

*Arabs motives for using new media: a uses and gratifications perspective*

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Abstract

In western countries, where citizens have access to many avenues for expressing themselves, new media may not be used for this purpose. In the Arab World, however, citizens may use new media mainly for expressing oneself; because there are very few permitted forms of expression and new media maybe the only form permitted. That said, previous work has focused on countries where citizens are able to express themselves using many methods. There is a need to understand Arabs motives for using new media. The study reported herein seeks to address this need for research. The study employed two stages of investigation: the first stage used a descriptive online questionnaire to report users' perceptions relating to their motives for using Al Arabiya site, which is one of the highly ranked sites in the Arab World. The second stage also used an online questionnaire to explore users' motives for using Al Arabiya site; but this survey was quantitative and was driven by the Uses and Gratifications theory. To measure users' motives in this survey, Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) internet motives scale was used with modification. The modification involved incorporating some of the results from the descriptive stage into the Papacharissi and Rubin scale. A principal component analysis was used to extract interpretable factors. An eigenvalue of 1.0 or greater was used to retain factors. Results from the second stage indicate that Interpersonal Utility, which accounted for 28% of the variance, was the most salient motive for using Al Arabiya site. Interestingly, the Interpersonal Utility factor included several statements relating to 'expression' including 'to express my opinion freely', 'to participate in discussions', and 'to express my opinion about the issues that matter to me'.  
Papacharissi, Z., & Rubin, A. M. (2000). Predictors of internet use. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 44, 175–196,

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## Introduction

In the west, where citizens have access to a large number of trusted sources for news and information, new media may only be one of these sources. In the Arab World, however, where traditional media sources such as, radio, TV, press, etc, are controlled, to a great extent, by governments, citizens may find new media a trusted source for news and information. Similarly, where citizens in western countries have access to many avenues for expressing themselves, new media in their case may not be that crucial for expressing oneself. In the Arab World, however, citizens may use new media, especially for expressing oneself; particularly that there are very few permitted forms of expression and new media maybe the only form permitted.

Previous work has focused on western countries, where citizens are able to access the internet to obtain news and information or express themselves without having to worry about content manipulation, heavy censorship or reprisal (see for example, Johannessen, 2010; Sæbø, Rose & Nyvang, 2009; De Zúñiga, Jung & Valenzuela, 2012; Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009; and Freelon, 2010). Although there is a growing body of literature on the use of the internet by non-western societies (see, for example, El-Said & Harrigan, 2009; Chu, 2009; Chu & Choi 2011; Sheedy, 2011; Harlow & Harp 2012), there has been little literature on societies, such as the Arab societies, where there are serious limitations on free speech and heavy censorship of traditional media. In light of this paucity of research, there is a need to understand Arabs motives for using new media. The study reported herein seeks to address this need for research.

In addition to the limitations on freedom of expression in the Arab world and the heavy censorship of the internet, the Arab world is also significant for four main reasons (Al-Hussan, 2011, p. 10):

First, the Arab world has a distinguished strategic location at the centre of the world which links the three continents of the Ancient world, Asia, Africa and Europe, and it is surrounded by important waters, straits and canals. Secondly, the Arab world has a large market size with a population of 359 million people. Thirdly, the region has a crucial strategic importance due to its mineral resources and reserves of oil of around 65% of the world's known oil reserves... Fourthly, in recent years the region has been experiencing a high economic growth rate.

All these factors make the Arab world interesting to study and deserving of our attention.

The study employed a quantitative survey to understand users' motives for using Al the site, which is one of the highly ranked sites in the Arab World. The survey, which employed a web-based questionnaire, was informed by the results of a previous descriptive survey conducted by Al-Saggaf (2008) and was driven by the uses and gratifications theory. To understand users' motives in this survey, Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) internet motives scale was used with modification. The modification involved incorporating some of the results from the previous afore mentioned descriptive survey into the Papacharissi and Rubin scale and also modifying the wording of the Papacharissi and Rubin motive statements. A principal component analysis with varimax rotation was used to extract interpretable factors. Three factors were extracted in the final analysis all of which had an eigenvalue greater than 2.0. the statistical analysis below provides more details about how the factors were extracted.

This article begins with a short overview of the uses and gratification theory followed by a short discussion of previous work relevant to this study. This is then followed by a brief overview of the results of the previous qualitative survey to allow the reader the opportunity to see how the results of this survey influenced the scale used in the current quantitative survey. Next the method including the site studied, the survey procedures, the sample, the motives scale used and the statistical analysis performed are presented followed by the results. The article concludes by reflecting on the role of new media sites in facilitating freedom of expression in countries where freedom of expression is limited.

