

## Does Gender Differences Exist in Online Newspaper Consumption among Pakistani Youth?

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### Abstract

*It is no doubt that the popularity of ICTs in developing countries has increased the use of internet-related social networking sites along with news information consumption, production, and news distribution. As such, there has been a huge shift in the trend of news consumption from conventional media to an online newspaper. It has also been noted that male and female youth are equally inclined to use internet for different reasons. Thus, in recent times scholars have started inspecting online newspaper consumption-related behavior, with an emphasis on young boys and girls in a way this group is one that can last longer. However, very few studies have paid attention to gender differences in motivating factors for online newspaper consumption in Pakistan. To address this gap, by using a cross-sectional design, a survey was conducted on university students from three public universities of Pakistan because university students are tech-savvy and mostly internet users. These three universities are representative of rural and urban population. Questionnaires were used to collect data which was analyzed using Partial Least Squares-Multi Group Analysis. Hypothesized results discovered that in terms of online newspaper consumption, there was no gender differences found in online newspaper consumption among Pakistani youth.*

**Keywords:** Online Newspaper Consumption, Motivating Factors, Youth, Gender Differences, Pakistan.

### Introduction

Gender is an important factor in news consumption both in print and online newspapers. According to scholars gender is a crucial element in news media consumption. News are reported and published on the basis of gender. Commonly it is perceived that women consume soft news whereas male prefer to consume hard news. Hence gender is one of important factor which determines news consumption. It is commonly perceived that man consume newspaper and other means of news than women. The few researchers who have documented the trend of consumption of online newspapers in Pakistan have indicated that the readership among men (56%) is three times more than that of women (13%) according to the Pakistan Advertisers Society (Adnansyed, 2011). In addition, Cherian & Jacob (2012), also reported that male (65%) outnumbered female (35%) consumers in news choice and preferences. Anjum & Michele (2014), also confirmed that males and females have different TV uses and

gratifications among Pakistanis living in Canada. For instance, males are more inclined to consume informational programs than females. Likewise, findings of a newspaper study on university students in Pakistan also claim that males and females have different preferences and motivations for newspaper consumption (Soomro et al., 2014). Similarly, an online newspaper exposure study of faculty members also found that males prefer to consume online newspapers compared to female faculty (B. Memon & Pahore, 2015).

Further, researchers in field of media, Pearson & Knobloch-Westerwick (2018) and Sparks et al. (2016), have affirmed that news consumers prefer online newspapers to conventional newspapers. The preference of online news by consumers is evident through the challenges faced by print newspapers in terms of readership, circulation and market access (B. Memon & Pahore, 2015; Nauman, 2017). The decline of traditional newspaper readership in Pakistan reflects the trend of people moving towards online newspaper consumption as free and accessible news sources continue to emerge on the Internet (Chyi & Lee, 2013; Thurman & Fletcher, 2019).

Thus, news consumption trends and habits are changing due to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Due to this print newspaper readers are dropping continuously and readers are shifting to online for news consumption. Hence, this has given a boost to online newspaper in the world. The growth rate of online newspapers has been noticed in the developing, and underdeveloped world as well. For instance, from virtually zero in 1993, there were 3112 online newspapers, 900 online magazines, 2108 radio sites and 1823 TV sites recorded from the developing countries (Nguyen, 2008). In addition, the World Association of Newspapers reported in 2001 that 5400 newspapers worldwide had an online/web edition, and this figure was continuously increasing. For the 1999-2000 period for instance, there was a remarkable numerical expansion from 1149 to 1207 in the US, 29 to 85 in Spain, 122 to 172 in Australia and 179 to 232 in Germany. By 2002, editor and publisher reported that traditional news organizations set up a total of 13,536 news websites (Nguyen, 2006). Meanwhile by the middle of 2000, virtually all mainstream newspapers and broadcasters in North America had an Internet site (Eid & Buchanan, 2005). According to the World Association of Newspapers (2006), the worldwide number of newspapers with websites increased by 20% in 2005.

