gratifications Scale employed in this study measures the motives people report for using streaming media, but not the gratifications obtained (GO), which are psychological outcomes from media use. However, subjective happiness is an outcome variable that is conceptually closer to the GO. These discrepancies in measures of predictor and outcome may account for some of the lack of findings in the present study. Therefore, future studies need to independently assess both gratifications sought and gratifications obtained while also investigating the mediating effect of gratifications obtained between the streaming motivations and the subjective happiness.

Method

Research Design

A quantitative, cross sectional survey design was used. The study goals necessitated the use of quantitative methodology due to the requirement for quantitative data to measure variables, statistical analysis to test hypotheses (correlation, regression, moderation) and generalizable findings. A cross-sectional design, which involves obtaining data at one time point, was considered suitable for this exploratory-confirmatory study because of the requirements of MPhil level research and the limitations of only one time point.

Participants

The target population was youth aged 18 to 35 years in Pakistan who were actively using streaming platforms. A non-probability sampling technique was used, which included Snowball sampling and convenience sampling. This age range was chosen due to the heavy involvement of the young people in streaming and because it represents the developmental period of early adulthood in which individuals are more likely to be exploring identity, making comparisons, and being sensitive to peer influence (Arnett, 2000). Participants were initially recruited by convenience sampling via friends, university contacts, and social media. A snowball sample recruited those in the initial group to pass along the survey link to others, allowing for a wider reach. The integrated approach is appropriate for online survey research in Pakistan, as there is no comprehensive sampling frame of streaming youth available (DataReportal, 2024). $N = 308$ respondents were the final sample. The sample size is higher than the minimum sample size recommended by Hair et al. (2010) for multiple regression (when there are only 5 predictors, the minimum sample size is 200); like other studies (Gabbiadini et al., 2021; Panda & Pandey, 2017). The participants were required to be residing in Pakistan between the age of 18-35, active users of at least one streaming platform and should give informed consent in the digital realm.

Measures

Streaming Gratifications Scale

The Streaming Gratifications Scale (Panda & Pandey, 2017) was adapted from the original published in Young Consumers (Vol. 18, Issue 4, pages 425–438, Emerald Publishing). The original scale was designed and tested with a mixed methods of study of binge-watching motivational factors of college students. Three subscales were used for this study that are theoretically relevant: (a) Escapism (4 items, e.g. "I use streaming to forget my worries"), (b) Entertainment (4 items, e.g. "Streaming makes me feel better"), and (c) Social interaction (4 items, e.g. "I stream to have something to discuss with others"). Items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree). Scale reliability for the total scale was found to be $\alpha = .72$. The subscales had acceptable reliability (escapism $\alpha = .72$, entertainment $\alpha = .79$, social interaction $\alpha = .72$).

Subjective Happiness Scale

The Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999) is a four-item measure that measures global subjective happiness at the trait level. Two items ask respondents to rate themselves absolutely (not a very happy person to 7 = a very happy person), and to rate themselves relative to other people. The other two items briefly characterize a happy and a not-very-happy person, with the question asking the respondents to indicate how well the characterization applies to them. The unhappy characterization (Item 4) was reverse coded. The mean score is higher, the more the participants are happy with their lives. The original 4 item scale had a Cronbach's $\alpha = .584$ in the present study. A very low corrected item total correlation for Item 2 ($r = .028$) led to the removal of this item from the scale creating a final scale of 3 items with an $\alpha = .738$. This modification is transparently reported as a limitation. Likewise, the low performance of Happiness2 might be due to cultural and contextual issues. The item asked respondents to consider “their happiest friends” with whom to compare; this may have different meanings in collectivist cultures like Pakistan where explicit comparison of happiness with others may not always be welcomed or the meaning may differ from that of the western context. Therefore, this item might not reflect how the subjective happiness of Pakistani youth is perceived. The question here is whether the Subjective Happiness Scale is culturally valid in South Asian populations or not. Future research is recommended with culturally adapted and psychometrically validated complete SHS prior to its application in Pakistan.

