

Empowering Digital Audiences: A Uses and Gratifications Theory Analysis of Streaming Platform Selection Among Youth in Indonesia and China

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the motivations and behaviours of Indonesian and Chinese university students in using digital streaming platforms, applying the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theoretical framework. Data were collected through questionnaires distributed online to 150 respondents in each country, supplemented by qualitative interviews and thematic analysis. The results reveal four dominant motivations: entertainment, escapism, social interaction, and learning. While these motivations appear in both contexts, their expression is shaped by cultural orientations and socio-technical ecosystems. Indonesian students emphasize action and drama genres that combine entertainment with moral and educational value, often extending viewing into peer discussions and cognitive learning through documentaries. Chinese students, in contrast, prefer comedy and romance as stress-relief mechanisms within a competitive academic environment, with collectivist values reinforced by platform-based interactions such as danmu (real-time comments). The findings confirm entertainment and escapism as universal gratifications, while cognitive and social motivations vary significantly across cultures. This study extends U&G theory beyond Western contexts, offering theoretical insights and practical implications for streaming service providers, policymakers, and educators. It highlights the importance of localized strategies in the global streaming industry, where content must adapt to cultural expectations and audience needs to remain relevant in the rapidly evolving digital media landscape.

Keywords: *Uses and gratifications, film, streaming platforms, media consumption, digital viewing.*

INTRODUCTION

The rise of digital technologies further transformed subscription television by enhancing signal quality, enabling interactive services, and introducing digital recording capabilities (Dhiman, 2023). More recently, streaming platforms such as Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime Video have disrupted the television landscape by granting audiences on-demand access to diverse content, independent of traditional cable or satellite subscriptions (Chalaby, 2024). These innovations have significantly altered viewing habits, particularly among younger

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generations, who increasingly prefer digital streaming services to conventional broadcasting (Alzubi, 2023).

In 2022, the Asia-Pacific region recorded an estimated 650 million subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) users. China accounted for 57.7% of this total, and India accounted for 15.7%, while Indonesia ranked fourth with approximately 33 million users (5.1%) (Statista, 2025). The overall SVOD market in Asia-Pacific is projected to grow steadily through 2026, with China and India maintaining dominance, yet Indonesia emerging as one of the fastest-growing markets. The expansion of Indonesia's SVOD sector is driven by rising internet access, growing middle-class purchasing power, and the popularity of both global platforms such as Netflix and Disney+ Hotstar and local platforms such as Vidio and WeTV.

Streaming technologies not only diversify access to media content but also influence consumption behaviours (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Tendean, 2022). Subscription-based streaming platforms provide interactive features that enhance user engagement, extensive content libraries, and personalized viewing experiences (Wu et al., 2024). Nevertheless, these opportunities are accompanied by challenges, such as excessive screen exposure and the normalization of binge-watching behaviours, which raise concerns about the social and psychological consequences of overconsumption (Greber, 2024).

While research on streaming services and subscription television has been extensive, there remains a limited understanding of cultural differences in youth media consumption (Jandevi & Zareen, 2020; Sahoo, 2024). In Western contexts, particularly in the United States, studies have largely focused on industry structures, audience engagement, and global media flows through platforms such as Netflix (Ferchaud & Proffitt, 2023; Fung & Chik, 2022). Other works examine technological and economic systems, often centred on Western services such as Netflix (Fagerjord & Kueng, 2019). This Western-centred bias highlights the need for research that addresses how cultural contexts shape youth media behaviours in non-Western societies.

To bridge this gap, the present study employs the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory to investigate the motivations and practices of young audiences in Indonesia and China. U&G theory posits that media users actively select platforms and content to fulfil specific psychological and social needs. Originally developed in the 1940s, the theory has since been extended to encompass digital and social media contexts (Haridakis & Humphries, 2019; Li & Reider, 2024; Mateus et al., 2023). This study applies U&G not only to identify key gratifications such as entertainment, social interaction, and information-seeking, but also to analyse how cultural values—such as collectivism versus individualism, or religious and communal orientations—shape the media practices of youth in both countries. For instance, audiences in China may use streaming platforms to participate in socio-political discussions in a supervised digital environment, while users in Indonesia use them more for religious or community-building reasons.

