



CONSUMPTION HABITS AND STREAMING ATTENDANCE OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN ECUADOR: The Impact of Streaming Platforms

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ABSTRACT

Digital streaming services have transformed audiovisual consumption habits. This study examines their use and relationship with attention and perceived academic performance among Ecuadorian university students. Based on an extended Technology Acceptance Model, a questionnaire was administered to 460 students aged 18–25. Reliability indicators were satisfactory (Cronbach's α : 0.79–0.85; KMO > 0.80). Results showed that 55.87% used the Internet for more than six hours daily, while entertainment was the primary motivation (47.83%), compared with academic purposes (19.57%). Furthermore, 34.35% reported academic distractions associated with streaming, and 18.70% perceived a decline in academic performance. These findings suggest that intensive digital consumption may affect attention, self-regulation, and study time, highlighting the need for academic support strategies and critical digital literacy programs.

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1. Introduction

Over the last decade, digital streaming has completely revolutionized entertainment by shifting audiences away from rigid schedules toward flexible, on-demand media tailored to personal tastes. Platforms such as Netflix, Youtube, and Disney+ illustrate this shift, enabling users to access extensive content libraries across multiple devices and regions. This transition reflects a broader digitalization of the entertainment industry, where consumption is increasingly driven by online platforms and personalized user experiences (Bastos et al., 2024). Recent reports suggest that streaming platforms reached over 1.5 billion subscriptions worldwide in 2024, highlighting how deeply these services have become integrated into people's daily routines (Ribke and Wayne, 2025). Concurrently, the economic scale of the sector continues to expand, with projections estimating revenues to exceed \$200 billion by 2027 (Zhang and Hua, 2025). This expansion is not only linked to technological progress and a wider variety of content, but also to the growing use of algorithm-driven personalization, which tends to keep users engaged for longer and gradually shapes the way they choose and consume media (Chapman and Abraham, 2025; Dekker and Tverdina, 2025).

Beyond its economic and technological aspects, the use of streaming platforms is closely connected to how people think and behave. Recent studies suggest that the design of these platforms often takes advantage of cognitive tendencies, such as the desire for immediate rewards, to keep users watching for longer periods, a behavior commonly known as binge-watching (Alimoradi et al., 2022; Chang and Peng, 2022). This behavior is increasingly being understood as a type of behavioral addiction, where people feel driven to keep watching almost automatically, often finding it difficult to stop or regulate the amount of time they spend consuming content (Forte et al., 2021; Chang and Peng, 2022). These patterns are especially relevant when considering groups such as university students, who are constantly immersed in digital environments and often juggle multiple activities at the same time. In this context, the challenge of managing attention becomes even greater, as their ability to regulate their own behavior is still developing, making them more prone to excessive or problematic use of streaming platforms (Lades et al., 2022; Deng et al., 2024).

In Latin America, the growth of streaming platforms has been especially noticeable in recent years, closely linked to the broader expansion of digital technologies across the region (Lobato, 2020; Chaudhar et al., 2025). Recent evidence suggests that watching online video has become a routine activity for a large share of the population, with a significant proportion of internet users regularly engaging with streaming content (Mulla, 2022). This growth is closely tied to increased connectivity and mobile access. In countries like Ecuador, internet access has expanded significantly in recent years, reaching a large share of the population. This growth has been driven mainly by the widespread use of mobile devices, which have become the primary way people connect and access digital content (Alderete, 2019; Bastidas-Morocho, 2025). Despite this progress, access to digital technologies has not developed evenly across the country. Clear differences remain between urban centers and more remote areas, where connectivity is still more limited. In cities like Guayaquil and Quito, access tends to be more stable and widespread, while in rural regions, structural barriers continue to influence how people connect to and use digital services (Alderete, 2017; Galperin and Fernanda Vicens, 2017).

At the same time, consumption habits in Latin America reveal distinct characteristics. The widespread availability of free and informal streaming options has contributed to a strong preference for non-paid content, often linked to structural economic constraints and uneven access to subscription services (Kuss and Griffiths, 2017; Lobato, 2020). These patterns coexist with an increasingly digital lifestyle, especially among younger populations. University students represent a group highly exposed to these dynamics. Research in higher education shows that students are constantly surrounded by digital stimuli, which makes it common for them to divide their attention between multiple tasks (Casa-Coila et al., 2025). Being continuously connected often makes it harder to stay focused, increasing the likelihood of distractions and making it more difficult to maintain sustained attention on academic work (Deng, Zhou and Broadbent, 2024; Martin et al., 2025). Moreover, evidence suggests that intensive media consumption, including streaming, can negatively affect academic performance indicators such as GPA, especially when self-regulation is limited (Junco, 2015; Adelantado-Renau et al., 2019).

