

Facebook to Metaverse: A Philosophical insight into Monetization, Practices and Preferences in Pakistan

Abstract: *Social Media Monetization has played a significant role in the economic domain. The dynamic world of digital media is transiting from augmented to virtual reality as can be seen in the case of the metaverse. Considering uses and gratification, the current study is aimed at exploring the practices and demographic perspectives of Pakistani social media consumers. For this purpose, a sample of 300 social media consumers was surveyed by using a purposive sampling technique. There is a positive correlation between the credibility of the SNS and trust in online resources with the usage of social media monetized content in Pakistani consumers. In addition to that, age is observed as a significant factor unlike the income of the users while utilizing social media monetized content. Being an emerging trend, monetization still requires room for building consumer trust. The study can be taken as a multi-disciplinary bridge among domains of marketing, consumer psychology, and social media.*

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Key Words: Social Media Monetization, Metaverse, Philosophical dimensions, Pakistani consumers, Practices, Preferences

Introduction

Social media is proving itself as a powerful platform for marketing by having direct access to the minds of millions of users. Recent strategies adopted by Social Networking Sites (SNS) have the feature of monetization, which provides access to the monetary exchange for various services or products that users want to buy (Masizan and Salubi, [2022](#); Ye & Chua, [2022](#); Maqsood and Ashfaq, [2022](#)). Being a third-world country, the concept of monetization has not

been that common in Pakistan. For example, in December 2016, the video search engine YouTube introduced monetization in Pakistan as a practising business strategy. The cult was adopted by third-world countries later than the first world (Mehrad and Tajer, [2016](#); Maqsood and Ashfaq, [2022](#)).

Social media has opened new venues in the information sector and philosophically, it has added many interesting dimensions in terms of social, communicative and technological

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affordance of users. Likewise, the inclusion of monetized content had given marketing a modern shape by introducing important patterns for media and money consumption, the advent of the metaverse also posed new challenges and opened interesting horizons of investigation for researchers. Currently, social media users in Pakistan are behaving differently as per their practices (for example, what content users click on, how often they shop online, and what they think about online shopping in the virtual atmosphere they live in) and perspectives (for example, age group and socioeconomic status) towards monetized contents of social media news adopted as metaverse (Rubin, 2009).

Geng and Chen (2022) studied the tipping phenomenon which is a relatively new style of monetizing content which is spreading fast. They came across the finding that the financial motivating forces of content monetization affect status-framed clients however a swarming basically on benefit-framed clients. Generally speaking, content adaptation is a two-sided deal that has both a brilliant and clouded side in terms of the content stockpile.

The study aimed at measuring the interplay between social media monetized content and the practices and perspectives of the present-day Facebook and Twitter users in Pakistan; for this study, the present-day social media users included those working in and/or attending a university in Lahore, Pakistan. This research study was conducted under the umbrella of the Uses and Gratification Theory, which asks what people do with media, not what media does to people. It assumes that media varies in its impact as per the usage; lesser exposure leads to lesser impact. However, the theory also assumes that people who use technology will select a specific medium based on their needs and gratification (Rubin, 2009).

Social media platforms are focused on user engagement that is related to their trust in the medium (Maqsood and Ashfaq, 2022). Monetization is often used to induce user content generation. Furthermore, monetization may be subject to the social status of content creators. Ye and Chua (2022) studies paid question-and-answer technique in accordance with expectancy theory in terms of content quantity and user

engagement. They concluded on a point that the paid Q&A is observed profitable to SNS platforms and it also upsurges the benefits to medium users.

The Gratification theory also helps to understand Facebook which is having the essence of both mass and interpersonal communication (Johnson & Yang, 2009). The uses and Gratifications theory helps us to understand the practices of SNS users in developing societies. For example, in Pakistan, citizens with limited resources choose to allocate their monies to purchase smartphones to get connected via Facebook. This satisfies their need to be connected and socialize with others. Hence there is a need to educate the masses about the technicalities of digital media (Mpoza, & Maqsood, 2021). When the audience, as active members, are quite selective in their media usage and they instead of having limited resources have the urge to use technology for fulfilling their socialization desire even if they have limited resources. The Uses and Gratification Theory sees the audiences as active members who are quite selective in their choice of media users.

The theory is also particularly suitable for studying Facebook, which connects past and personal relationships, and Twitter, which offers the potential for both mass and interpersonal communication (Johnson & Yang, 2009). The Uses and Gratifications theory helps us to understand the practices of SNS users in developing societies. The theory sees the audience as active members who are quite selective in their choice of media. For example, in Pakistan, citizens with limited resources choose to allocate their monies to purchase smartphones in order to access Facebook. This satisfies their need to be connected and socialize with others.

Given that in Pakistan the trend of SNS monetization is new, society has been slow to accept this form of consumerism. The reason behind this slow change is that Pakistan belongs to the group of developing nations that are in the process of adapting to the modernization trends but still have a long way to go. The lack of economic stability is another factor that adds to this picture. Social media has connected the world in a way that people now have access to news about world events and developments and that is why social media is becoming a need now. In

addition, being easy and cost-effective it has more liking by the users.

Statement of Problem

Social media has opened new venues in the information scenario and the inclusion of monetized content has given the concept of marketing a new shape by introducing new patterns in media and money consumption. In such a situation the present-day social media users in Pakistan are behaving differently as per their preferences (interactions, perceptions, and reflections) and perspectives (age group, socio, economic status) towards monetized content of social media.

