

# Online News Media Consumption in Malaysia and Pakistan Through the lenses of Uses and Gratification Theory

Muhammad Ramzan Pahore\*

Sumera Memon<sup>†</sup>

Dr Muhammad Shahzad<sup>‡</sup>

## Abstract

*Media Ecosystem is shifting vehemently across the globe, and the internet is the primary changing agent. The prime objective of this study is to know the relevance of Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) assumption in online news media consumption. However, online news media and newspaper consumption is very recent phenomenon in Malaysia and Pakistan. This theory has been used in conventional media consumption in different parts of the world. This paper reviewed the past research studies related to online news consumption and highlighted status of online newspapers and news consumption in both Asian countries. Findings of the study affirmed that active audience is related to online news consumption. Hence, theoretically this study contributed to the literature of uses and gratification theory in the field of online news media consumption.*

**Keywords:** *Online news media consumption, uses and gratification theory, conventional media.*

## Introduction

The Internet is now considered a significant source of information compared to the traditional mass media (Mitchelstein, Siles & Boczkowski, 2015). The growth of the Internet has brought scores of changes in the business models and processes of news production, news channels and news consumption (Flavian & Gurrea, 2009). In

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\*Lecturer, Department of Media and Communication Studies, University of Sindh. Email: mramzan@usindh.edu.pk (Corresponding Author)

<sup>†</sup>PhD Student, School of Multimedia Technology and Communication, University of Utara Malaysia

<sup>‡</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Media Studies, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur. Email: mshahzadrana8@gmail.com

specifics, the Internet has arguably increased the frequency of news consumption (Chyi & Lewis, 2009; Fletcher & Park, 2017; Taipale, 2013). Hence, with the increased proliferation of the Internet, the consumption of news has also increased through several digital platforms and technologies that are embedded in Internet technology.

In view of this development, previous scholars (Chyi & Lee, 2013; Michelstein, Siles & Boczkowski, 2015) have asserted that the conventional news production houses are adopting the modern and digital platforms in presenting news to their consumers. In other words, newspapers are becoming news websites, which are otherwise known as online newspapers. Arguably, the adoption of these new technologies is evoking a new dimension to the argument of motivational factors and their connections with news consumption behaviours (Fortunati, Deuze, & De Luca, 2014; Memon & Pahore, 2014, 2015). Hence, as the consumption of online newspapers continues to grow; theorists such as Greer and Furguson (2016) have started showing concern in discerning the factors that motivate the consumption of online newspapers.

Additionally, scholars (e.g. Alivi, Ghazali, Tamam, & Osman, 2018; Boczkowski, 2005; Zulkafli, Omar, & Hashim, 2014) have indicated that the advent of online newspapers has affected the readership of traditional newspapers. Subsequently, majority of the print houses are losing their readership and have been focusing on building their online presence and expanding their online readership and acceptance. These efforts have been yielding a considerable level of results, which is evident with the continuous increase in the number of online newspapers. Furthermore, You, Lee, Lee, J. K. and Kang (2013) in Mapping Digital Media Report affirmed that more than 62% of the Chinese population consumes online news and significantly, increase in online newspaper consumption was witnessed. Likewise, Alivi, Ghazali, Tamam and Osman (2018), Arrifin and Jaffar (2009), Ghazali, Omar, Bolong and Mansor (2014)

and Omar, Ismail and Kee (2018) pointed out that most of the mainstream media houses in Malaysia have both print and online publications. In fact, these authors indicated that the online newspapers are fast increasing in relevance as compared to the print publications, which have remained stagnant in readership. Similarly, Pakistani news media are not laggards in adopting online platforms as either primary or supplementary means of news publication and distribution (Yusuf, Dragomir, Thompson, Watts, Chan, Nissen & Tambini, 2013)

As common with every technological innovation, understanding the behaviour of consumption and adoption has always been an important discourse. Hence, as the advent of the Internet is changing the production and distribution of news, it is expected that the consumption behaviour of newsreaders and consumers will change as well. In fact, previous researchers such as Lee (2013), Lee and Chyi (2014), Wei (2008) and Yoo (2011) have indicated that the determinants of print newspapers consumption are different from those of the online. These studies have specified that media consumers be motivated by various psychological, social, political and demographical factors.

Students vastly use digital media because online news consumption is important routine matter of their life (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000). For instance, studies have demonstrated that online newspapers appeal to youths more than adults (Lee & Chyi, 2014). One of the citable logics to explaining the difference between youth and adult levels of consumption is that youths are technology-savvy. Hence, youths are inclined to online newspapers because of their technological expertise. Furthermore, a number of evidences suggests that news consumption behaviour is different across generations and current studies have mainly aimed on younger audiences in Malaysia and Pakistan, In view of this, there is a need to expand the existing knowledge on the motivational factors towards online newspaper consumption.