Similar trends are seen in Asian countries such as China, Malaysia, Pakistan and India, where most of the newspaper organizations brought their publications online due to the decrease in print newspaper readership. In the case of Malaysia, Utusan Online was the first media house to have an electronic newspaper and the development attracted quite a good number of newspaper consumers (Ariffin & Jaafar, 2010). Furthermore, Ariffin & Jaafar (2010) asserted that the Utusan Online websites confirm around 20 million hits, with average approximately 4 to 5 millions pages viewed in a single month in 2008. Similarly, Pakistan experienced a decline in the readership of conventional newspapers while online readership increased significantly (Pahore et al., 2021; Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2012; Shokat, 2008). Following this trend, it is fair to conclude that the online news platforms are overcoming the traditional print newspapers as a primary source of relevant and timely information among a lot of people. Thus, as the online newspaper platforms increase in readership and relevance, it is therefore important to study the consumption of online newspapers. Online newspaper consumption is especially important with regards to the social and psychological factors that are responsible for explaining the consumption behavior of news consumers.

Likewise, in Pakistan most of the newspapers have shifted print newspaper to online newspapers for the purpose of retaining and attracting new consumers to maintain readers. Online newspapers are very convenient and easy to access. In this regard previous studies have documented that there are clear-cut differences between the consumption behavior of online newspaper and traditional newspapers. For example, it was confirmed that online newspaper users are active consumers hence locate news of their interest easily in the websites and send the news stories to peer groups and also share content with others (Chan-Olmsted et al., 2013). Additionally, studies have shown a significant level of discrepancies in the browsing and sharing behavior between online newspaper and print newspapers (Flavián & Gurrea, 2008; O'Brien et al., 2014). However, previous studies have not delved emphatically on the motivations of online newspaper consumption (Boczkowski et al., 2018; Boczkowski & Peer, 2011; Fletcher & Park, 2017; Kuiken et al., 2017; Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2010; Nguyen, 2008; Omar, B., Ismail & Kee, 2018; Pahore et al., 2018).

Indeed, Eggers et al. (2017), argued that online platforms offers news consumers opportunity to be more actively engaged with the contents of the newspaper as compared with the traditional newspaper. As such, as the popularity of online newspaper continues to increase, there is an opportunity for a paradigm shift in in the motivating factors to news consumption. However, there is still a limited study on the motivations of online newspaper (Boczkowski et al., 2018). Most especially, not many studies have been driven by the prepositions of Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) to study the motivations of online newspaper among young consumers (Smock et al., 2011).

Therefore, as print newspapers continue to depreciate; fewer studies are conducted on exposure to online newspapers in Pakistan (Madni et al., 2013; Ricchiardi, 2012; Yusuf et al., 2013). Additionally studying the consumption of online newspapers in Pakistan at this moment when the internet penetration in Pakistan is growing by the speed of light (Boczkowski et al., 2018; B. A. Memon, 2011).

This study adopts the Uses and Gratification (U&G) theory as propounded by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch in 1974. The U&G theory explains the uses and functions of the mass media to individuals, groups and the society as a whole. It probes the question of what do people do with media (Ruggiero, 2000) This is why the theory is commonly known to be a sub-division of media effect research, which is very effective in determining consumers' motivation for doing what they do with mass media (Ruggiero, 2000). Thus, U&G emphasizes what people do with media, instead of what media do to people (Rubin, 2008). Audiences' consumption of media is further theorized as motivated or driven by specific reasons and cognitive or affective needs, wants and interests (Levy & Windahl, 1985; Rubin, 2008). In this regard, U&G theory is considered apt in explaining consumers' motivations towards the contents and consumption of online newspapers. U&G theory is therefore employed in this study to discern why consumers are actively clicking on online newspapers.

The nature of the influence of consumers' motivation on online newspaper consumption is likely to vary according to the gender of news consumers. Gender is an important factor in determining newspaper consumption; therefore it has long been of interest in the studies of newspaper consumption, including traditional and online news media, newspaper reading behavior and mobile newspaper consumption (Chan, 2015; Wei, 2008). Previous studies found that gender is a well-established factor that exerts a significant influence on print and online newspaper consumption (Taipale, 2013). According to Taipale (2013), gender is an important consideration in understanding the

consumers' motivation and online newspaper consumption, because it is able to show the difference in newspaper consumption between male and female consumers on the basis of motivational factors.