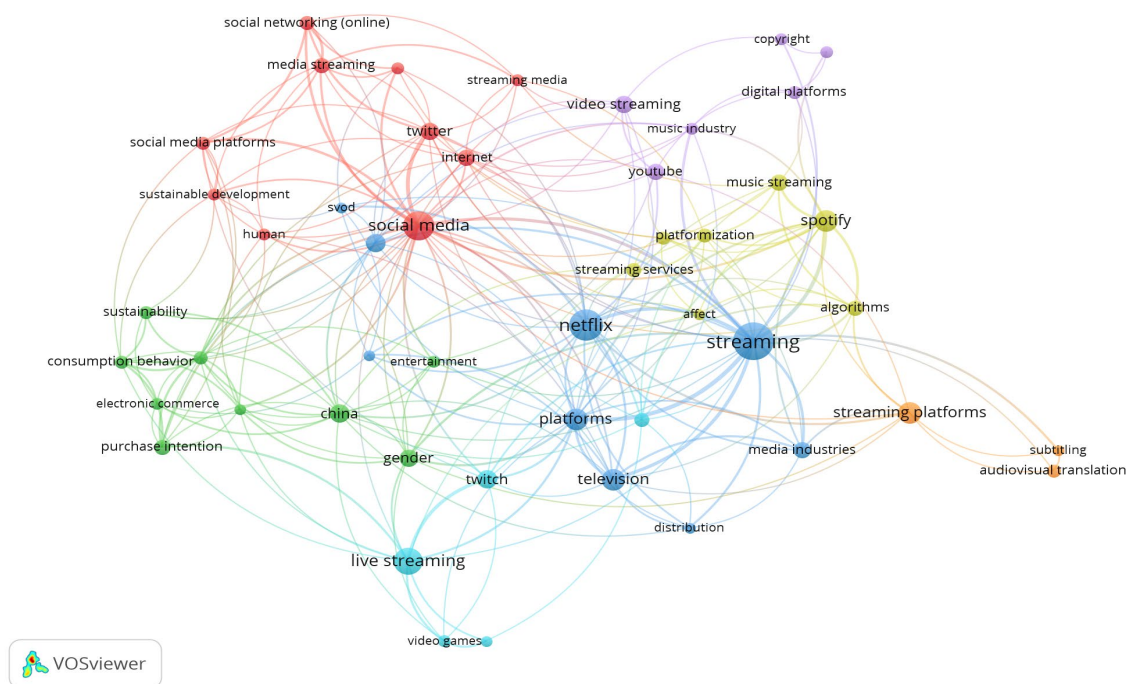


Figure 1: Streaming platforms, media consumption, digital viewing

Based on Figure 1, data from 417 publications were processed using VOSviewer, which produced a visual map designed to identify patterns and connections in previous research. The visualization highlights the relationships among major themes, including streaming, social media, platformization, the media industry, algorithms, and psychological aspects such as effects and consumption behaviours. The analysis indicates that much of the existing research has focused on the technological and economic dimensions of streaming services, with strong associations between terms such as streaming and leading platforms like Netflix and Spotify. Similarly, the term social media is often linked to discussions of platforms such as Twitter and YouTube, as well as broader issues related to human behaviour and sustainable development.

Despite the availability of extensive literature, this mapping also identifies research gaps that the present study seeks to address. A key limitation of existing studies is the insufficient attention to the psychological effects of social media and streaming platform use, particularly when analysed through the lens of gender differences. Most studies have concentrated on industrial, technical, and business aspects, while relatively few have explored the issue from a social-psychological perspective—especially regarding how gender shapes patterns of digital media use. Thus, the literature mapping drawn from the Scopus database not only demonstrates the relevance and importance of this study but also highlights its novelty in offering a new and specialized perspective. By doing so, the research establishes itself as a significant contribution to understanding the intersection of gender, social media, and streaming platforms in the digital era, employing a data-driven methodology supported by high-quality academic publications.

The comparative approach adopted in this study enables an investigation into the cultural and technological factors that influence youth media consumption in Indonesia and China. By comparing young people's engagement with streaming platforms across these two distinct socio-cultural contexts, the study moves beyond market-driven trends to explore

deeper behavioural dynamics. Furthermore, it draws attention to the psychological and behavioural implications of prolonged screen exposure, fostering a broader discussion about digital media consumption. This approach integrates perspectives from communication studies, media psychology, and cultural analysis.

In addition, the study incorporates modern media consumption behaviours—such as binge-watching and engagement with interactive content—into the framework of U&G theory. It demonstrates that digital consumption carries both advantages, by fulfilling user needs, and disadvantages, such as reduced physical activity and disrupted sleep patterns. By examining subscription television behaviours among youth in Indonesia and China, the study offers valuable insights for media scholars, streaming service providers, and policymakers. To develop more user-centred, engaging, and socially responsible digital media strategies, it is essential to understand the motivations and consumption patterns of young audiences across cultural contexts. The purpose of this research is therefore to contribute to ongoing debates on digital media consumption and its effects, while offering new perspectives on how technological developments continue to shape audience behaviour in the digital age.

Accordingly, the research is guided by the following questions: (1) What are the primary motivations driving audiences in Indonesia and China to use digital streaming platforms? (2) How are these motivations influenced by cultural elements in each context? and (3) How can U&G theory explain digital streaming behaviours in Indonesia and China? This study employs a descriptive-qualitative methodology and case study approach to examine student engagement with film streaming platforms in both countries. Data were collected through online questionnaires distributed to 150 respondents in each setting. The research framework is grounded in Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory, while descriptive statistics were applied to analyse the structural factors shaping user motivations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The rapid growth of digital streaming platforms has transformed global media consumption, particularly among younger audiences. Scholars have increasingly focused on the motivations, behaviours, and effects associated with the shift from traditional television to internet-based, on-demand services. Platforms such as Netflix, Disney+ Hotstar, iQiyi, and WeTV have not only altered how people access content but also reshaped how audiences derive meaning from their media experiences. Understanding how young users discover, select, and engage with streaming platforms is therefore crucial in an evolving media landscape. To address this need, the present study applies the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) framework to explore youth viewing behaviours across two culturally distinct yet technologically dynamic countries—Indonesia and China. This review synthesizes existing scholarship on digital streaming, youth media consumption, and U&G theory, while identifying gaps that this study aims to fill.

1. Evolution of Media Consumption and the Rise of Streaming Platforms

Advancements in digital technology have fundamentally reshaped media consumption worldwide. Over the past two decades, streaming platforms have gradually replaced traditional broadcast and cable television, offering audiences customizable, on-demand access to content (Ibrahim et al., 2024). Modern media consumption emphasizes interactivity, mobility, and personalization, characteristics epitomized by platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Disney+ Hotstar, alongside regional leaders like iQiyi and WeTV (Lotz &

Eklund, 2023; Sobral, 2019). Among Millennials and Gen Z, the preference for internet-based services over conventional television packages has accelerated the phenomenon of “cord-cutting”.