Viewing Duration

Average daily streaming duration was measured by one of five ordinal categories: less than 1 hour, 1-2 hours, 3-4 hours, 5-6 hours, and more than 6 hours. This variable was treated as ordinal in descriptive analyses and as continuous (after centering) in moderation analyses.

Procedure

Data was gathered using an online self-administered questionnaire that was created using Google Forms. The survey link was sent via WhatsApp groups, Facebook and Instagram, and other social media platforms in April 2026. To increase accessibility, the questionnaire was presented in two languages (English and Urdu). The opening page included a bilingual informed consent statement that explained: (a) the academic purpose of the research (MPhil degree completion at Government College University, Lahore); (b) the voluntary nature of participation and that responses would be anonymous; (c) confidential handling of responses; (d) estimated completion time of 5–7 minutes; and (e) the right to withdraw at any time. Participants who did not choose the option "Yes, I agree" were not sent to substantive questions.

Data Analysis

SPSS (Version 26) was used to analyze the data. All demographic and scale measures were calculated as descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and frequencies). Pearson correlation analysis was used to test H1 and H2. To test H3, multiple linear regression procedure was used (enter method) with escapism, entertainment and social interaction as simultaneous predictors of happiness. A hierarchical regression was attempted with the centering of escapism and Time and was then followed by a product term (H4). The residuals were checked for normality and homoscedasticity. The study was conducted in line with ethical principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality and data security.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

A total of 308 people responded to the survey. The sample consisted of 159 male (51.6%), 122 female (39.6%) and 27 other/prefer-not-to-say (8.8%) participants (see Table 1) with all educational levels (Intermediate to MPhil). There was a variety of streaming platforms used, with Netflix (32.8%), YouTube (28.9%) and TikTok (15.6%) being the most used. Table 1 shows a summary of demographic characteristics. In the preliminary screening, some respondents stated that the main media platform used is non-streaming applications such as WhatsApp, weather applications, and online shopping applications. Because these applications fall outside the operational definition of streaming media, such responses should have been removed by a screening question. Their inclusion may have introduced measurement contamination and contributed to the null results. Future studies need to combine a more rigorous system of platform validation and clear operational definitions of streaming media.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics ($N = 308$)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	159	51.6
	Female	122	39.6
	Prefer not to say	27	8.8
Age group	18–24	178	57.8
	25–35	130	42.2

Education	Intermediate	98	31.8
	Bachelor's	112	36.4
	Master's	68	22.1
	MPhil/PhD	30	9.7
Primary platform	Netflix	101	32.8
	YouTube	89	28.9
	TikTok	48	15.6
	Other	70	22.7

The main study variables were summarized as descriptive statistics, as shown in Table 2. Skewness values for all variables with available estimates fell within the acceptable range of ±1.5, supporting approximate normality. All three streaming-motivation means fell below the midpoint of the 5-point scale (Escapism M = 2.71, Entertainment M = 2.42, Social Interaction M = 2.83). This indicates that overall, participants were not very favorable to streaming for these reasons. This low variance in the predictors may have limited the statistical power needed to detect significant correlations or regression effects, offering one plausible explanation for the null results.

Social interaction had the highest mean score (M = 2.83, SD = 1.01), followed by escapism (M = 2.71, SD = 1.07) and entertainment (M = 2.42, SD = 1.12) in answering RQ1, which questioned the most common streaming motivation. Still, all three motivation scores fell below the midpoint of the 5-point scale, indicating that participants did not strongly endorse any single motivation for streaming. This pattern is actually an interesting discovery and may indicate that, at least in this Pakistani sample, streaming may be more about habit or situational convenience than about strong psychological desire.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	***M***	***SD***	**Skewness**	**SE Skew**
Escapism	2.705	1.074	.462	.139
Entertainment	2.424	1.119	.479	.139
Social Interaction	2.830	1.009	.301	.139
Subjective Happiness (3-item)	3.872	1.634	−.020	.139
Viewing Duration	3.02	1.32	.10	.139