As the Internet continues to be relevant in news production and distribution, studies continue to emerge in explaining the adoption, readership and consumption of online newspapers (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein & Matassi, 2018; Didi & LaRose, 2006; Pahore, Hamid, & Ismail, 2017, 2018). The review of the literature reveals that many studies are carried out on the consumption of news from various media, such as websites, blogs, Yahoo, Google and conventional sources (Lee & Chyi, 2014), mobile news consumption (Chan, 2015), online news browsing and sharing motivations (O'Brien, Freund, & Westman, 2014), attitudes towards online newspaper and print newspapers, online news consumption (Fletcher & Park, 2017; Omar, Ismail, & Kee, 2018).

Likewise, Pearson and Knobloch (2018) 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 (Nauman, 2017; Memon & Pahore, 2014; 2015; Thurman, 2017; Yusuf et al., 2013). 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, 2017). Therefore, as print newspapers continue to depreciate; fewer studies are conducted on exposure to online newspapers in Pakistan (Memon & Pahore, 2014, 2015; Ricchiardi, 2012; Yusuf et al., 2013). Whereas in Malaysia, most of the print organizations have shifted the print media to the digital media, therefore; all mainstream print newspapers have become digital/online newspapers like, The Straits Times, The Star, BH Barita Harian, Utasan Malaysia The Star Online, The Sun Daily and many others (Alivi, Ghazali, Tamam, & Osman, 2018; Arrifin & Jaffar, 2009). Additionally, studying the consumption of online newspapers in Malaysia and Pakistan at this moment, when the Internet penetration in both countries growing by the speed of light

(Boczkowski, Mitchelstein & Matassi, 2018; Rechardi, 2013; Zulkafli, Omar, & Hashim, 2014), is timely to explore the status of online news media consumption.

## **Literature Review**

### *Uses and Gratification Theory*

Uses and gratification theory is one of the most important theories in the field of communication and media. This theory has been used in media for decades but its assumptions are relevant in all times and its assumptions are frequently tested and confirmed in number of studies. The UGT 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 (Lee, 2013; Stafford, Stafford & Schkade, 2004). Thus, UGT emphasizes 'what people do with media, instead of what media do to people' (Rubin 2008, p. 168). By assessing consumers' motivational factors and conventional and online media use in the mediating contexts of other separable differences and 'structural determinants' (Lee, 2013), researchers (e.g. Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Rubin & Step, 2000) confirm that UGT research can then rationally forecast how motivations affect media consumption.

### *Active Audience Concept*

In this regard, the UGT is considered apt in explaining consumers' motivations towards the contents and consumption of online newspapers. The UGT is therefore employed in this study to determine why consumers are actively clicking on certain online newspapers while ignoring other newspapers.

Thus, the UGT is main theory in studying active consumers and their choices and preferences when consuming media on the basis of

their social and psychological factors (Jamal & Melkote, 2008; Meyrowitz, 2002). Additionally, it is argued that the UGT is suitable for studying the targeted content consumption in media and in contrast with the magic bullet theory's general assumption in various studies (Rubin, 2008). Active audience is a crucial assumption of the UGT. Internet consumers are so active currently that we hardly call to them as 'audiences'. Instead, researchers tagged such 'audiences' as consumers/users in keeping with the real spirit of the UGT (Sunders & Liperos, 2013). In the theoretical perspective of UGT, consumers' use of mass media is furthermore theorized as motivation for getting information, entertainment, and desire for escapism or by having other interests driven by specific reasons. Thus, the UGT rationalizes the prediction of motivational factors towards consumption of media contents (Lee, 2013; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000).

### *Uses and Gratification Assumptions*

More relatedly, McQuail (1987) listed the theoretical perspectives of the UGT such as media choices and uses, which based on purpose and motivations and audiences actively select and consume media to satisfy their desires. Audiences are active in selecting media; Individuals make motivated selections based on past know-how with the media; and Media use is only one direction among others to gratify the wants practiced in everyday life.

Following the premise of Katz et al. (1974), social and psychosocial factors such as information seeking, entertainment seeking, social utility, personal utility and escapism are the major motivational factors towards media usage.

Previous researchers (Diddi & LaRose, 2006; Lee, 2013; Ruggerio, 2000) on UGT have majorly focused on the concepts of 'why' and 'how' of media usage. Hence, the UGT has basically been a popular theory for studying media audiences and examines their reasons for the consumption of media contents. It is clear from previous studies

that they focused on the social and psychological independent variables to look at the influence or effects connected with media consumption, for example World Wide Web (Nam, 2014; Stafford & Stafford, 2001) and online newspaper consumption/online news consumption (Chyi & Lee, 2014; Flavian & Gorria, 2009; Lee, 2013; Yoo, 2011).