### **Previous work**

To understand the motives of Arab users for using new media, the uses and gratifications theory was used. The next section will provide a brief overview of this theory and will discuss some of the studies that used this theory. The next section will be followed by another section whose purpose is to provide a summary of the results of a previous study, by Al-Saggaf (2008), that used a descriptive survey to understand the motives of Arab users for using new media. The reason for discussing this study is because some of the results of the survey have been incorporated into the motive scale used in the current study.

### ***The uses and gratifications theory***

The uses and gratifications theory is the most frequently applied theory in media research (Muhtaseb & Frey, 2008). A recent study found that the uses and gratifications theory accounted for 17.24% of the theories applied in internet and online media research (Lee, Kim, & Rosen, 2009). Other theories widely applied also include diffusion/adoption theory (11.72 %), social identity theory (11.03 %) and social presence theory (10.34 %) (Lee, Kim, & Rosen, 2009). One of the key features of the uses and gratifications theory is that it repudiated earlier assumptions about media users that they are merely a passive audience (Johnson & Kaye, 2003). Another key feature of this theory is that it focuses on the active choices that people make to fulfill their media needs (Muhtaseb & Frey, 2008). This theory postulates that users actively seek out media messages to satisfy a particular need and that they are aware of their reasons for using that particular media (Johnson & Kaye, 2003).

These features encouraged researchers to employ the theory to study people's motivations for using online media (Muhtaseb & Frey, 2008). Johnson & Kaye (2003) used the uses and gratifications theory to understand the politically interested internet users' motives for using the web for political purposes. Their analysis revealed four factors: guidance, entertainment/ social utility, convenience, and information seeking with guidance accounting for 27.2% of the total variability. Similarly, Kaye & Johnson (2004) used the uses and gratifications theory to understand the motivations for using the internet (web, bulletin boards/electronic mailing lists, chat forums) for political information. Similar to their 2003 study, their 2004 study's analysis revealed four factors: guidance, entertainment/ social utility, convenience, and information seeking. With guidance again accounting for 27.2% of the total variability, the researchers concluded that politically interested internet users are drawn to online sites primarily to seek political guidance. The uses and gratifications theory has also been used to understand the motives for using the internet in other societies. Yang (2007) used this theory to understand

users' motives for using the internet in Taiwan. Yang extracted five factors that accounted for 60.426% of the total variance within the data: entertainment, habit, social, information and escapism.

The uses and gratifications theory has also been used to understand the motives for using other internet technologies. Flanagin (2005) used this theory to examine the prevalent motivations for using instant messaging among college students. He derived four factors explaining almost 67% of the overall variance: social entertainment, task accomplishment, social attention and 'meet new people'. The most significant factor in his study was social entertainment which explained 54% of the variance. Lin (2002) used the uses and gratifications theory to understand the impact of the gratifications of online use on online media services access. Her analysis yielded three final factors: escape/ interaction, informational learning, and entertainment with the escape factor being the most significant. Similarly, Chung & Yoo (2008) looked at the motivations for using online newspapers. The authors extracted three final factors that accounted for 56.2% of the total variance. The three factors that were used to explain the motives for using online newspapers were socializing, which was the most significant factor accounting for 27%, entertainment and information seeking/surveillance.

### ***The results of the previous qualitative survey***

Al-Saggaf (2008) used a descriptive survey to report users' perceptions relating to their motives for using Al Arabiya site. Ninety seven (97) participants completed the online questionnaire which relied on open-ended questions to allow a complete expression of a view. (For the demographic characteristics of the participants see Al-Saggaf (2008)). The respondents provided several reasons for reading articles on Al Arabiya site with 49.5% of the respondents saying that they read the articles on Al Arabiya site because the site was a good news site and 14.4% of the respondents indicated that they followed what was written on the site because they were suspicious of Al Arabiya's direction and wanted to monitor its activities. In terms of the benefits that the respondents gained from visiting Al Arabiya site, 9.3% said the benefit was knowing the opinions of the Arabs and their ways of thinking, while 7.2% said their main benefit from participating in the site was their ability to express their opinions. It should be noted that 50.5% did not answer the question relating the benefits from the site and 6.5% said there was no benefit from their interaction in the site.