Reliability Analysis

The results of Cronbach's alpha coefficients are presented in Table 3. The initial 4 item happiness scale had poor internal reliability (α = .584). Item-total statistic analysis (Table 4) indicated that Happiness2 was poorly

correlated (r = .028) and that if it was omitted, alpha would increase to .738. Thus, the final happiness score was the average of Happiness1, Happiness3, and the reverse coded Happiness4 (H4reverse). The reliability of all three subscales of the scale was satisfactory (α > .70).

Table 3

Scale Reliabilities (Cronbach's α)

Scale	Number of Items	α
Escapism	4	.72
Entertainment	4	.79
Social Interaction	4	.72
Happiness (original 4-item)	4	.584
Happiness (final 3-item)	3	.738

Table 4

Item-Total Statistics for Original Four-Item Happiness Scale

Item	Scale M if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total r	α if Item Deleted
Happiness1	11.83	17.098	.435	.457
Happiness2	11.62	24.035	.028	.738
Happiness3	11.36	15.540	.545	.361
H4reverse	11.23	15.486	.518	.380

Note. The final happiness score excluded Happiness2 due to a corrected item-total correlation of r = .028.

Correlations Among Variables

Bivariate relationships were analyzed using the Pearson correlation (Table 5). Subjective happiness showed very weak, non-significant correlations with escapism (r = .021, p = .719), entertainment (r = .011, p = .850), and social interaction (r = .011, p = .850). There was a slight but non-significant correlation between viewing duration and happiness (r = −.100, p = .081). As predicted, escapism correlated moderately with entertainment (r = .523, p < .001) and social interaction (r = .496, p < .001).

The moderate inter-correlations among escapism, entertainment and social interaction motivations (r = .421 to .523) pose some important issues of discriminant validity in the Pakistani sample. Although none of these correlations reached the level that typically signals multicollinearity, they suggest that respondents may not clearly distinguish the streaming motives as conceptually separate experiences. This suggests cultural convergence between the gratification dimensions in the collectivist media context. For future studies, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) needs to be performed to test the psychometric validity of the three-factor structure of the Streaming Gratifications Scale in Pakistan.

Table 5

Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Happiness	—			
2. Escapism	.021	—		
3. Entertainment	.011	.523**	—	
4. Social Interaction	.011	.496**	.421**	—

Note. **$p < .01$ (2-tailed). $N = 308$.

Multiple Regression Analysis

A simultaneous multiple regression analysis was performed to see if escapism, entertainment, and social interaction motivations predicted subjective happiness. The overall regression model was not significant, $F(3, 304) = .043$, $p = .988$ and explained almost no variance in subjective happiness, $R^2 = .000$, adjusted $R^2 = -.009$. Hence, the hypothesis of H3 was rejected. The multicollinearity statistics showed that multicollinearity was not a problem in the primary regression model as all tolerance values were greater than .634 and all variance inflation factor (VIF) values were less than 1.576.

The individual coefficients (Table 6) indicated that none of the three motivations were a significant predictor of happiness. Escapism had a small positive but non-significant effect ($B = .031$, $SE = .110$, $\beta = .020$, $p = .779$). Entertainment had virtually zero effect ($B = -.0001$, $SE = .101$, $\beta = .000$, $p = .999$). Social interaction also had a trivial non-significant effect ($B = .001$, $SE = .110$, $\beta = .001$, $p = .991$). Therefore, the escapism negative and entertainment and social interaction positive conditions are not supported, H1 and H2, respectively. The collinearity statistics showed no problematic multicollinearity with values of tolerance ranging from .634 to .718 and values for VIF ranging from 1.393 to 1.576.