Similarly, Saleeman et al. (2015), found that gender strongly influences news media usage. Likewise, Anjum & Michele's (2014), Pakistani study on media consumption suggests that gender is a significant factor in shaping news consumption patterns. Their findings also evinced that men watch current news and information programs, whereas women just look for entertainment. On the basis of the arguments and findings debated above, it is presumed that gender differences are reflected through news consumption from different media.

In addition, various previous studies have also noted that online newspaper consumption behaviors are different across genders of online consumers (Boczkowski et al., 2018; Fletcher & Park, 2017; Jung & Sundar, 2018; Wei & Lo, 2015). Therefore, in order to identify the gender differences in online newspaper consumption, this study examines the moderating role of gender on consumers' motivations and online newspaper consumption (Taipale, 2013).

## Methods

This study employs a cross-sectional survey design. The use of a survey research design using the self-administered questionnaire for data collection in this study is for the purpose of making a generalization from a small sample to a large population (Creswell, 2012). By using the proportionate stratified random sampling technique survey was carried out on three university students of three public universities namely: University of Karachi, University of Sindh, and Shah Abdul Latif University are the public universities in Sindh, Pakistan. The justification for focusing on university students as the population of this study is that they have internet access, which is estimated at about 80% for Pakistani universities (Khan, 2011). Moreover, Didi & LaRose (2006) suggested that students are a suitable population for newspaper studies. However, considering that the population of this study is quite big as compared to the discovered sample size, the Krejcie & Morgan (1970), approach was employed for determining a bigger sample size. Hence, by referring to the Krejcie and Morgan's sample table, a 381 sample size is appropriate for a population of 60,000 and above. Therefore, a sample size of 381 is considered apt for this study. Finally, in order to minimize the issue of low response rate and non-cooperative respondents, the sample size of 381 was increased by 40% as advised by Salkind, (1997). This thus extends the sample size for this study to 533 respondents. Hence, a sample size of 533 was considered appropriate for this study.

Considering the fact that, this study introduced gender as a moderating variable and in an attempt to maintain balanced proportionate representation of both subjects within the selected universities, gender proportionate representation was taken out. To do so, the shared percentage of each university male and female was drawn from the sampled populations. Thus, clear university wise we took 327 male and 206 female students from three universities as a representative sample. On the basis of their population sampled ratio is taken in this study. To answer the proposed research question, the data collection was collected from selected universities. For the data collection researchers have adapted questionnaire from past studies with strongly established validity and reliability from past research studies. In the first place, data were collected from the University of Sindh. In the second place, the data collected from

the University of Karachi. In the last place, the data collection took place in Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur. To see the gender differences in newspaper consumption among male and female, researchers have used SPSS, PLS-SEM and Multi Group Analysis (MGA) analysis techniques. For gender differences in news consumption MGA was used (Hair et al., 2014b).

## Results

### PLS-MGA to Test for Moderating Effect of Gender

This section presents the result of the PLS-MGA in analyzing the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between motivational factors on online newspaper consumption. Hence, Figure 1 for the male group and Figure 2 for the female group show results of the categorical moderator of gender, which is known as priori required that two separate models are estimated for the moderator relationships.

Results in Table 1 are based on the comparison of bootstrap confidence intervals as a more conventional approach to PLS multi group analysis (Hair et al., 2014a; Henseler, 2007; Rigdon et al., 2008). The subsamples--male and female--were first exposed to separate bootstrap analyses as can be seen in Figure 1 for males and Figure 2 for females, and then the bootstrap outcomes served as a basis for testing the potential group differences, the results of which can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Gender differences in News Consumption

Relationship	Path Coefficients- difference (Male Group 1- Female Group 2)	p-Value (Male Group 1- Female Group 2)	Findings
ECM → ONC	0.058	0.264	Not supported
EM → ONC	0.107	0.171	Not supported
IM → ONC	0.069	0.242	Not supported
PUM → ONC	0.017	0.563	Not supported
SUM → ONC	0.163	0.898	Not supported