Ninety four percent (94%) revealed that they read the reader's comments which appeared at the end of every article published on Al Arabiya site and gave a number of reasons for this but, according to them, the main reason was to know the opinions of the Arabs and their ways of thinking. However, only 43.3% indicated that they sometimes commented on Al Arabiya articles or on the comments made by other readers. The main reasons those who commented on the articles published on the site or on the comments made by other readers did so was because they wanted to express their opinions or respond to provocative comments or provide supplementary information or correct wrong information (from their perspective) or complete the picture about an issue. On the other hand, the main reason those who did not comment on Al Arabiya articles or on the comments made by other readers didn't do so was because Al Arabiya site did not publish their comments. Those Al Arabiya did not publish their comments felt unhappy about

this, while those respondents whose comments always got published on Al Arabiya site spoke positively about their ability to express their opinions.

## **Method**

### ***Study site***

The media site selected for study is Al Arabiya site, which is one of the popular media sites in the Arab world (Al-Saggaf, 2006). According to Alexa.com the site is ranked 36 in Saudi Arabia. The site publishes articles on politics, business, sports, and variety and updates its contents by the minute (Al-Saggaf, 2006). One of the popular features of the site is the commentary service, which allows users to comment on the articles published and also on the comments made by other readers (Al-Saggaf, 2006). The service is located at the end of each published article. Users can access the comments and post their own replies after they scroll down through all the replies to a particular published article (Al-Saggaf, 2006). Another feature of Al Arabiya site is its concentration on fast and catchy news. This has always delivered entertaining journalism (Al Arabiya, 2008). Al Arabiya site is the online presence for the popular TV news station 'Al Arbiya', which is managed and owned by Saudis (Feuilherade, 2003). While there is no doubt the channel favours reporting on issues of interest to Saudis, the channel in a very short time earned a reputation for being effective in offering instant coverage of the news as it breaks and making use of latest internet technology in the reporting of news (Al-Saggaf, 2006).

### ***Survey procedure***

The population in this survey is Arab speaking citizens who lived at the time of the study within the Arab world or who lived in diaspora and who were Al Arabiya site users. The Arab speaking countries include Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Sudan, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

The survey questionnaire was administered online, which means participants filled the questionnaire and returned it over the internet. The survey was conducted online because of the issues of convenience, cost, time and accessibility (Wright, 2005). The questionnaire was divided into two parts: the demographic section which sought information on each participant's age, sex, education and so on and the survey questions (the motive statements). The questionnaire was offered in Arabic, the mother tongue language of Arabs, in case the respondents did not speak English fluently. At the end of the survey period, all responses received were translated back into English.

To invite participants to take part in the survey, the researcher, on the 5th of November 2011, posted a brief comment (in Arabic) at the end of each article that was published on Al Arabiya site that day. The comment contained, in addition to some information about the purpose of the study, the web link to the survey.

### ***Sample***

A total of 60 participants completed the questionnaire which was posted on Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com). The reason for the low response rate is because Al Arabiya site does not permit the posting of comments to the published Al Arabiya site articles that are not related in nature to the articles. Users' comments on articles or on the comments made by other readers do not appear on the site the moment they are sent; they are first examined by the site's staff and then released if found appropriate (Al Arabiya, 2008). In the case of the researcher's comments at the end of the published articles, only a few of them were released by the site staff by mistake; hence the low response rate. The reason they were released by mistake is because the site receives so many comments that staff finds it difficult, within the timeframe they have, to read and approve all the comments sent (Al Arabiya, 2008).

Out of the 60 respondents who participated in the study 94.7% were males, and 5.3% were females. By age, 46.6% of the respondents indicated that their age fell between 25 and 34 years; 20.7% indicated that their age fell between 35 and 44 years; and 17.2% said their age fell between 20 and 24 years. These findings are consistent with the findings of the previous study (Al-Saggaf, 2008) and the general characteristics of the internet users in the Arab world (Hofheinz, 2005). According to the survey results, the majority of the participants in the study possessed university qualifications, with 63.8% indicating that they had an undergraduate degree and 25.9% a post graduate degree. Again these findings are consistent with the findings of the previous study (Al-Saggaf, 2008). In response to the question regarding marital status, 45.6% of the respondents indicated that they were married, while 54.4% indicated that they were single.