Table 6

Multiple Regression Coefficients for Streaming Motivations Predicting Subjective Happiness

Predictor	*B*	*SE*	β	*t*	*p*	95% CI for B	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	3.786	.310		12.219	.000	[3.176, 4.395]		
Escapism	.031	.110	.020	.281	.779	[−.185, .247]	.634	1.576
Entertainment	−.0001	.101	.000	−.001	.999	[−.199, .199]	.692	1.445
Social Interaction	.001	.110	.001	.012	.991	[−.215, .217]	.718	1.393

Note. Dependent variable: Subjective Happiness (3-item). $R^2 = .000$, adjusted $R^2 = -.009$, $F(3, 304) = .043$, $p = .988$.

Moderation Analysis

For H4, viewing duration and escapism were centered around their means before creating the interaction term. This hierarchical regression analysis tested centered escapism (Step 1) and the interaction term (Step 2). However, there was high multicollinearity among the moderation model's variables: The interaction term (VIF = 14.23; tolerance = .070) had unstable coefficient estimates that added to the lack of confidence in the interpretability of the moderation results. The interaction effect was not statistically significant ($\Delta R^2 = .001$,

$F(1, 304) = .394$, $p = .531$); however, the high levels of multicollinearity within the data set mean that the moderation analysis may not have been estimated properly. Therefore, it was not possible to evaluate the case with any degree of certainty for the H4. Future research should test moderation with the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2018; Model 1) to produce a more stable estimate of the interaction effect and to center the variables automatically.

Table 7

Collinearity Statistics for Moderation Model (Step 2)

Predictor	Tolerance	VIF
Escape centered	.144	6.965
Time centered	.118	8.491
Escape-centered × Time-centered	.070	14.230

Regression Diagnostics

Residual diagnostics were conducted to check the assumptions of linear regression. There were no standardized residuals plotted against the standardized predicted values, and the pattern was random with no funnel shape, which meant that the assumption of homoscedasticity was satisfied. The histogram of the residuals was close to a normal curve, and the Normal P-P plot revealed the points were close to the diagonal line, which was consistent with the normality assumption for the residuals. Examination of Cook's distance (maximum = .025) and Mahalanobis distance (maximum = 12.99) both within acceptable limits indicated that no individual case had an undue influence on the regression model.

Discussion

Based on this, the present study aimed to investigate the relationship of escapism, entertainment and social interaction motives while streaming with subjective happiness in Pakistani youth and to test the moderating effect of viewing time on the relationship of escapism with subjective happiness. None of the streaming motivations significantly predicted happiness and the regression model accounted for almost no variance, contrary to all the hypotheses. The moderation hypothesis could not be reliably tested due to multicollinearity. Theories are discussed below, prior to the empirical work, and in the context of methodological limitations these null findings are discussed.

H1 (People who like escapism experience a negative relationship with happiness) was not supported. The coefficient for escapism was a small positive value and was not significant ($\beta = .020$, $p = .779$). This goes against the results of Gabbiadini et al. (2021) and Kardefelt-Winther (2014) who correlated escapism with reduced wellbeing. There are a number of possible reasons. First, the measurement of happiness (trait subjective happiness) might not be as responsive to media effects as momentary affect or domain-specific satisfaction. Second, escapist viewing of streaming could be a socially normal and culturally accepted activity of leisure in Pakistan and not a maladaptive coping strategy. Third, because of the limited range of escapism scores ($M = 2.71$, on a 1 to 5 scale) and happiness scores ($M = 3.87$, on a 1 to 7 scale), correlations may have been strengthened or weakened. Additionally, positive relationships were not supported between the entertainment motivations, social interaction motivations, and happiness. The standardized coefficients for both entertainments and social interactions were close to zero, .000 and .001, respectively, with both possessing very low p values ($p = .999$ and .991, respectively). This is contrary to Zhai et al.'s (2024) and Smith et al.'s (2021) findings that entertainment media positively correlated with well-being. A possible reason is that streaming in Pakistan is an activity that is used as a single and passive pursuit even if accompanied with a stated objective of social interaction. Social interaction items (e.g., “I stream to have something to talk about”) might be expected but not necessarily actual social interaction. The positive health outcomes may not occur if there is no co-viewing or online community involvement. H3 (streaming motivations collectively