Despite the rapid expansion of streaming platforms globally, there is still a noticeable lack of research focusing on how these services are experienced in emerging contexts such as Ecuador.

Studies published in high-impact journals have paid limited attention to users' subjective perceptions, which are central to understanding sustained engagement with digital media (Wu and Xie, 2024; Dekker and Tverdina, 2025). This gap becomes even more relevant when considering that media consumption is shaped not only by technology but also by cultural factors (Heuman and Rampazzo Gambarato, 2023; Ro et al., 2025). In Latin American settings, and especially in Andean societies, collective values and social practices may influence how content is selected, shared, and interpreted (Duarte and Suarez, 2012). At the same time, there is very little empirical evidence on examining streaming consumption among Ecuadorian university students, a population highly exposed to digital environments (Pegalajar Palomino and Rodríguez Torres, 2023; Morales-Urrutia, Yépez-Villacis and Mantilla-Falcón, 2026). Recent research shows that binge-watching behaviors are strongly linked to self-regulation processes and goal interference, particularly among younger users (Lades et al., 2022). To address this gap, the present study adopts an extended Technology Acceptance Model to explore not only how students perceive and use streaming platforms, but also how their everyday context influences these behaviors. In doing so, it takes into account factors such as the growing availability of mobile connectivity and the lingering effects of post-pandemic stress, both of which may shape how students engage with streaming services in their daily routines (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

This study aims to analyze the media consumption habits of university students in Ecuador, with a particular focus on the use of social media and streaming platforms, aiming to understand how digitalization is reshaping audiovisual consumption practices among young populations. Specifically, this study seeks to (1) identify patterns of streaming use, (2) assess students' perceptions in terms of usefulness and entertainment value, and (3) examine the impact of these habits on attention and academic performance. Based on existing literature, two hypotheses are proposed: H1: higher levels of streaming consumption are negatively associated with sustained attention; and H2: positive user perceptions mediate the relationship between streaming use and GPA. To test these hypotheses, the study adopts a mixed-methods design with a sample of $N = 460$ university students, combining survey data with both statistical and qualitative analysis.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to better understand the complexity of streaming consumption among university students, combining quantitative data on usage patterns with insights into how these platforms are experienced in everyday life. This type of design is particularly useful in digital media research, where observing behavior alone is often not enough to explain why users engage with technologies in certain ways. Previous studies suggest that bringing together quantitative and qualitative evidence helps build a more complete picture of both what users do and how they interpret their experiences, especially in highly digitalized contexts (Venkatesh, Brown and Bala, 2013; John W. Creswell; Vicki L. Plano Clark, 2018). In this sense, the study draws on an extended Technology Acceptance Model, which highlights the importance of perceived usefulness, enjoyment, and contextual factors in shaping both the adoption and continued use of digital platforms (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Al-Adwan et al., 2023). The focus on undergraduate students aged 18 to 25 responds to the fact that this group tends to be highly engaged with digital media and represents a key population for understanding emerging consumption patterns. Finally, the use of a structured online questionnaire allows for the collection of consistent and comparable data across a relatively large sample, which is essential for identifying behavioral trends and testing theoretical relationships in this field (Hair et al., 2019) (Table 1)

Table 1 Structure of the questionnaire

Section	Topic	Variables measured	Example indicators
A	Sociodemographic data	Age, gender, university type, program	Age range, academic level
B	Access to technology	Device ownership, internet access	Smartphone use, connectivity
C	Digital media consumption	Time online, usage patterns	Daily hours, peak usage
D	Social media use	Platforms, frequency, purpose	Instagram, TikTok, usage time
E	Streaming consumption	Frequency, platforms, content type	Netflix, YouTube, series/movies
F	Perception and impact	Usefulness, preference, behavioral change	Habit change, influence on decisions

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the design of the data collection instrument administered to Ecuadorian university students (2026).