Netflix’s evolution from a DVD rental service into a global streaming giant exemplifies this transformation. Initially disrupting the market with its mail-based DVD rentals, Netflix introduced online streaming in 2007, fundamentally altering access to media (Voigt et al., 2016). Its innovations—including personalized recommendations, multiple user profiles, offline downloads, and parental controls—have reinforced its reputation for user-centred design. By 2024, Netflix had achieved gross profit margins of 43%, and in November 2021, their market valuation reportedly reached USD 300 billion, solidifying digital streaming as a core strategy for entertainment industry growth (Saxena, 2025). Netflix also popularized binge-watching, strategically leveraging both technological affordances and psychological factors to foster para-social relationships with characters (Shariffadeen et al., 2023; Song et al., 2025). Binge-watching has since become a form of escapism and stress relief, providing audiences with both emotional release and immersive storytelling experiences (Cabral et al., 2020; Mathur et al., 2024). Netflix’s success has driven competitors such as Disney+ and HBO Max to adopt aggressive content and subscriber acquisition strategies, fuelling an increasingly competitive global streaming market (Budzinski et al., 2021; Chalaby, 2025; Schauerte et al., 2024).

The Asia-Pacific region has witnessed particularly rapid streaming growth. Industry forecasts predict that the regional video streaming market will expand from USD 33.32 billion in 2024 to USD 40.84 billion in 2025, with a compound annual growth rate of 22.6% projected through 2030 (Grand View Research, 2024). This growth is driven by fast internet penetration, widespread smartphone adoption, the deployment of 5G networks, and the rising popularity of live-streamed digital events (Grand View Research, 2024). These dynamics have created a new media ecosystem in which content access is determined less by time and location than by dynamic, user-driven demand.

In East and Southeast Asia, distinct media ecosystems, government regulations, and cultural preferences generate unique consumption patterns. In China, content regulations foster the dominance of domestic platforms such as iQiyi, Bilibili, and WeTV (Samuel & Mitchell, 2022), while in Indonesia, audiences enjoy wider access to global platforms such as Netflix and Disney+ Hotstar, leading to greater exposure to international content. At the same time, short-video platforms such as TikTok and Douyin have begun to influence viewing behaviours, with clips often serving as gateways to long-form streaming content.

The development of digital technology has brought changes to filmmaking, resulting in a paradigm shift in film production, distribution and consumption, leading to the emergence of experimental aesthetics and media convergence, which emphasizes the active involvement of the audience. Meanwhile Sukmono (2025) reinforces this by showing two main clusters in global digital film research: (1) technical innovations such as digital projection, blockchain, and artificial intelligence, and (2) industry transformation thru OTT, big data, and streaming distribution. These two clusters show that digitalization is not just about technical aspects but also influences the consumption patterns of a global audience. Sukmono (2025) also highlights regional disparities, where Western countries dominate research while Asia faces limitations in distribution infrastructure and digital literacy.

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework: Uses and Gratifications in the Streaming Era

To conceptualize user behaviour in digital streaming, this study employs the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory. Originally developed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch in the 1970s, U&G posits that audiences are not passive consumers but active agents who select media to satisfy specific needs (Steiner & Xu, 2018). As Syafira and Dharmmesta (2024), U&G theory has been applied to understand user behaviour in streaming services, focusing on factors like affective gratification, tension release, cognitive gratification, perceived risk, and viewing addiction. These factors influence subscription behaviour and customer engagement, highlighting the importance of functional benefits such as service usability, content variety, entertainment, and relaxation.

Based on the research conducted by Sukmono et al. (2019), it was found that the audience exhibited three characteristics: euphoria toward new freedom, openness to diverse identity issues, and limitations due to exclusive access. This characteristic confirms the U&G assumption that audiences are active, but their choices remain influenced by structural conditions such as regulation and infrastructure. In other words, the gratification sought by the audience is always shaped by the socio-political and cultural context.

Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory emphasizes the role of the audience as an active participant in media consumption, which is becoming increasingly evident in the streaming era because users have complete control over what, when, and how they watch content (Haridakis & Humphries, 2019; Menon, 2024; Rubin & Bantz, 2023). Streaming also offers a personalized experience, where users can customize their viewing through interactive features like skip, replay, and pause, in line with the U&G framework that highlights individual needs and motivations in media selection. The main motivations include content-based gratification such as entertainment, information, and emotional experiences (Li & Reider, 2024); social gratification through sharing and commenting features that strengthen community interaction; and functional gratification, which is the satisfaction derived from ease of navigation and the quality of streaming services (Menon, 2024). Furthermore, technological affordances such as high-resolution video quality and adaptive bitrate streaming are further enhancing the viewing experience to meet user expectations (Cicco et al., 2020).

Recent studies have expanded U&G applications to streaming platforms. For instance, Syafira and Dharmmesta (2024) identify entertainment, information, relaxation, and social interaction as key motivations for subscribing to video-on-demand (VOD) services. While consistent with earlier U&G research, these motivations are enriched by unique affordances of streaming platforms—such as binge-watching, algorithmic recommendations, and second-screen engagement (Bastos et al., 2024; Steiner & Xu, 2018). In the digital era, gratifications are not limited to long-form content but also emerge from short-form formats such as TikTok and Douyin. Short videos provide instant gratification in the form of quick entertainment, bite-sized information, and interactive engagement, shaping audience preferences for longer streaming content (Li & Reider, 2024; Zhang et al., 2022). The difference in gratification between long-form content (serials, films) and short-form content (short videos) is an important factor in understanding the media consumption behaviour of the younger generation.