Note: ECM= Escapism Motivation; EM= Entertainment Motivation; IM= Information Motivation; PUM= Personal Utility Motivation; SUM= Social Utility Motivation; and ONC= Online Newspaper Consumption

The PLS-MGA result in Table 1 shows that a respondent in this study has no prominent difference on the basis of gender. Male student and female students are equally using online newspapers for their motivated needs. These results show that youth have opportunities of and have good access to technology and internet at their campus and at home therefore results of the study reflect that both male and female have similar news motivations for online newspaper consumption. Hence, details of the hypothesis tested are given below. Study has proposed five hypotheses to know the gender differences between male and female students:

H<sub>1</sub>: Gender moderates the relationship between information motivation and online newspaper consumption.

H<sub>2</sub>: Gender moderates the relationship between entertainment motivation and online newspaper consumption.

H<sub>3</sub>: Gender moderates the relationship between social utility motivation and online newspaper consumption.

H4: Gender moderates the relationship between personal utility motivation and online newspaper consumption.

H5: Gender moderates the relationship between escapism motivation and online newspaper consumption.

Thus the first hypothesis was proposed H1: Gender moderates the relationship between entertainment motivation and online newspaper consumption ( $\beta = .161, p > 0.05$ ), hence the hypothesis is not accepted. Additionally, consumer gender moderates the relationship between entertainment motivation and online newspaper consumption, and results show that gender does not moderate the relationship between entertainment motivation and online newspaper consumption ( $\beta = .107, p > 0.05$ ). This indicates that there is only 10% difference between males and females on the ground of entertainment motivation for online newspaper consumption. Hence, H2 is not accepted.

The result also shows that social utility motivation and online newspaper consumption ( $\beta = .157, p > 0.05$ ). This result shows that males and females have 16% difference in social utility motivation for online newspapers, but statistically, H3 is not accepted. Also, the result reveals that gender moderates the relationship between personal utility motivation and online newspaper consumption ( $\beta = .005, p > 0.05$ ) and hence, there is no significant difference between males and females in terms of the relationship. Thus, H4 is not accepted. Finally, the result of this study demonstrates that gender moderates the relationship between escapism motivation and online newspaper consumption. Results show that ( $\beta = .05, p > 0.05$ ). This indicates that gender does not moderate the relationship between escapism motivation and online newspaper consumption. Hence, there is no difference between males and females on the basis of escapism motivation and online newspaper consumption. Thus, the H5 was not accepted.

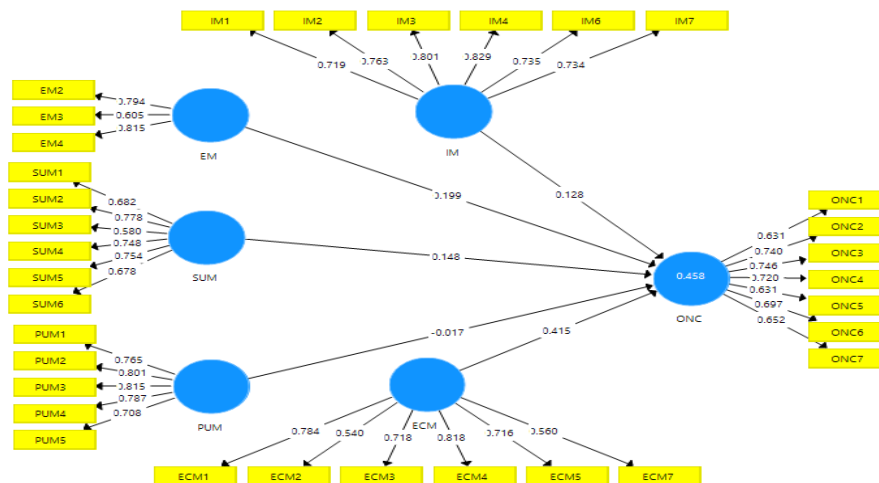


Figure 1. MGA Model for Male Respondents (source: Author's analysis)

This figure shows the results of mutli group analysis of male respondents in PLS-SEM which shows that model is explained 45% by the five variables namely information motivation, entertainment motivation, social utility motivation, personal utility motivation, and escapism motivation. According to the results, entertainment is most contributing variable which explains more than other variables in the model. Second important variable is escapism motivation. Results shows in male model that, personal utility motivation is not contribution factor in this model.