To strengthen the quality of the measurement instrument, the questionnaire first underwent a content validation process through expert review, where specialists in digital media and survey design assessed the clarity, relevance, and alignment of the items with the study objectives. Following this step, a pilot test was carried out with a group of university students to identify potential ambiguities and improve the wording and structure of the survey before its full deployment. Reliability was then examined using Cronbach's alpha, and all constructs showed values above the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, suggesting adequate internal consistency (Watkins, 2018; Hair et al., 2019). In addition, construct validity was examined through exploratory factor analysis (EFA), a multivariate statistical technique commonly used to identify the underlying structure of a set of observed variables and to determine how items group together into meaningful latent dimensions. In practice, EFA allows researchers to reduce many variables into a smaller set of factors, making it particularly useful in the development and validation of survey-based instruments. Recent studies highlight that EFA plays a key role in uncovering latent constructs when theoretical structures are not fully established, and it has been widely applied across fields such as social sciences, education, and management research to assess measurement validity (Howard, 2023; Liotta et al., 2023). By applying EFA in this study, it was possible to verify whether the items included in the questionnaire were consistently aligned with the expected dimensions of streaming behavior and user perceptions. To further assess the suitability of the data for factor analysis, both the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity were examined. When the KMO value exceed 0.80, it indicates a high level of sampling adequacy and suggests that the correlations among variables are sufficiently compact to produce reliable factors. In parallel, if Bartlett's test is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), it confirms that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix and that meaningful relationships exist among the items. These conditions are essential when applying exploratory factor analysis, as they ensure that the dataset contains enough shared variance to justify the extraction of latent constructs (Hair et al., 2019). In practical terms, meeting these thresholds strengthens confidence that the instrument is measuring coherent underlying dimensions rather than unrelated variables. Together, these results support the robustness of the measurement model and justify the use of factor analysis in this study. A summary of the reliability and validity indicators obtained is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Reliability and validity indicators

Construct	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha	KMO	Variance explained (%)
Streaming use intensity	4	0.81	0.82	62%
Perceived usefulness	3	0.85	0.84	65%
Entertainment value	3	0.83	0.80	63%
Academic impact	4	0.79	0.81	60%

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the statistical analysis of survey data collected from 460 Ecuadorian university students (2026).

Table 2 presents the reliability and validity results for the main constructs, where the number of items (e.g., 4 for streaming use intensity, 3 for perceived usefulness and entertainment value, and 4 for academic impact) corresponds to the survey questions designed to measure each concept. The Cronbach's alpha values, ranging from 0.79 to 0.85, indicate good internal consistency, meaning that the items within each construct are closely related and measure the same underlying dimension (Hair et al., 2019). Similarly, KMO values above 0.80 confirm that the data are suitable for factor analysis, as

they reflect sufficient shared variance among items. The variance explained, between 60% and 65%, suggests that each factor captures a substantial portion of the total variability, supporting the coherence and one-dimensionality of the constructs. Importantly, these indicators are derived from statistical procedures applied to the dataset, while the other parameters are calculated through correlation analysis and exploratory factor analysis, providing strong evidence of the robustness of the measurement instrument.

The survey was distributed through university communication channels and online platforms, allowing students to take part voluntarily and anonymously, with all responses treated confidentially and in accordance with standard ethical guidelines. The analysis began with descriptive statistics to provide an overall picture of students' media and streaming habits. To examine the proposed relationships, a set of inferential techniques was then applied. First, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to estimate the strength and direction of the association between streaming consumption and sustained attention (H1), where the coefficient r captures the linear relationship between two variables (e.g., $-1 \leq r \leq 1$). This was followed by multiple regression analysis to assess the predictive effect of streaming use on attention while controlling for other variables, typically expressed as $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \varepsilon$, where Y represents attention and X variables represent consumption patterns and controls (Wooldridge, 2003; Hair et al., 2019). To further explore the underlying mechanism proposed in H2, a mediation analysis was conducted using either PROCESS or a structural equation modeling (SEM) framework. In this context, SEM allows the simultaneous estimation of direct and indirect effects, where the total effect (c) of streaming use on academic performance (GPA) is decomposed into a direct effect (c') and an indirect effect ($a \times b$) through mediators such as perceived usefulness and entertainment value (Tabri and Elliott, 2012; Martynova, West and Liu, 2018; Hayes, 2023). This approach is particularly useful for testing theoretically grounded models, as it integrates measurement and structural relationships within a single framework. A summary of the hypotheses and the corresponding analytical techniques is provided in Table 3.