3. *Digital Streaming, Youth Engagement, and Short-Video Ecosystem in Asia-Pacific*

Studies on youth engagement in the streaming ecosystem indicate that digital platforms are becoming the primary arena for young people to seek entertainment, identity, and social interaction (Steiner & Xu, 2018). This transformation aligns with the global trend of digital film distribution becoming increasingly modular and data-driven (Sukmono, 2025). On the other hand, Indonesian audience studies show similar dynamics. Sukmono et al. (2019) emphasize that although the post-1998 audience is more open to multicultural themes, limitations in infrastructure and alternative viewing spaces mean that film consumption remains concentrated in major cities. This finding shows that the engagement of young audiences in Asia, including Indonesia, is not only determined by entertainment motivation, but also by the availability of infrastructure and equitable distribution. Thus, the discussion about the streaming ecosystem in Asia cannot be separated from the factors of the digital divide and local policies.

Young audiences are the most digitally connected demographic and the most active consumers of streaming services (Tetteh & Kankam, 2024). In Indonesia, popular genres include action, drama, and comedy, often valued for strong narratives, cultural relevance, and educational elements. In contrast, Chinese audiences increasingly prefer comedy and romance, reflecting both the pressures of academic life and a demand for light-hearted entertainment (Heeks et al., 2024; Lim, 2024). These trends are reinforced by cross-platform promotion, where streaming providers use social media and short-video clips to attract audiences (Shi et al., 2023).

Over the past three years, short-video platforms such as TikTok and Douyin have emerged as both competitors and complements to streaming services. TikTok alone accounts for more than 28.62% of monthly active users in Asia-Pacific (296.8 million users) (Backlinko, 2025). In Indonesia, 77% of users report discovering new music via TikTok (SonoSuite, 2024). Recent studies suggest that short-form video platforms like TikTok and Douyin can significantly influence viewer behaviour and content consumption patterns. The use of teaser content and short clips from series or films on these platforms has been shown to increase viewer conversion to long-form streaming platforms. This is primarily due to the engaging nature of short-form videos and the effective recommendation algorithms that keep users hooked by continuously presenting content that aligns with their interests (Fan & Hemans, 2022; Lu et al., 2020).

While in China, micro-drama (duanju) formats popularized by ReelShort and DramaBox are disrupting traditional streaming models. ReelShort has been downloaded over 370 million times, generating USD 700 million in revenue by early 2025, while DramaBox reached 90 million registered users in 2024 (Time, 2025). With 1–2 minute episodes ending on cliffhangers, these formats sustain audience engagement and are increasingly integrated into conventional streaming catalogues. This phenomenon shows the blurring boundaries between the short video ecosystem and streaming services, where traditional platforms are starting to integrate mini-series content into their catalogues to maintain relevance (Li, 2025).

Moreover, live streaming commerce on TikTok Live has influenced impulsive buying behaviours among Gen Y and Gen Z, driven by interactivity, visual appeal, streamer credibility, and social presence (Andika et al., 2025; Hidayat et al., 2024; Indriastuti et al., 2024; Rahmi et al., 2024; Razafinandrasana & Tamara, 2024; Simanjuntak et al., 2023; Tee et al., 2023; Tran et al., 2025). The integration of interactive live sessions with creators or actors has evolved into a key strategy in entertainment marketing, particularly for films and television series. This

strategy is considered effective because it combines creativity, emotion, and real-time interaction, which collectively enhance audience engagement, brand retention, and purchase intention. The application of gamification in live streams has been shown to increase audience participation, while celebrity involvement strengthens trust and buying interest. In addition, para-social interaction and multidimensional social presence play significant roles in building emotional connections between audiences and creators, leading to positive attitudes toward products as well as greater viewer loyalty. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this strategy is highly dependent on the quality of brand integration and the overall interaction experience. Challenges such as market saturation and the risks of intrusive advertising must be carefully managed to avoid diminishing audience satisfaction and loyalty toward both the platform and the promoted content (Guerrero et al., 2025; Kang & Xu, 2024; Lin & Lee, 2024; Palomino-Flores, Chang, & Castells, 2024; Palomino-Flores, Chang, & Cristi, 2024; Qu & Yin, 2021; Yang et al., 2024).

This phenomenon demonstrates that the short-video ecosystem not only competes with conventional streaming services but also shapes audience gratification, consumption duration, and preferred content formats. The integration of interactive features, cross-format content distribution, and adaptive marketing strategies has therefore become essential for streaming platforms seeking to remain relevant amid shifting preferences among younger generations.