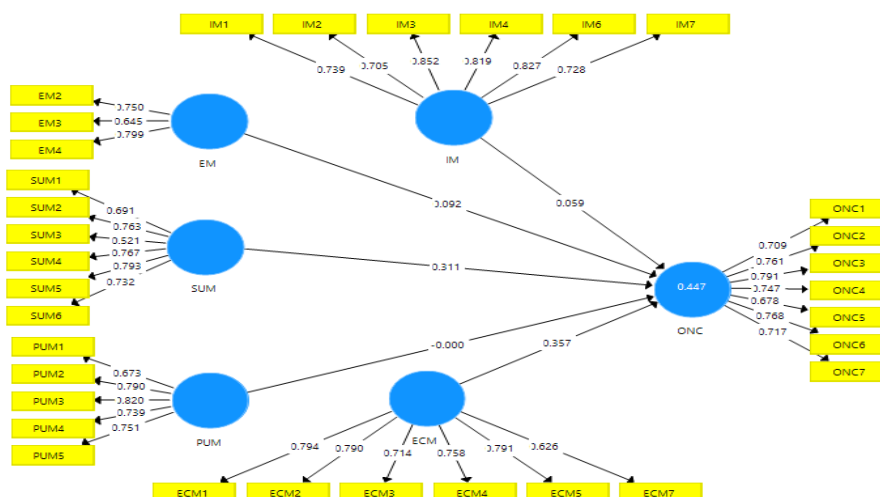


Figure 2. MGA Model for Female Respondents

This graph is the result of multi group analysis for female respondents which shows the model is explained 44% by the five independent variables namely information motivation, entertainment motivation, social utility motivation, personal utility motivation, and escapism motivation. Female model of MGA results are not much different than male MGA model but there is slightly difference in the values that explain the model. Here first contributing factor is entertainment motivation second is escapism and third is social utility motivation, and fourth is information motivation. Thus personal utility motivation has no relationship with online newspaper consumption.

### Discussion

With reference to the research question (RQ) which seek to find out if gender moderates the relationship between information motivation, entertainment motivation, social utility motivation, personal utility motivation, escapism motivation and online newspaper consumption, the objective of this study was to analyze the moderating effect of gender on the relationship of information motivation, entertainment motivation, social utility motivation, personal utility motivation and escapism motivation with online newspaper consumption. Hence, based on the review of literature, it was hypothesized that gender moderates the relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables.

On the basis of literature review, five hypotheses were set (H1: gender moderates the relationship between information motivation and online newspaper consumption, H2: gender moderates the relationship between entertainment motivation and online newspaper consumption, H3: gender moderates the relationship between social utility motivation and online newspaper consumption, H4: gender moderates the relationship between personal utility motivation and online newspaper consumption, H5: gender moderates the relationship between escapism motivation and online newspaper consumption) and tested by using PLS-MGA analysis. With reference to this research study, five developed hypotheses were tested by using PLS-MGA analysis. The results show that all the hypotheses were not supported.

Hence, this results show that males and females have more or less the same level of motivations for online newspaper consumption. This study finds some path coefficient difference in both male and female groups, but statistically, relationships are not significant but exogenous and endogenous variables are related. Moreover, some

studies in Pakistan also affirmed that the Pakistani learned society, especially university students and faculty, are more gender-neutral (Khan & Nisa, 2017). They have most likely the same approach and motivations to consume media. Hence, gender did not moderate the relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables in the hypothesized relationship (Khan & Nisa, 2017; Memon & Pahore, 2014).

Perhaps, this may be because of digital technology. The penetration of the Internet is still in its developing phase, as the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) Annual Report 2013 as well as The Express Tribune; English daily newspaper survey affirmed that there were 20 million Internet users in Pakistan by the year 2013. It is interesting to note that current figures from the PTA annual report 2016-2017 confirm 44 million Internet users in Pakistan. These figures indicate that the public is rushing to adopt digital technology, and irrespective of gender, all are using it.