predict happiness) was not supported ($R^2 = .000$, $F(3, 304) = .043$, $p = .988$). This means the three motivations, even combined, account for none of the differences in happiness. This may be the case because the motivations for streaming may not be relevant for happiness or because other factors (e.g., personality, social support, life stress) may be stronger determinants and outweigh any media effects. It was not possible to reliably test H4: moderation by viewing duration. The very high VIFs (VIF>14) were probably explained by the product term being highly correlated with its factors, since the product term was not optimally centered. Proper centering (subtract the mean) should be used in future studies, and the PROCESS macro may be used (Hayes, 2018) that will do this automatically. One of the biggest drawbacks of this study is that it did not have an assessment for H4.

But the absence of results is quite different from much of the literature in the West. But there are also an increasing number of studies that fail to find significant or small media–well-being effects. A thorough review of digital well-being studies by Büchi (2021) found that the effect size with rigorous methods is frequently found to be very small ($r < .10$). Orben and Przybylski (2019) discovered that technology use accounted for 0.4% of the variance in adolescent well-being. The results presented here are consistent with this "small effects" view. From a cultural perspective, Hatamleh & Akkof (2025) discovered that there is a cultural moderation effect between the social media motivations and happiness. Social interaction through media can have less positive consequences in collectivist Pakistan due to the already high sense of belongingness in personal relationships.

Likewise, escapism can have a lesser negative impact due to family and community resilience. The results contradict a one-to-one correspondence between the gratifications sought and wellbeing in the application of UGT. This is because of the difference between gratifications sought (GS) and gratifications obtained (GO). Although escapism (GS) is a gratification sought, it does not mean that they will find lasting happiness (GO). Future research for UGT should include the measurement of both GS and GO separately as well as moderators to the relationship between GS and GO.

Another important explanation for the null findings is range restriction in the predictor variables. All three motives for streaming were below the midpoint of the response scale, suggesting lower endorsement of these motives among the participants. The lower the variability of the predictor variables and the closer they are to the bottom of the scale, the more difficult it will be to detect the statistical relationships between them and the outcome variables. Thus, the observed value of $R^2 = .000$ may be due to limited variance rather than to a lack of underlying psychological relationships. In addition, UGT could require the addition of cultural aspects. The same drive can have different 'health' implications in individualistic and collectivistic cultures. This study is an initial empirical foundation for such cultural extensions.

Practical Implications

Results indicate that the motivations to stream do not appear to be good predictors of happiness for mental health professionals. The presence of escapist streaming should not be considered a symptom of depression or maladjustment. Platform designers might not automatically recognize that using social features leads to better well-being for users, at least in Pakistan. Relying on this evidence, the cases raised by policymakers about the negative effects of streaming on youth happiness may be exaggerated, but further longitudinal research is required to confirm this.

Limitations

There are some limitations of this study that also account for the null effect and suggest avenues for further research. First, a cross-sectional study design does not allow causal inference; future studies should employ a longitudinal or experience-sampling design. Second, the sampling used (non-probability sampling – snowball and convenience) reduces generalizability, and future studies should consider sampling more representative samples. Third, the original 4-item SHS had $\alpha = .584$, and one of the items was removed from the scale, which is not what the original scale had done, and may have caused systematic error. The Urdu translation of the SHS needs to be validated in Pakistan, or other indices of well-being should be utilized. Fourth, the lack of multicollinearity does not allow testing of H4, which is recommended for future studies in which variables are appropriately centered and larger samples are included ($N > 500$ for continuous moderating variables).