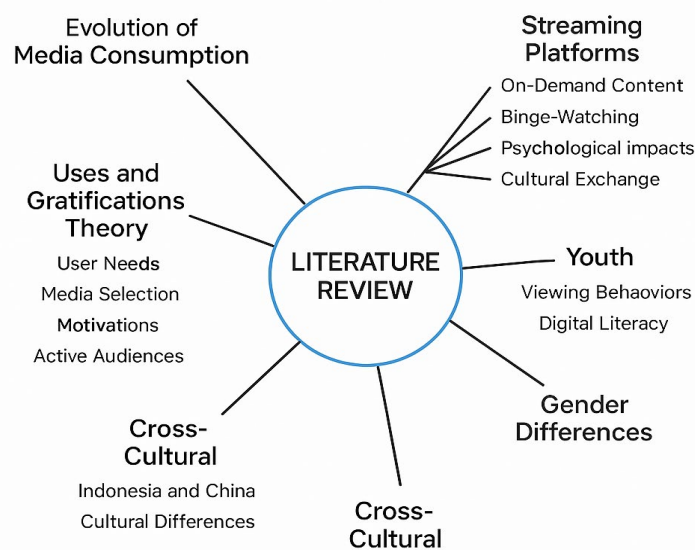


Figure 2: Motivation and consumption behaviour of streaming media in young generation: A cross-cultural analysis

The existing literature provides valuable insights into the motivations and behaviours of digital media users, particularly in the context of streaming platforms. However, significant gaps remain—especially regarding cross-cultural comparisons, gender-based patterns of media engagement, and the psychological implications of excessive consumption among adolescents in non-Western societies. By situating this research within the Uses and Gratifications theoretical framework and focusing on two culturally rich contexts—Indonesia and China—this study seeks to extend current discourse by offering deeper insights into how

young audiences actively engage with digital content to fulfil emotional, cognitive, and social needs. The findings are expected to contribute both to theoretical advancement and to practical applications in media policy, platform design, and digital literacy initiatives targeting younger demographics in Asia and beyond.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive-qualitative research design combined with a comparative case study approach. The aim is to analyse youth engagement with streaming platforms in two different cultural contexts: Indonesia and China. By comparing these two cases, the study seeks to identify similarities and differences in media consumption behaviours, motivations, and psychological implications, while situating them within the theoretical framework of Uses and Gratifications (U&G).

Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed to respondents in both Indonesia and China. A total of 300 participants took part in the study, with 150 respondents from each country. The questionnaire was designed to capture demographic information, streaming platform usage patterns, viewing habits, and motivational factors. In addition, open-ended questions allowed respondents to elaborate on their personal experiences, perceptions, and preferences regarding digital streaming. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, with the following criteria: (1) active students at universities in Indonesia and China, (2) aged 20-29 years, and (3) experienced at least 4 hours per week watching on streaming platforms. These universities were selected due to their historical significance as centres of education in both countries. The total sample size was 150 respondents (35% male, 65% female). Data collection was conducted from January to July 2023.

The research instrument was developed based on prior U&G studies, particularly those that address streaming-specific behaviours such as binge-watching, interactive features, and cross-platform engagement. A pilot study involving 20 respondents, equally divided between Indonesia and China, was conducted to refine the clarity, reliability, and cultural appropriateness of the questionnaire items. Feedback from this phase informed adjustments in wording and structure before the full survey was administered.

Data analysis in this study was carried out systematically through a series of interconnected stages. The initial stage involved data cleaning, conducted immediately after the completion of interviews and observations. All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and carefully examined to eliminate irrelevant elements such as word repetitions, excessive pauses, technical disturbances, or off-topic conversations. The personal identities of respondents were either removed or replaced with specific codes to ensure participant confidentiality. The next stage was data screening, aimed at ensuring that only information relevant to the research objectives was analysed. At this stage, the researcher re-examined interview transcripts, field notes, and observational records to exclude data unrelated to the study's themes. Validation was performed by cross-checking transcripts against field notes to confirm consistency between respondent statements and the researcher's observations.

Following this, the categorization of data was carried out using thematic analysis techniques. The process began with open coding to identify keywords, significant phrases, and main ideas emerging from the raw data. These codes were then grouped through axial coding to identify relationships among categories and to form major themes, such as "entertainment motivation," "social interaction," "genre preferences," and "the influence of

short-video platforms on viewing behaviour.” The final stage, selective coding, involved synthesizing these themes into a comprehensive narrative integrated with the U&G theoretical framework that underpins this study.

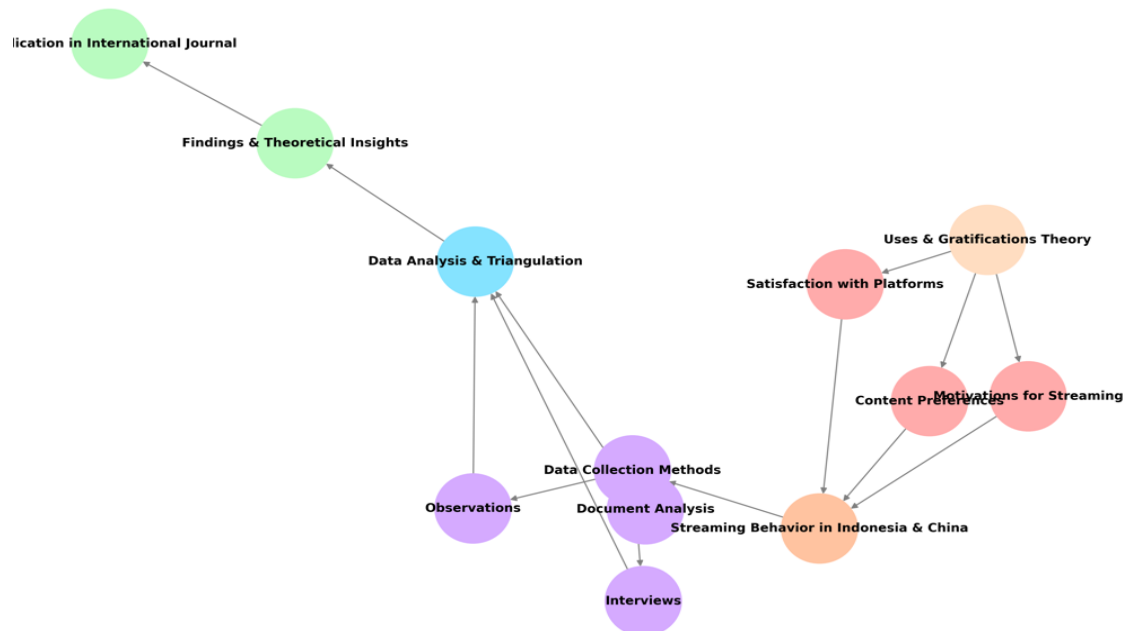


Figure 3: Conceptual framework of streaming platform engagement among students in Indonesia and China