### ***The motives scale***

To understand users' motives for using Al Arabiya site, Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) internet motives scale was used with modification. The modification involved incorporating some of the results from the previous descriptive survey (Al-Saggaf, 2008) into the Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) scale and also changing the wording of several of the Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) motive statements. Using concepts from the uses and gratifications theory Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) combined interpersonal, internet, and media motives to derive 27 motive statements that made up their scale (Muhtaseb & Frey, 2008). After dropping several statements from the Papacharissi and Rubin (2000), in line with Muhtaseb & Frey (2008), and including additional statements from Al-Saggaf (2008) study, respondents were presented with a total of 30 statements (14 statements originated from Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) and the remaining 16 transpired from Al-Saggaf (2008) study). Table 1 below shows the motive statements and the source from which the motive statements originated. The 30 statements were prefaced by the statement 'I use Al Arabiya site' and respondents were asked to indicate the applicability of the 30 statements to their situation using a 5-point Likert-type scale (5= Strongly Agree, 4= Agree, 3= Neutral, 2= Disagree, 1= Strongly Disagree).

#	Motive statement	Source
1	To find out what is happening in the Arab world	Al-Saggaf, (2008)
2	To express my opinion freely	Papacharissi and Rubin (2000)
3	To find out the opinions of the Arabs and their ways of thinking	Papacharissi and Rubin (2000)
4	To keep an eye on Al Arabiya's direction because I don't trust it	Al-Saggaf, (2008)
5	Because Al Arabiya is a good news website	Al-Saggaf, (2008)

6	To enjoy the company of others	Al-Saggaf, (2008)
7	To provide supplementary information	Papacharissi and Rubin (2000)
8	To feel good about my ability to express my opinion	Al-Saggaf, (2008)
9	To relax	Al-Saggaf, (2008)
10	To participate in discussions	Papacharissi and Rubin (2000)
11	To help me decide about important issues	Al-Saggaf, (2008)
12	So I can feel less lonely	Al-Saggaf, (2008)
13	To enjoy reading the readers' comments	Al-Saggaf, (2008)
14	To kill time when i am bored	Papacharissi and Rubin (2000)
15	When I have nothing better to do	Papacharissi and Rubin (2000)
16	To obtain information for free	Papacharissi and Rubin (2000)
17	To access information quickly	Al-Saggaf, (2008)
18	To give me something to talk about with others	Al-Saggaf, (2008)
19	Because it is exciting	Al-Saggaf, (2008)
20	To access information more easily	Papacharissi and Rubin (2000)
21	Because it is enjoyable	Papacharissi and Rubin (2000)
22	Because it is entertaining	Papacharissi and Rubin (2000)
23	To help others	Papacharissi and Rubin (2000)
24	To show others encouragement	Papacharissi and Rubin (2000)
25	To feel a sense of belonging	Papacharissi and Rubin (2000)
26	Because I enjoy answering questions	Papacharissi and Rubin (2000)
27	To find out who agrees with me	Al-Saggaf, (2008)
28	To express my opinion about the issues that matter to me	Al-Saggaf, (2008)
29	To respond to provocative comments	Al-Saggaf, (2008)
30	So I can forget about other things that occupy my mind	Al-Saggaf, (2008)

Table 1: The motive statements and the source

### ***Statistical analysis***

A principal component analysis with varimax rotation was used to extract interpretable factors. Since the interest in this study is on identifying a group of variables whose variance can be represented by a smaller group of factors, principal component analysis was found to be appropriate to use. The analysis was carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 20 and was repeated 19 times to satisfy the requirements of this analysis. Upon inspection of the results the following requirements were met:

1. The sample size was 59
2. The correlations matrix for the variables included many correlations greater than 0.30
3. All variables had a measure of sampling adequacy greater than 0.50 (as the Anti-image table Correlation revealed)
4. The variables with measures of sampling adequacy less than 0.50 were removed (as the Anti-image Correlation table revealed)
5. All the variables had a communality greater than 0.50
6. The variables that had a communality less than 0.50 were removed
7. The overall Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was .754
8. The overall measure of sampling adequacy for all the variables was greater than 0.50
9. The probability associated with the Bartlett Test of Sphericity was less than 0.001
10. The derived components explained more than 60% of the variance in each of the variables

11. There was no complex structure so as to extract clean variables that correlated highly within each factor
12. None of the components had only one variable in it

A scree plot initially produced four factors. However, given the fourth factor's eigenvalue was marginally greater than 1.0 (1.049) and earlier analyses revealed that three factors will provide optimum solution, three factors were extracted in the final analysis. The final analysis yielded a reduced scale of 16 items that loaded on these three factors. It is worth noting also that for each variable, missing values were replaced with the variable mean.

## Results

The three extracted motivations for using Al Arabiya site are: information seeking, interpersonal utility and pass time. Each factor had an eigenvalue greater than 2.0. (information seeking, 5.591; interpersonal utility, 2.953; pass time 2.092). The three factors accounted for 66.478% of the total variance in each of the variables. With the exception of two items that had their highest factor loadings as .557 and .686, all the other 14 motivation statements had factor loadings of more than .7, indicating that the variables are highly correlated within their factors. Table 2 below shows the factor analysis and the motivations for using Al Arabiya site.