Fifth, there was a possibility of self-report biases (social desirability and common method of variance) that dampened correlations with happiness; future research could incorporate social desirability scales or objective viewing data. Lastly, the sample was relatively happy (M = 3.9, on a 1–7 scale) and moderately motivated, limiting the range and potentially making it impossible to detect effects. There is also a restriction on range that needs to be looked at. All means were below the mid-point of the scale, suggesting that participants were not very enthusiastic about these motivations for escapism, entertainment, and social interaction. In addition, there is less variance within the independent variables, which means that there is less chance of discovering a statistically significant relationship, and this may help to account for the null regression results. The duration of viewing was measured with a single item with only five response categories. The extent of this coarse measurement may have resulted in less precision and statistical sensitivity in the moderation analysis. Future studies should use real-time measures of the number of hours viewers watched, rather than self-reported hours, for more accurate measures and interaction testing. In the future, studies should: (a) be conducted using probability sampling to increase generalizability; (b) incorporate the complete 4-item SHS after adequate cultural adaptation and validation; (c) test moderation with variables centered appropriately and PROCESS macro; (d) add variables like personality (neuroticism, extraversion), social support, and mental health symptoms; (e) use daily diary methods to capture within-person fluctuations; and (f) compare between streaming motivations across platforms (short-form video vs long-form series).

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between escapism, entertainment, and social interaction motives for streaming and subjective happiness among youth in Pakistan. The analysis did not show any statistically significant correlations between streaming motivations and subjective happiness, as measured by the Streaming Gratifications Scale and a modified 3-item version of the Subjective Happiness Scale. The regression model accounted for almost none of the variance in happiness, and because of the high degree of multicollinearity in the moderation hypothesis (viewing duration), it was not possible to test this hypothesis reliably. The results should thus be considered with some reservations and as exploratory rather than confirmatory. Importantly, the results do not provide an example of a lack of psychological effect of streaming media on well-being; they suggest that within this sample, measurement system and cultural context, none was detected. These null results may be due to a variety of methodological and conceptual issues, such as range restriction, concerns about the validity of the measures, culturally adopted scales, and the differences between sought and obtained gratifications. The study is original in documenting a new context, a non-Western context, in which the expected relationships of Uses and Gratifications Theory were not found in the growing literature on digital media and well-being. The results highlight the need to culturally validate psychological assessments and to rethink the applicability of media gratification measures in collectivist societies like Pakistan.

References

Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. American Psychologist, 55(5), 469–480. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.5.469

Büchi, M. (2021). Digital well-being theory and research. New Media & Society, 26(1), 172–189. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211056851

DataReportal. (2024). Digital 2024: Pakistan. https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-pakistan

Diener, E. (1984). Subjective well-being. Psychological Bulletin, 95(3), 542–575. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.95.3.542

Eden, A. L., Johnson, B. K., Reinecke, L., & Grady, S. M. (2020). From need fulfillment to need frustration: A typology of media use and well-being. Psychology of Popular Media, 9(3), 300–314. https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000234

Gabbiadini, A., Baldissarri, C., Valtorta, R. R., Durante, F., & Mari, S. (2021). Loneliness, escapism, and identification with media characters: An exploration of the psychological factors underlying binge-watching tendency. Frontiers in Psychology, 12, Article 785970. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.785970

Greenberg, B. S. (1974). Gratifications of television viewing and their correlates for British children. In J. G. Blumler & E. Katz (Eds.), The uses of mass communications: Current perspectives on gratifications research (pp. 71–92). Sage.

Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., & Anderson, R. E. (2010). Multivariate data analysis (7th ed.). Pearson.

Hatamleh, I. H. M., & Akkof, A. M. A. (2025). The moderating effect of cultural restraint on the relationship between users' motivations for following digital influencers on social media and subjective happiness. Frontiers in Communication, 10, Article 1644142. https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2025.1644142

Hayes, A. F. (2018). Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.