It is assumed on the basis of the past studies on the UGT reviewed in this paper that the needs for consuming media are developed by users on the basis of media attributes. Due to this, every media differs in uses and gratification (see Table 1). Consumers change and adopt different uses of media; therefore, they develop different motivations towards these media. This shows that the UGT is suitable to be used in the context of online news consumption. However, according to Ruggiero (2000), the UGT is a traditional media use theory that helps to understand users motivation for media consumption and it is used to various different medium from radio to television, cable TV, and now the Internet and media. In a similar vein, Stafford and Stafford (2001) have also stressed that the UGT assumptions are crucial in the study of new and emerging media. Emerging media refers to online newspapers and online media.

*Table 1 Reviewed studies and their eempirical findings*

<b>Research Study</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Media Needs</b>
Lin et al (2005)	Online and offline news	Entertainment, Informational Guidance, Interpersonal Communication, Diversion
Lee (1998)	Newspaper	News Gratification Sought and News Gratification Obtained
Vincent and Basil (1997)	Newspaper	Surveillance, Escape, Entertainment, Boredom
Pew (2012)	Internet as Information Source	Companionship, Social Relationship, Surveillance, Excitement, Relaxation, Escape

Papacharissi & Rubin (2000)	Internet	Entertainment, Pastime, Interpersonal Utility, Information Seeking, Convenience
Diddi & La Rose (2006)	Internet News	Entertainment, Escapism, Habit, Pastime, Surveillance, News Quizzes
Chung and Yoo (2008)	Online Newspapers	Socialization, Entertainment, and Information Seeking/Surveillance
Lee & So (2002)	Social Media via Mobile Broadband	Entertainment, Interactivity, Mobility, Passing Time, Substitutes, Companionship, Solitude, Popularity
Zolkepli Kamarulzaman (2011)	Social Media	Personal Integrative Needs, Social Integrative Needs, Tension Release Needs
Lee (2013)	News Consumption	Information motivations, Entertainment motivations, Social motivations, Opinion motivations
Lee and Chyi (2014)	News Consumption	News seeking
Omar, Ismail & Kee (2018)	Online Consumption of Public Affairs News	Information Motivation and Social Utility Motivation
Boczkowski, Mitchelstein & Matassi (2018)	Incidental News Consumption	Leisure, Sociality, Information

In summary, the UGT has been employed by a good number of previous researchers to explain news consumption, especially in terms of the motivational factors that influence the consumption of news. The UGT, being an audience-centric model, is appropriate for explaining the types of gratification people seek from consuming news. For example, previous UGT based studies have demonstrated that audiences consume news to satisfy and fulfill their needs to know, to explore current issues, to get entertained, to check and balance their governments and finally for relaxation. Another set of studies also added that news is consumed for the purpose of forming opinions and avoiding doubts. In other words, the type of

gratifications reflects audiences' motivational factors towards media usage and specifically news consumption.

### **Research Methodology**

In this study, researchers have adopted random sampling of published research articles in the field of media and communication studies in different parts of the world more preferably from Malaysia and Pakistan. In this connection research papers published in reputed journals on the area of mass media specially newspapers, magazines, social media, Internet, digital media and online newspaper, which were reviewed to understand uses and gratification theory in relation to online news media consumption. In addition, those research papers were taken which underpinned by UGT because these studies have used this theory and its popular assumption in different settings. Hence, in this study authors have focused the active audience assumption in the uses and gratification theory, which is very relevant to the current media studies.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Findings of this study have confirmed that the UGT has widely been used in print, electronic, social, digital media and online news media. Besides, active audience assumption of the theory is valid and relevant in the digital and online news consumption settings because audience is actively searching the news of their interest and taste from the websites. Whereas in conventional settings, audience passively consumes whatever content is provided by the owners of service providers (organizations).

Furthermore, in affirming the argument, many scholars have shown concerns that active audience is not the relevant concept to conventional media like, newspaper, magazine, TV and listening to radio. Because active audience concept is more relevant to the studies on online news media settings where consumer is actively using media on the basis of their news choice and news interest

(Lee, 2013; Pahore, Norsiah, Awan, 2018; Ruggerio, 2000). In this connection, Ruggerio (2000) stressed that active audience is one of the important aspect of uses and gratification theory that is relevant in the age of internet and communication technologies. In addition, scholars are of opinion that in online news media settings consumers are not just audiences but we call them 'users' who are actively choosing and using media content on the basis of their news choice and news interest. Audiences only focus and use those media channels, newspapers and digital media, which provide them required types of news. For future research, this active audience concept may be empirically tested in the online media consumption studies.

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