**Rotated Component Matrix<sup>a</sup>**

	Component		
	Information seeking	Interpersonal utility	Pass time
To find out what is happening in the Arab world	.734	.195	-.148
To express my opinion freely	.557	.380	-.252
Because Al Arabiya is a good news website	.749	.140	-.288
To provide supplementary information	.156	.740	.104
To participate in discussions	.161	.783	.046
So I can feel less lonely	.160	.187	.686
To kill time when i am bored	-.184	.158	.829
When I have nothing better to do	-.192	-.104	.808
To access information quickly	.739	.275	-.227
Because it is exciting	.880	.068	.027
To acess information more easily	.812	.161	.139
Because it is enjoyable	.783	-.074	.403
To help others	.078	.817	.049
To show others encouragement	.148	.840	-.006
Because I enjoy answering questions	.106	.747	.307
To express my opinion about the issues that matter to me	.147	.780	-.134

Table 2: The factor analysis and the motivations for using Al Arabiya site

The first factor, information seeking, accounted for 26.312% of the variance after rotation. It consists of the following statements: to find out what is happening in the Arab world; to express my opinion freely; because Al Arabiya is a good news website; to access information quickly; because it is exciting; to access information more easily; and because it is enjoyable. This indicates users consider information seeking as a strong motivation for using Al Arabiya site.

This result accords with the results of the previous survey. Al-Saggaf's (2008) survey found that 49.5% of the respondents said that the reason they read the articles on Al Arabiya site is because the site is a good news site that provides up-to-date information on what is happening in the Arab world. That respondents use Al Arabiya site to obtain political news should not be surprising given obtaining news for Arabs is an important aspect of their daily routine (Hofheinz, 2005).

The second factor, interpersonal utility, accounted for 25.541% of the variance after rotation. The factor consists of the following statements: to provide supplementary information; to participate in discussions; to help others; to show others encouragement, because I enjoy answering questions; and to express my opinion about the issues that matter to me. The similarity of the total variance that this factor explains to the total variance the first factor explained suggests that interpersonal utility is also an important motivation for using Al Arabiya site. This finding is also consistent with Al-Saggaf's (2008) findings. In the previous qualitative survey, 16.5% of those who comment on the articles published on the site or on the comments made by other readers, said their reason for doing so was because they want to express their opinions and 11.3% of the respondents said their main reason was because they want to provide supplementary information or information that corrects what has been said or complete the picture about an issue. The finding is also in line with other findings in the literature. Chung & Yoo (2008) note that respondents look for more than just news when they visit an online news paper; some people use online newspapers as a place to interact with others and socialize.

The third factor, pass time, accounted for 14.625% of the variance after rotation. This factor included the following statements: to kill time when i am bored; when I have nothing better to do; and so I can feel less lonely. This finding does not parallel Al-Saggaf's (2008) findings. None of these motives was indicated by the respondents of the descriptive survey. It is not clear as to why this factor was not reported by the respondents of the previous survey. However, further research should provide clues as to this difference in the findings of the two studies exists. That said, the finding about the pass time factor is strongly supported in the literature (see, for example, Lin (2002) and Yang (2007)). Chung & Yoo (2008) also confirmed this finding. They noted that an online newspaper is also a place to enjoy pastime activities, relax and relieve boredom.

## **Conclusion**

The results from a web-based survey that aimed at understanding Arab users' motives for using new media indicate that information seeking, which accounted for 26.312% of the variance, was the most salient motive for using Al Arabiya site. The interpersonal utility, which came in second place and accounted for 25.541%, was another important motive for users to access Al Arabiya site. Both of these findings accord with the results of a previous survey conducted by the first author in 2007. The results of this study also parallel the results of other studies in the relevant literature. However, the third factor, pass time, which accounted for 14.625% of the variance, was not supported by the previous survey although it was consistent with previous research. It is not clear as to why this factor was not reported by the respondents of the previous survey. But further research should provide clues in regards to this difference in the findings of the two studies.

The findings of this study show that people used Al Arabiya site not only to find out what is happening in the Arab world but equally important to express their opinions freely, to participate in discussions and to provide supplementary information. This suggests that that in countries where traditional media sources are controlled, the internet is largely censored and freedom of expression is limited, new media can significantly reduce the effects of these limitations.

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