Table 3 Hypotheses and analytical techniques

Hypothesis	Description	Statistical technique
H1	Streaming consumption negatively correlates with sustained attention	Pearson correlation, regression
H2	Perceptions mediate the relationship between streaming use and GPA	Mediation analysis (PROCESS / SEM)

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the research hypotheses and methodological design of the study (2026).

Finally, qualitative insights derived from complementary responses were used to contextualize the quantitative findings, allowing for a deeper interpretation of student behavior within increasingly digitalized environments. This integrated methodological approach ensures a robust and context-sensitive analysis, aligned with current standards in high-impact research on digital media consumption. Building on this approach, it is necessary to clarify how the key variables are operationalized.

To operationalize the variables included in the study, the measurement strategy was structured to capture both the core constructs and the contextual conditions surrounding students' media use. Table 4 presents the main measurement model, detailing the four key constructs along with their corresponding items and the Likert-scale format used to assess them. Each construct is represented by a set of items designed to reflect different dimensions of students' interaction with streaming platforms, ensuring a consistent and structured approach to measurement. In parallel, Table 5 complements this structure by outlining the control and contextual variables, including demographic characteristics, access to technology, and general patterns of digital media use. These variables are incorporated to account for differences in students' environments that may influence their behaviors and perceptions. Together, both tables provide a comprehensive overview of how the study translates abstract concepts into measurable variables, supporting a coherent and robust analytical framework.

Table 4 Measurement constructs and survey items

Construct	Item code	Survey item	Scale
Streaming use intensity	SUI1	I use streaming platforms on a daily basis	Likert (1-5)
	SUI2	I spend several hours watching streaming content	Likert (1-5)
	SUI3	Streaming is one of my main forms of entertainment	Likert (1-5)
	SUI4	I often watch multiple episodes or videos in one session	Likert (1-5)
Perceived Usefulness	PUI1	Streaming platforms are useful for my daily life	Likert (1-5)
	PUI2	Streaming platforms help me access relevant or educational content	Likert (1-5)
	PUI3	Streaming services improve my access to information and knowledge	Likert (1-5)
Entertainment Value	EV1	I find streaming platforms enjoyable	Likert (1-5)
	EV2	Streaming content helps me relax	Likert (1-5)
	EV3	I use streaming mainly for entertainment purposes	Likert (1-5)
Academic Impact	AI1	Streaming distracts me from my academic tasks	Likert (1-5)
	AI2	I find it difficult to concentrate after using streaming platforms	Likert (1-5)
	AI3	Streaming affects the time I dedicate to studying	Likert (1-5)
	AI4	My academic performance has been negatively affected by streaming use	Likert (1-5)

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the research questionnaire design, informed by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and adapted to the context of streaming consumption among university students (2026).

Table 5 Control and contextual variables

Variable type	Variable	Measurement
Demographic	Age	Categorical (18-25 groups)
	Gender	Nominal
	City	Nominal
Academic	Field of study	Nominal
	Year of study	Ordinal
Technology access	Smartphone ownership	Yes/No
	Internet access	Yes/No
Digital behavior	Daily internet use	Ordinal (hours)
	Social media use	Ordinal (hours)
Streaming behavior	Platform used	Multiple choice
	Frequency of use	Ordinal

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the operationalization of variables included in the questionnaire administered to Ecuadorian university students (2026).

3. Results

The analysis of the data derived from the instrument applied to the sample of university students (N = 460) reveals significant patterns concerning digital convergence, multimedia media consumption, and its interference with everyday academic dynamics. In terms of age, the population is evenly concentrated across three ranges: 18 to 20 years (39.78%), 24 to 25 years (36.09%), and 21 to 23 years (24.13%).

Digital connectivity is consolidated as a structural constant in the lives of the respondents. 55.87% report daily Internet use of more than 6 hours, while 25.65% use it between 4 and 6 hours. When intersecting the intensity of overall Internet use with the specific time devoted to social media, a phenomenon of high-density consumption becomes evident (Table 6).

Table 6 Cross-tabulation: Total hours of daily Internet use versus hours spent on social media

Hours per day of internet use	Less than 1 hour	Between 1 and 3 hours	Between 3 and 5 hours	More than 5 hours	Total (N)
Less than 2 hours	11	7	1	0	19
Between 2 and 4 hours	6	44	14	2	66
Between 4 and 6 hours	8	52	51	7	118
More than 6 hours	5	63	81	108	257
Total	30	166	147	117	460

Note: The data show that the subgroup with the highest overall intensity of use (>6 hours) transfers dedication directly to social media, where 42.02% (108 of 257 students) spend more than 5 hours per day on these platforms, forming profiles of high hypermedia dependence.