To ensure validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in media studies and cross-cultural communication. Reliability testing produced Cronbach’s alpha values above 0.70 for the key motivational constructs, indicating acceptable internal consistency. The study further strengthened its robustness by combining quantitative findings from descriptive statistics with qualitative thematic insights.

Ethical considerations were carefully observed. All participants provided informed consent before completing the survey, and anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed by omitting any identifying personal information. Participation was voluntary, with respondents free to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Ethical approval for the study was obtained in accordance with institutional research standards. The final research report followed a structured format, linking the findings with U&G theory to provide both theoretical and empirical insights into digital streaming consumption. The study is intended for publication in a reputable international journal, with success indicators continuously monitored throughout the publication process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Primary Motivations of Indonesian and Chinese Audiences in Using Digital Streaming Platforms

The research findings indicate that the primary motivations of Indonesian and Chinese students in using digital streaming platforms can be mapped into three Uses and Gratifications (U&G) categories: content-based gratification such as entertainment, information, and emotional experiences (Li & Reider, 2024); social gratification through sharing and commenting features that strengthen community interaction; and functional

gratification, which is the satisfaction derived from ease of navigation and the quality of streaming services (Menon, 2024). Additionally, technological affordances such as high-resolution video quality and adaptive bitrate streaming are further enhancing the viewing experience to meet user expectations (Cicco et al., 2020). This aligns with U&G theory, which emphasises the role of the audience as an active actor in media consumption (Haridakis & Humphries, 2019). Although all three categories are present in both contexts, cultural orientation and socio-economic conditions lead to significant differences in consumption patterns.

In Indonesia, entertainment motivation was strongly associated with action and drama genres. Students preferred films with compelling narratives and complex characters, which also conveyed moral lessons. As one Indonesian respondent explained: *"I prefer watching action dramas because, apart from being thrilling, they usually include moral messages we can learn from"*. This resonates with Syafira and Dharmmesta (2024), who found that emotional entertainment and narrative quality are key factors driving engagement with video-on-demand platforms. In contrast, Chinese students more frequently mentioned comedy and romance as their preferred genres, serving as a release from academic pressures. One Chinese respondent remarked, *"Studying here is very stressful. When I watch comedies on iQiyi, I can laugh and forget my burdens for a while"*. This supports Heeks et al. (2024), who argue that media consumption in China is increasingly influenced by emotional regulation needs rather than narrative depth in response to academic pressure and the need for light entertainment.

Across both contexts, the majority of respondents reported an average daily viewing time of three to five hours. Specifically, 58% of Indonesian students and 61% of Chinese students fell within this range, while only a small minority (<15%) watched less than two hours per day. These durations exceed WHO recommendations for balanced screen exposure. Previous studies have also linked excessive screen time to reduced physical activity, disrupted sleep, and decreased face-to-face social interactions (Bastos et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, extended viewing also functioned as a form of escapism, with binge-watching serving as a coping strategy for stress relief and temporary detachment from reality (Cabral et al., 2020; Mathur et al., 2024). Indonesian students often treated binge-watching as an outlet from academic routines. One participant admitted: *"Sometimes I watch a long series on Netflix all night, because it is my way of forgetting about assignments"*. Chinese students, on the other hand, highlighted the flexibility of platforms: *"On WeTV, I can decide when to watch. That makes me feel I have control over my time"*. This illustrates multi-layered gratifications, where one viewing activity simultaneously fulfils needs for relaxation, entertainment, and self-regulation (Bastos et al., 2024).

This motivation aligns with the U&G framework, which emphasises entertainment and escapism as basic audience needs (Steiner & Xu, 2018). This finding is also consistent with the research by Sukmono et al. (2019), where the Indonesian audience post-1998 experienced "euphoria" over the freedom to watch new themes, even though access was still limited. Thus, in both the film and digital streaming realms, audience enthusiasm is fuelled by socio-political context and the opportunity to find forms of entertainment considered relevant.

For Indonesian audiences, film watching often extended into peer discussions. As one respondent put it: *"After watching a Korean drama on Disney+ Hotstar, I usually tell my friends about it, and then we discuss the storyline"*. By contrast, Chinese students relied more on platform features such as the danmu (real-time comments) on Bilibili or iQiyi. One

respondent noted: *"I enjoy writing comments while watching, so I can immediately share my feelings with others, even if we do not know each other"*. These differences illustrate how technological affordances shape digital social experiences: peer-based community interaction in Indonesia versus platform-based collectivism in China (Samuel & Mitchell, 2022; Wu et al., 2024).

Cognitive motivation was more prominent in Indonesia. Many students explicitly described streaming as a source of education. For example: *"I often watch documentaries on Netflix because, besides being entertaining, they give me new insights about history or culture"*. Chinese respondents, however, were less likely to emphasize learning, though some acknowledged that romance films and social dramas helped them reflect on modern life: *"Family films on iQiyi often make me think about parent–child relationships today"*. This aligns with Sullivan (2020), who stresses that cognitive gratifications vary according to cultural context and social values.