However, it is assumed that online newspapers are also a new phenomenon in Pakistan; due to current Internet penetration, most newspapers are now online. Therefore, online newspapers are now available for consumers. As a result, online newspapers are great sources of current information and entertainment, and they help consumers to collect information that help them to maintain personal and social relations. More importantly, online newspapers help to escape from stress, daily routines and fatigue. It is a fact that students face multiple work stress and deadlines, therefore students look for sources that give them relief and relaxation. This may possibly be another reason gender did not moderate the hypothesized relationship.

However, online newspapers are related to the online experience. Moreover, research related to social media and the motivations for Facebook use find no difference in the use of male and female consumers, further finds that both equally use social media for information and social purposes (Baek, K., Holton, A., Harp, D., & Yaschur, 2011). Similarly, an Indian study on Internet usage and online shopping affirmed that males and females have similar online shopping behaviors (Chawla et al., 2015). This study tested gender as a moderating variable, but found that gender-neutral males and females have a likely interest in Internet usage and online shopping.

Furthermore, supporting this point, a study on university teachers' internet use and online newspaper consumption in Pakistan affirmed that males and females have similar ratios towards use and preference. Both males and females prefer to consume online newspapers daily, while some prefer to consume more than two online newspapers (Memon & Pahore, 2014). Likewise, Khan & Nisa (2017) conducted a quantitative study on information seeking behavior in the digital environment on research scholars (MPhil and PhD) in Sargoda University, Pakistan. The findings of the study suggested that males and females have common smartphone use behavior and the study did not find any difference among male and female researchers in terms of Internet use and information seeking behavior in the online environment. Both males and females equally preferred online sources for information and entertainment. Thus, the study ascertains that gender difference may not exist among university students in consuming online newspapers.

Furthermore, evidently, it is clear the male are more prone to read newspaper than women but in some countries women outnumber men in reading newspapers the size of gender difference varies between countries, yet in general it is more common for men than women to read newspapers (Elvestad & Blekesaune, 2008). Hence, countries like Pakistan have different social and political scenarios, therefore priorities for online news media may be different. In addition, Internet penetration and online newspapers are also



new phenomena. Therefore, online newspapers probably equally attract both males and females. Thus, newspaper reading is part of daily diet for many because being online is every one's priorities, and based on these equal opportunities, Pakistan appears to be a relatively gender-equal country when it comes to newspaper reading in the online context. In line with this point, Taipale (2013), affirmed that Finland is also a gender-equal country in terms of online and offline newspaper consumption. Hence, on the basis of this discussion, it is now clear why gender did not moderate the relationship between information motivation, entertainment motivation, social utility motivation, personal utility motivation, escapism motivation and online newspaper consumption. The results of this study are also of practical relevance to online newspapers and digital media organizations. They need to deploy the friendly news format, thus encouraging more news consumers to read online newspapers in Pakistan

### **Conclusion**

Despite some previous studies, this study addressed a theoretical gap by incorporating information motivation, information motivation, social utility motivation, personal utility motivation and escapism motivation as independent variables and gender as the moderating variable in the model. This is an important contribution to the body of knowledge in online newspaper studies. Further, gender differences in news consumption among Pakistani youth were not found significant. Hence, both young male and female use online newspapers more or less with same interest and motivations. In addition, the conceptual framework of this study has added to the domain of Uses and Gratification theory by probing its features from the perspective of online newspapers, where it was revealed that it is important to pay attention to variables in the Uses and Gratification theory in ensuring increased online newspaper consumption, especially with regards to Pakistani youth. Furthermore, the results of this study are also of practical relevance to online newspapers and digital media organizations. They need to deploy the friendly news format, thus encouraging more news consumers to read online newspapers in Pakistan. Hence, rather than focus on offline versions of these variables, this study extended the theory to online media, specifically in relation to online newspaper consumption. Practically, findings help policy makers specially editors to create and publish material of students interest. It has been recommended that future researcher to better understand the online newspaper consumption and users motivation on bases of gender on different age groups.

### **Conflict of Interest**

We verify that there is no conflict of interest with any financial, personal, or other relationships with other people or organization related to the material discussed in the manuscript.

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