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the descriptive analysis of survey data collected from 460 Ecuadorian university students (2026).

These findings suggest that digital connectivity is not merely an access condition among Ecuadorian university students, but a structural component of their daily routines. The fact that more than half of the sample reports use the Internet for more than six hours per day, and that a substantial subgroup also spends more than five hours daily on social media, reflects a pattern of high-density digital exposure. This result is consistent with previous studies indicating that university students are increasingly exposed to digital stimuli that may fragment attention and interfere with academic routines (Deng et al., 2024; Martin et al., 2025). It also supports the argument that social media use can become academically relevant when it shifts from instrumental or communicative use toward prolonged recreational consumption, as suggested by (Casa-Coila et al., 2025)

The digital ecosystem of university students is markedly centralized. When examining the platform used most frequently daily and comparing it with the user's declared main purpose, specific utilitarian dynamics are identified (Table 7). WhatsApp leads absolute daily-use frequency (n = 260), distributed across communication (n = 50), entertainment (n = 85), and study purposes (n = 68). TikTok, meanwhile, emerges as the second preferred axis, focused monolithically on entertainment (n = 91).

Table 7 Cross-tabulation: Most frequently used daily platform and main purpose of consumption

Most used platform	Communication	Entertainment	Study	Information/ News	Work	Total (n)
WhatsApp	50	85	68	41	16	260
TikTok	11	91	15	11	2	130
Instagram	4	20	1	0	1	26
YouTube	3	14	3	4	0	24
Facebook	2	7	3	2	0	14
X (Twitter)	2	3	0	1	0	6
Total	72	220	90	59	19	460

Note: Overall entertainment is the dominant motivational driver in platform use for 47.83% of the total population, far exceeding academic use (19.57%).

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the descriptive analysis of survey data collected from 460 Ecuadorian university students (2026).

The perceived impact of streaming services on school performance varies according to academic maturity or year of study. Table 8 examines the perception of school distraction caused by these multimedia technologies.

Table 8 Distribution of the perception of academic distraction due to streaming use by year of study

Year of study	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total (n)
1st year	20	35	79	48	16	198
2nd year	9	15	36	19	15	94
3rd year	4	14	20	14	5	57
4th year	5	6	8	9	1	29
5th year or above	4	16	31	16	15	82
Total	42	86	174	106	52	460

Note: A notable concentration is observed in the neutrality category (37.83%). However, the affirmative categories accumulate 34.35% of students who openly recognize that streaming undermines and distracts their attention from academic obligations, a critical indicator in the first years of study.

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the descriptive analysis of survey results collected from 460 Ecuadorian university students (2026).

The distribution of platform preferences also reveals an important distinction between communicative and entertainment-oriented digital practices. WhatsApp appears as the dominant platform because it fulfills multiple functions, including communication, academic coordination and entertainment. TikTok, in contrast, is strongly concentrated around entertainment, which suggests a more specialized role within students' digital ecosystems. This finding is relevant because recent

research has shown that TikTok can be used as an educational tool when integrated into structured learning strategies; however, in the present study, its predominant association with entertainment indicates that its pedagogical potential is not necessarily activated in everyday student use ((Moreno Fuentes and De La Blanca De La Paz, 2025)). This reinforces the idea that platform effects depend not only on the technology itself, but also on the purpose, context and intensity of use.

In further examining the direct deterioration of academic performance, the general data indicate that 12.83% "Agree" and 5.87% "Strongly agree" that their performance has decreased for this reason. A gender-disaggregated analysis (Table 9) reveals subtle asymmetries in behavioral self-criticism.