Short-video applications such as TikTok and Douyin emerged in both contexts as gateways to long-form content. One Indonesian respondent explained: *"I discover the latest dramas from short clips on TikTok, then I look for the full version on Netflix"*. Similarly, a Chinese respondent stated: *"I often see mini-drama clips on Douyin, then continue watching them on WeTV"*. These findings are consistent with recent literature highlighting the integration of short- and long-form ecosystems as an audience acquisition strategy (Time, 2025; Zhang et al., 2022). Short videos offer instant gratification in the form of quick entertainment, brief information, and high social engagement, potentially influencing audience preferences for long-term streaming services (Li & Reider, 2024; Zhang et al., 2022).

Overall, the results reaffirm the core proposition of U&G theory that audiences are active agents who select media to satisfy specific needs. Indonesian students emphasized morally and educationally valuable entertainment, while Chinese students highlighted light entertainment as a stress-regulation tool. Social interaction was expressed differently across contexts, shaped by cultural norms and platform affordances. Thus, while primary motivations were broadly similar (entertainment, escapism, social interaction, learning), their applications were strongly shaped by local contexts. These findings align with Chalaby (2024) and Lotz and Eklund (2023), who stress the importance of cultural adaptation strategies in the global streaming industry.

2. Cultural Factors Shaping Motivations in Both Contexts

Culture plays a central role in shaping audience motivations for using digital streaming platforms. Although Indonesian and Chinese students are both motivated by entertainment, escapism, social interaction, and learning, the cultural orientations of each country produce distinctive consumption patterns. This finding is consistent with U&G's emphasis that media choices cannot be separated from social values, norms, and cultural environments (Katz et al., 1973).

In Indonesia, religiosity and communitarian values strengthened cognitive and social motivations. Respondents often emphasized watching content with moral, historical, or religious themes. As one participant noted: *"I enjoy films that have moral or religious values, because they make me feel closer to everyday life"*. This reflects Jandevi and Zareen's (2020) findings that Indonesian students abroad continue to prioritize religious and social values in their media interactions. Additionally, according to the findings of Sukmono et al. (2019), Indonesian audiences are open to multicultural themes, but their interpretation is influenced

by moral values and the proximity of the issue to social reality. Similarly, Sullivan (2020) emphasises that cognitive gratification is influenced by cultural values. Preferences for historical dramas and documentaries also reveal efforts to connect entertainment consumption with cultural identity and social learning.

Indonesia's relatively open media ecosystem, where global platforms like Netflix and Disney+ Hotstar operate, allows international content to circulate, though audiences filter it through local cultural values (Ibrahim et al., 2024; Lotz & Eklund, 2023). Thus, cultural religiosity and communitarian values shape Indonesian audiences' motivation to seek entertainment that is not only enjoyable but also morally instructive and socially relevant.

In China, collectivism and a highly competitive academic environment strongly influenced motivations for entertainment and escapism. Chinese students gravitated toward comedy and romance genres as stress relievers. One respondent shared: *"I watch light romances on iQiyi because they help me forget the heavy pressures of studying"*. This echoes Heeks et al. (2024), who argue that academic pressure and social norms in China drive youth toward light entertainment as an emotional outlet. Collectivist values also encouraged community-based media practices, especially through features like danmu. As one respondent stated: *"I feel closer to others when watching together through live comments, even though we do not know each other"*. This finding aligns with Wu et al. (2024) with Samuel and Mitchell (2022) who describe how interactive technologies in Chinese platforms reinforce social gratifications consistent with collectivist norms. This pattern aligns with the global trend mapped by Sukmono (2025), where Asian countries still face infrastructure gaps, making film distribution often exclusive. In other words, whether in the context of film or streaming, culture and structure determine audience gratification patterns.

Notable differences also emerged in how audiences in each country interpreted social interaction through media. Indonesian students tended to discuss films within real-life communities—among peers or through cross-platform social media groups. In contrast, Chinese audiences engaged in platform-based interactions, where comment features created collective spaces for shared viewing experiences. This suggests that while social motivation exists in both contexts, its form is deeply shaped by cultural norms and technological affordances (Samuel & Mitchell, 2022).

Cultural orientation also shaped educational motivations. Indonesian students emphasized documentaries and history-related content as part of cultural and moral learning: *"I watch historical documentaries because they give me knowledge about our culture"*. Chinese students, by comparison, engaged in learning indirectly, using dramas as reflections of social realities, particularly family and urban dynamics. Thus, educational motivations in Indonesia were more normative and cognitive, while in China, they were more contextual and social (Lim, 2024; Sullivan, 2020).

These findings also illustrate how cultural values interact with global and domestic digital ecosystems. In Indonesia, the dominance of global platforms highlights a cosmopolitan orientation, albeit filtered through local norms. In China, state regulation reinforces the prominence of domestic platforms such as iQiyi and WeTV, which align with collectivist values and cultural sensitivities (Chalaby, 2024; Samuel & Mitchell, 2022). These differences demonstrate that digital consumption motivations are shaped not only by individual preferences but also by political regulation, technological ecosystems, and cultural norms.

By incorporating cultural interpretation into the U&G framework, this study shows that Indonesian students construct streaming as a blend of entertainment, morality, and social identity, while Chinese students view it as emotional regulation and collective connectedness. Although the gratifications appear similar, cultural orientation produces different motivational emphases. These findings align with global scholarship on streaming in the Asia-Pacific region, which highlights the importance of cultural adaptation in understanding digital media consumption (Grand View Research, 2024; Zhang et al., 2022).