Kardefelt-Winther, D. (2014). A conceptual and methodological critique of internet addiction research: Towards a model of compensatory internet use. Computers in Human Behavior, 31, 351–354. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.10.059

Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and gratifications research. The Public Opinion Quarterly, 37(4), 509–523. https://doi.org/10.1086/268109

LaRose, R., Mastro, D., & Eastin, M. S. (2001). Understanding internet usage: A social-cognitive approach to uses and gratifications. Social Science Computer Review, 19(4), 395–413. https://doi.org/10.1177/089443930101900401

Lyubomirsky, S., & Lepper, H. S. (1999). A measure of subjective happiness: Preliminary reliability and construct validation. Social Indicators Research, 46, 137–155. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1006824100041

Mahesh, P., Subramanian, D., & Thankappan, K. (2024). Digital dilemmas: A comprehensive review of the psychosocial and sleep effects of web streaming on Indian youth. Frontiers in Psychiatry, 15, Article 1364569. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2024.1364569

Mattei, D., & Schaefer, C. (2004). An investigation of the validity of the Subjective Happiness Scale. Psychological Reports, 94, 288–290. https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.94.1.288-290

McQuail, D. (2010). McQuail's mass communication theory (6th ed.). Sage.

Muñiz-Velázquez, J. A., Gómez-Baya, D., & Lozano Delmar, J. (2021). Exploratory study of the relationship between happiness and the rise of media consumption during COVID-19 confinement. Frontiers in Psychology, 12, Article 566517. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.566517

Orben, A., & Przybylski, A. K. (2019). The association between adolescent well-being and digital technology use. Nature Human Behaviour, 3, 173–182. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-018-0506-1

Panda, S., & Pandey, S. C. (2017). Binge watching and college students: Motivations and outcomes. Young Consumers, 18(4), 425–438. https://doi.org/10.1108/YC-07-2017-00707

Pittman, M., & Reich, B. (2016). Social media and loneliness: Why an Instagram picture may be worth more than a thousand Twitter words. Computers in Human Behavior, 62, 155–167. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.03.084

Ruggiero, T. E. (2000). Uses and gratifications theory in the 21st century. Mass Communication & Society, 3(1), 3–37. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0301_02

Smith, D., Leonis, T., & Anandavalli, S. (2021). Belonging and loneliness in cyberspace: Impacts of social media on adolescents' well-being. Australian Journal of Psychology, 73(1), 12–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/00049530.2021.1898914

Statista. (2024). OTT video – Pakistan market forecast. https://www.statista.com/outlook/amo/media/tv-video/ott-video/pakistan

Steiner, E., & Xu, K. (2020). Binge-watching motivates change: Uses and gratifications of streaming video viewers. Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies, 26(1), 82–101. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856517750365

Sundar, S. S., & Limperos, A. M. (2013). Uses and grats 2.0: New gratifications for new media. Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 57(4), 504–525. https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2013.845827

Tamborini, R., Grizzard, M., David, P., Bowman, N. D., Reinecke, L., & Lewis, R. J. (2021). Media for coping during COVID-19 social distancing: Stress, anxiety, and psychological well-being. Frontiers in Psychology, 11, Article 577876. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.577876

Tefertiller, A. (2023). Self-determination in media gratifications using streaming video-on-demand channels. Media Psychology Review. https://mprcenter.org/review/

Uram, P., & Skalski-Bednarz, S. B. (2024). Social media escapism in Poland: Adaptation of a measure and its relationship with thought suppression and mental health. Psychological Reports. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/00332941241269552

Wirz, D. S., Eden, A., Ulusoy, E., & Ellithorpe, M. E. (2025). Beyond pleasurable and meaningful: Psychologically rich entertainment experiences. PLoS ONE, 20(2), e0315596. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0315596

World Health Organization. (2024). Social connectedness and well-being. https://www.who.int

Zhai, G., Su, J., Chen, Z., Feng, Y., Jiang, Y., Liu, T., & Wu, X. (2024). The relationships between short video usage and subjective well-being: Mediation models and network analysis. Behavioral Sciences, 14(11), 1082. https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14111082