Table 9 Proportional cross-tabulation: Self-perceived negative impact on academic performance due to streaming use by gender (%)

Gender	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Total (%)
Men	24.84%	22.93%	32.48%	10.19%	9.55%	100.0%
Women	15.51%	28.38%	37.95%	14.19%	3.96%	100.0%

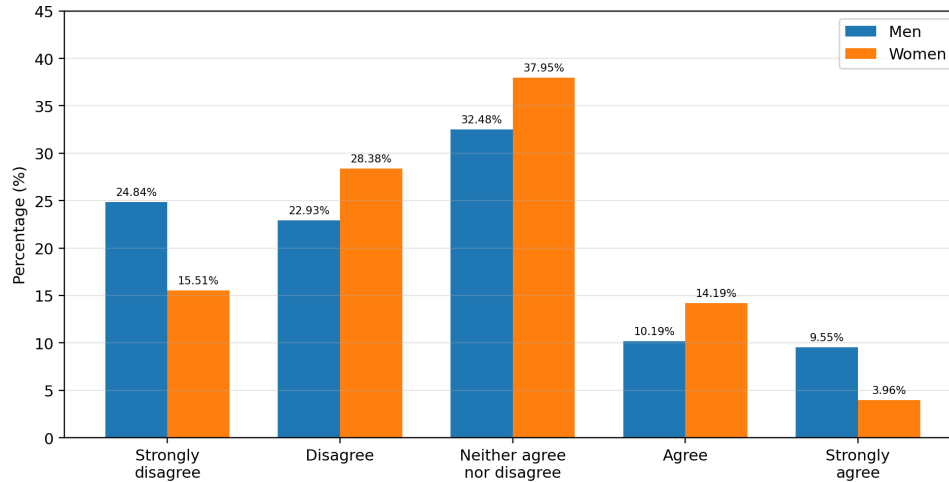
Note: While men show more polarized positions at the extremes (9.55% are located in the maximum absolute impact category), women show a higher percentage of moderate recognition ("Agree", 14.19%), placing the debate around how patterns of habituation to digital media differentially affect self-management of formative time.

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the descriptive analysis of survey data collected from 460 Ecuadorian university students (2026).

The quantitative data confirms the existence of a direct and measurable effect on university students' grades and school performance due to high hypermedia dependence (Figure 1). Overall, 12.83% of the sample report that they "Agree" and 5.87% "Strongly agree" that their academic performance has decreased due to the consumption of streaming services and digital platforms, which means that almost one fifth of students (18.70%; $n = 86$) experience an actual deterioration in their academic grades. This behavior is worsened by the fact that entertainment is the dominant motivational driver for 47.83% of the population ($n = 220$), displacing autonomous study activities through immediate-gratification stimuli and dynamics of severe procrastination.

The gender-disaggregated results offer a more nuanced interpretation of the academic impact of streaming use. While women report a higher percentage of moderate agreement with the statement that streaming has negatively affected their academic performance, men show a higher percentage in the strongest agreement category. This pattern suggests that the perceived academic impact of streaming may not operate uniformly across groups. However, these differences should be interpreted cautiously because the current results are descriptive and do not yet establish whether the observed variation is statistically significant. Previous studies have shown that intensive screen media use and social media engagement can be associated with academic outcomes such as GPA and classroom performance (Junco, 2015; Adelantado-Renau et al., 2019) In this sense, the present findings identify a meaningful subgroup of students whose streaming and digital platform habits may be interfering with academic performance, but further inferential analysis is required to determine the strength and significance of this relationship.

When analyzing this behavior by gender, critical behavioral asymmetries are evident in the perception of this effect. Women show a higher moderate recognition, with 14.19% declaring that they "Agree" with the decrease in their academic performance, compared with 10.19% among men. However, the male population registers the peak of maximum behavioral severity and polarization, concentrating 9.55% at the extreme of "Strongly agree." This behavior indicates that there is a critical niche of male users who are highly vulnerable to the breakdown of inhibitory mechanisms in the digital environment, consolidating an actual loss of control over formative time and a severe negative impact on their academic trajectories.

Figure 1. Self-perceived negative impact on academic performance due to streaming use

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the descriptive analysis of survey data collected from 460 Ecuadorian university students (2026).

The empirical findings of the present research corroborate the consolidation of a hyperconnected media ecosystem, characterized by the structural convergence between streaming platforms and digital social networks. This framework operates under the algorithmic logic of the attention economy, exerting vectorized pressure that directly collides with habituation processes and cognitive-academic performance in the university population.

The prevalence of a daily connectivity window exceeding six hours in more than half of the analyzed sample empirically validates the theses of "platform capitalism" (Srniczek, 2017). Under this model, devices and mobile interfaces transition from mere instrumental artifacts of communicative mediation to environments of everyday habitation and subjectivation.