3. Uses and Gratifications Theory Explaining Similarities and Differences in Digital Streaming Behavior

The U&G framework provides an analytical lens to understand how audiences actively select media to meet specific needs, ranging from entertainment and escapism to social interaction and learning (Katz et al., 1973). The results demonstrate that Indonesian and Chinese students both exhibit digital streaming behaviours consistent with the core propositions of U&G, but with distinctive nuances shaped by culture, media ecosystems, and social orientation.

Both groups prioritized entertainment as the dominant motivation, with streaming serving as relaxation and stress relief. An Indonesian respondent explained: “I watch dramas on Netflix after studying because it helps me calm my mind”. A Chinese respondent echoed this: “*Watching comedies on iQiyi helps me release academic pressure*”. These parallels confirm entertainment as an affective gratification within the U&G framework, where media functions as a tool of emotional regulation (Bastos et al., 2024a; Steiner & Xu, 2018).

Streaming was also widely used for escapism. One Indonesian participant shared: “*Sometimes I binge-watch Korean dramas all night as a way to escape my academic routine*”. A Chinese respondent expressed a similar sentiment: “*I watch light romances to forget the stress of exams.*” These findings reinforce literature on streaming as a psychological escape mechanism, especially among young people (Syafira & Dharmmesta, 2024).

Despite these similarities in entertainment and escapism, differences were pronounced in cognitive and social motivations. Indonesian students expressed a stronger orientation toward learning gratifications. As one respondent stated: “*I enjoy watching historical documentaries on Disney+ because they expand my knowledge.*” Chinese respondents were less likely to mention educational benefits, though some described family dramas as useful for reflecting on modern social life: “*Family dramas on WeTV make me think about everyday life in China*”. This pattern aligns with the research by Sukmono et al. (2019) which states that Indonesian audiences post-1998 are open to identity issues, while Chinese audiences tend to seek collective connection. This divergence is consistent with Sullivan (2020) and Jandevi & Zareen (2020), who highlight cultural variations in cognitive gratifications.

In terms of social interaction, Indonesian students preferred discussing films with real-life peers or across social media platforms. As one respondent said: “*After watching, I immediately discuss it with my friends via WhatsApp groups*”. Chinese students, however, emphasized platform-based connectivity through danmu features. One participant noted: “*Real-time comments on Bilibili make me feel like I’m watching together with many others*”. This demonstrates that while the social need is universal, its expression differs, shaped by collectivist norms in China and communitarian practices in Indonesia (Samuel & Mitchell, 2022; Wu et al., 2024).

The analysis confirms U&G's relevance in explaining both similarities and differences in cross-cultural streaming behaviour. The universal motivations—entertainment and escapism—cut across contexts, while cognitive and social gratifications are shaped by cultural variables: religiosity and communitarianism in Indonesia versus digital collectivism and academic pressures in China. By extending U&G beyond Western settings this study underscores the necessity of incorporating culture into digital media behaviour analysis.

From a practical perspective, these findings offer implications for streaming service providers. In Indonesia, strategies should emphasize educational content, moral themes, and cultural relevance, while in China, light entertainment such as comedy and romance, along with interactive features like danmu, are more likely to resonate with audiences. This supports recent scholarship emphasizing the need for localized and culturally adaptive strategies in global streaming platforms (Chalaby, 2024; Lotz & Eklund, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the motivations and behaviours of Indonesian and Chinese students in their use of digital streaming platforms, applying the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theoretical framework. The findings demonstrate that audiences in both contexts actively select streaming services to fulfil similar needs—entertainment, escapism, social interaction, and learning—yet their expressions of these motivations are shaped by cultural orientation, technological affordances, and socio-political ecosystems.

In Indonesia, entertainment motivations are closely linked to genres such as action and drama that carry moral or educational value, reflecting the influence of religiosity and communitarian values. Viewing often extends into peer discussions, underscoring the role of streaming as both an individual and communal experience. Cognitive motivations are also more pronounced, with students actively engaging with documentaries and historical content as a means of cultural learning and personal enrichment.

In China, comedy and romance dominate as preferred genres, serving primarily as mechanisms for stress relief within a highly competitive academic environment. Cultural collectivism, reinforced by digital affordances such as danmu features, shapes social interactions into platform-based communal practices. While learning motivations are less explicit, students still use family dramas and social narratives as tools for reflection on contemporary life.

These findings reaffirm the utility of the U&G framework while extending its application beyond Western contexts. Entertainment and escapism emerge as universal gratifications, whereas cognitive and social motivations vary significantly across cultures. Indonesian students frame streaming as a blend of enjoyment, morality, and knowledge, while Chinese students approach it as emotional regulation and collective connectedness. From a practical perspective, this research highlights the need for localized strategies in the global streaming industry. In Indonesia, content strategies should emphasize educational narratives, cultural resonance, and moral themes, while in China, lighter genres and interactive features are more effective in addressing audience needs. These insights contribute both theoretically and practically to scholarship on cross-cultural media consumption and provide actionable implications for streaming providers, media policymakers, and educators.

Ultimately, this study underscores that digital streaming platforms are not neutral technologies but culturally embedded systems that reflect and reproduce social values. By situating streaming consumption within the comparative contexts of Indonesia and China, the research offers a nuanced understanding of how culture, technology, and audience agency converge in shaping digital media practices in the Asia-Pacific region.

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