The pronounced heuristic bias toward recreational consumption (47.83%), hegemonized by synchronous microvideo formats (TikTok) and instant conversational architectures (WhatsApp), reveals an ontological displacement of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT): these technologies have been subsumed, transitioning from catalysts of cognitive empowerment and epistemic scaffolding to vectors of digitized leisure and attentional alienation (Bautista, 2025; Moreno Fuentes and De La Blanca De La Paz, 2025).

The intergroup comparative analysis by academic cohorts reveals an inversely proportional correlation between progress along the curricular path and susceptibility to streaming interference. Students enrolled in initial cycles (first and second year) exhibit significantly greater vulnerability to the disruption of their autonomous learning agendas. This phenomenon directly connects with models of self-regulated learning and Zimmerman's (2002) constructs of executive control. It is proposed that novice students show a deficit in the metacognitive scaffolding and chronemic-management skills needed to inhibit stimuli of immediate hedonic gratification, which are systematically stimulated by the platforms' continuous-flow design (binge-watching) (Zimmerman, 2002). Likewise, the fact that one third of the overall sample infers an explicit detriment in their educational trajectories positions this phenomenon not as an isolated behavioral anomaly, but as a critical indicator of systemic vulnerability that directly calls upon student welfare policies and university tutoring.

The breakdown of the data from a gender perspective reveals sociobehavioral asymmetries that require complex analytical deconstruction. On the one hand, the female cohort's propensity to associate itself with a moderate negative impact and to manifest reflective positions of neutrality or agreement can be theorized through the constructs of differentiated social desirability and critical self-assessment. The literature suggests that female subjects internalize attentional monitoring processes more rigorously, which translates into lower declarative resistance to recognizing failures in impulse control in the face of screen interfaces.

On the other hand, the male vector, although it reports lower impact in the medium ranges, records the peak of maximum behavioral severity, concentrating 9.55% in the "Strongly agree" spectrum. This extreme-tail phenotypic behavior reveals the existence of a niche of users highly prone to dynamics of severe technological procrastination and mediated attentional dysfunction, characterized by the

breakdown of behavioral inhibition mechanisms in the face of gamified and automated stimuli from the digital environment.

The nature of the descriptive and correlational findings of this study opens a horizon of methodological and theoretical questions essential for the transdisciplinary understanding of contemporary media ecology. First, given the evident densification of hypermedia consumption reflected in the data (where 42.02% of students with high overall connectivity saturate their daily time with more than 5 specific hours of interaction on conversational platforms and microcontent), it becomes imperative to move from psychometric approaches based exclusively on self-perception toward longitudinal methodological designs in data analytics (learning analytics) combined with mobile methodologies (mobile-experience sampling). The persistence of social desirability biases or memory distortions in the manual quantitative report of screen hours limits the precision of inferences about procrastination. Future studies should implement algorithmic and real-time telemetry logging through authorized APIs on students' devices. This will allow researchers to correlate chrononutritional variability and microcycles of intermittent media exposure with actual academic performance, operationalized not as an abstract perception but through the Academic Performance Index (API) weighted across academic semesters.

Second, the marked motivational and operational divergence identified between platforms for instrumental-communicative use (WhatsApp) and those oriented toward pure entertainment (TikTok and streaming services) must be addressed through the lens of the neurobiology of attention and the economy of instant gratification. Given that 47.83% of the sample places entertainment at the core of its digital ecosystem and that distraction is markedly prevalent in university initiation cycles (1st and 2nd year), a clinical and pedagogical need arises to investigate the cognitive mechanisms underlying attentional fragmentation. Future research should be oriented toward empirically evaluating the phenomenon of media multitasking through quasi-experimental paradigms in usability laboratories. The objective will be to elucidate how photic stimulation and the dopaminergic feedback loops of microvideo recommendation algorithms erode students' executive functions, specifically working memory and inhibitory control, variables that directly mediate the capacity for scaffolding and self-regulation in complex learning.

Finally, gender asymmetries and the heterogeneity identified according to the level of curricular progression in the perception of academic impairment (where women tend to adopt reflective positions of neutrality or moderate agreement regarding the effect of streaming, while a critical niche of men polarizes maximum absolute impact) demand the formulation of predictive models based on structural equation modeling (SEM) and latent class analysis. It is a priority to examine the mediation of emerging psychopathological variables, such as selective disconnection syndrome, technological anxiety, the construct of behavioral addiction to screens and the internet, and FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), controlling for sociodemographic variables and macro variables such as the type of university governance (public vs. private) and the epistemic field of knowledge (exact sciences vs. social sciences). This multilevel modeling will provide the empirical basis needed for curriculum-design experts and student-welfare committees to prescribe institutional interventions in critical media literacy, grounded in neuroergonomics and aimed at mitigating cognitive vulnerability in contemporary higher education.

4. Conclusions and future research

This study provides empirical evidence on the consumption habits and streaming attendance of university students in Ecuador, highlighting the growing importance of digital platforms in the everyday lives of young adults. The findings show that streaming services and social media are no longer peripheral forms of entertainment, but central components of students' daily routines, communication practices, and leisure activities. In this sense, the study contributes to the understanding of how digitalization is reshaping audiovisual consumption patterns in higher education contexts, particularly in an emerging Latin American setting where empirical evidence remains limited.

One of the main conclusions of this research is that university students are highly connected and exposed to digital media for extended periods of time. More than half of the sample reported using the internet for more than six hours per day, and a considerable proportion of these students also spent more than five hours daily on social media. This result suggests the consolidation of a hyperconnected

student profile, in which academic, communicative, and entertainment activities coexist within the same digital ecosystem. Although connectivity can support learning, access to information, and academic coordination, excessive exposure may also increase the risk of distraction, procrastination, and difficulties in maintaining sustained attention.

The study also shows that entertainment is the dominant motivation behind platform use. WhatsApp appeared as the most frequently used platform, fulfilling multiple functions related to communication, study, and entertainment, whereas TikTok was mainly associated with recreational consumption. This distinction is important because it indicates that platform effects cannot be explained only by the technology itself, but also by the purpose, intensity, and context of use. In other words, the same digital platform may serve educational or distracting purposes depending on how students integrate it into their academic routines. This finding is especially relevant for universities seeking to design pedagogical strategies that use digital media productively without ignoring their potential to capture attention and displace autonomous study time.

Regarding academic impact, the results indicate that a meaningful group of students perceive streaming as a source of distraction. The fact that 34.35% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that streaming distracts them from academic obligations suggests that this phenomenon should be treated as an academic and institutional concern, not merely as an individual habit. Moreover, 18.70% of students reported a perceived decline in academic performance associated with streaming and digital platform use. Although this percentage does not represent the majority of the sample, it identifies a vulnerable subgroup whose media consumption practices may interfere with concentration, time management, and self-regulated learning.

The results also contribute to discussions on platform capitalism and the attention economy. Streaming services and social media platforms are designed to maximize engagement through recommendation systems, continuous content flows, and personalized interfaces. These mechanisms may encourage prolonged use and make it more difficult for students to interrupt consumption when they need to return to academic tasks. In this regard, the study suggests that universities should not approach digital media only as technological tools, but also as environments that shape behavior, attention, and learning conditions.

The practical implications of this research are relevant for higher education institutions. Universities should promote critical digital literacy programs that help students understand how platforms are designed to capture attention and influence behavior. Likewise, academic support services could include training in time management, self-regulated learning, and healthy digital habits. Rather than discouraging the use of digital media altogether, institutional strategies should guide students toward a more conscious, balanced, and purposeful use of streaming platforms and social media.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the data are based on self-reported measures, which may be affected by recall bias and social desirability bias, especially when students estimate screen time, streaming frequency, or academic impact. Second, the cross-sectional design limits the possibility of establishing causal relationships between streaming use, attention, and academic performance. The findings identify associations and perceived effects, but they do not demonstrate that streaming consumption directly causes lower academic achievement. Third, academic performance was measured through self-perception rather than official GPA records, which may reduce the precision of the academic impact construct. Fourth, the sample was limited to Ecuadorian university students aged 18 to 25, so the findings should not be generalized to all student populations or to other national contexts without caution. Finally, although the study adopts a mixed-methods design, future versions should further develop the qualitative component to better capture students' subjective experiences, motivations, and strategies for managing digital consumption.

Future research should incorporate inferential and longitudinal analyses to examine the strength and direction of the relationships identified in this study. Specifically, further studies could test whether streaming intensity significantly predicts academic distraction or perceived performance decline, and whether these relationships are mediated by entertainment value, perceived usefulness, or self-regulation. In addition, future research should include objective indicators such as GPA, screen-time records, or digital trace data to complement self-reported information. These approaches would allow for a more robust understanding of how streaming platforms influence academic behavior and

would provide stronger evidence for institutional interventions aimed at improving students' digital well-being and academic performance.

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