Research Objectives

1. To study the preferences (perceptions, interactions, reflections) of social media consumers regarding the monetized contents of social networking sites in Pakistan.
2. To explore the level of acceptability of the element of monetization in Pakistani social media users.
3. To examine the interplay between consumers' demographic perspectives (age groups, social and economic status) with the monetized content on social media.

Research Questions

In order to conduct this research on social media monetization in the context of Pakistan two research questions were created.

- Q1:** How do social media consumers perceive, interact and reflect upon monetized content?
- Q2:** Does consumers' age group or socioeconomic status play any role in the utility of social media monetized content?

Literature Review

Social media allows the content of the user to be exchanged and shared while assisting in communication among users with the help of social networking sites like Facebook, Youtube, Friendster, blogs, internet forums, Google plus,

bookmarking sites and online communities (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012, p.8). Shukla (2008) studied the new economy based on social web properties that use virtual currency to capture users' imaginations. He added: "By creating a demand for premium content such as virtual gifts or upgraded features, savvy social publishers are finding that at least a portion of their users will gladly fork over real cash in order to pay for, say, a pretend peony on (Lil) Green Patch or to buy the latest toys for their virtual babies on Make A Baby. Even better, plenty are willing to wade into the world of online surveys and advertising offers in exchange for these 'must have' items in their games".

But at the same time, there exists a trust deficit regarding monetized usage due to the risk of identity problems and spam as illustrated by Clark's (2014) exploration of concerns facing Internet users, specifically Online SNS users. Cyber-attacks can lead to issues like identity theft, tailored website content delivery, geolocation threats, and overall privacy concerns. Clark also discussed how a user can be monetized through an attack vector such as spam. One of the commonly used methods of online monetizing spam is done via sending links to users promising free gift cards. Clark's study was the first empirical study to talk about survey scams and demonstrates how to determine which advertising networks are sponsoring spam. He persisted that the information freely provided on the Internet can adversely impact the organization and its users.

Another important factor that helps SNS users make buying decisions is peer pressure that exists. Social media consumption and following trends are also affected by one's peer group and ultimately play a role in monetized decision-making of SNS users. Mangold et al. (2009) viewed social networking sites' as a way of promoting consumer-to-consumer interaction along with brand-to-consumer communication under the influence of peer groups. By maintaining a positive relationship with consumers, fan pages give special deals and promotions to the users in order to market their products in a better manner. People like to look at product reviews of their peer groups before

they make their minds up to buy them (Dorado, [2011](#)).

In a 2012 study, Gros ([2012](#)) asserts that a consumer's selection of a product is comprised of multiple stages in the decision-making process. The influence is strong at the first stage but starts to weaken as consumers get closer to the last decision-making stage. Consumers' cultural backgrounds and nationalities are important factors in this way. Additional elements that may discourage consumers from purchasing items include negative product reviews.

An appealing aspect of buying behaviour is the peer reviews which are influential in consumers making the decision to ultimately make a purchase. Ivyengar et al. (2009) asserted that the low social status which is 4% of the population is not much likely to use it in the context of social media platforms, with a middle-status group which is 40% of the population moderately uses whereas, the people from high socioeconomic status with 12 % of the population are well connected and are actively using social media forms of monetization. The reason behind this is that the low-status group is under high pressure and less interactivity, middle status had a strong impact due to peer usage and those with high status had a negative impact on the friend purchase and pursue non-purchase activities.

In the context of Pakistan, research in this sector is limited. Bilal et al. ([2014](#)) stated that social media and social networking sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, Blogs and Twitter in the garments industry in the context of social media monetization and found that SNS help companies gain profits and compete in the marketplace in a better way. People generally look for popular brand names on social media and make decisions accordingly.

Theoretical Framework

The current study is based on the idea of social media monetization considering the context of Pakistani consumers. The Uses and Gratifications theory is relevant to the social media context as it

states that media usage is goal driven. Consumers actively select the medium of their choice to fulfil certain gratifications (Clavio & Kian, [2010](#)). It also asserts that there is a difference in information needs and consumption patterns of consumers from different age groups and socio-economic statuses. In a society like Pakistan, the trend of monetization is a new one to be known and accepted across audiences. This theory fits the best in a way that the use of social media in developing societies is always goal driven and according to the gratification of the audience (Ruggeiro 2000). The role of monetization can be studied via this theory because this considers the audience as active members and are quite selective in their choice of media usage. Despite the fact that early U&G studies were mainly descriptive, in quest of classifying the responses of audience members into meaningful categories (Katz & Lazarsfeld, [1955](#); Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948; Merton, 1949). Mehrad and Tajer ([2016](#)) extended the thought of the audience being active rather than passive as viewed previously.

Research Design

In the mass media field, quantitative research is done for the purpose of understanding the mindset of social media users. In this study survey method is used for audience analysis.

Findings and Interpretation

For my study, the data from 300 respondents was collected with the help of purposive sampling, out of which 45.7% were male and 54.3% were female. Respondents were from various age groups ranging from 17-26 years. As a representative sample, respondents came from many socioeconomic statuses, for example, higher and lower socioeconomic statuses. As this study is about the usage of social media for monetization, it needed the views of the users of social media platforms. In this sample, a wide majority of people were observed to be frequent consumers of social media.

Table 1. Demographics of the Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	137	45.7

	Female	163	54.3
Age	18-21	47	15.2
	22-25	49	15.8
	24-26	131	42.3
	27 and above	73	24.3
	Bachelors	177	59.0
Education	Masters	123	41.0
	10000-50000	46	15.3
Family Income	51000-100000	112	37.3
	Above 100000	142	47.3

As the study is about the usage of social media monetization so it needed the views from the users of such platforms. In this sample, a wide majority of people were observed to be good consumers of social media as one hundred and seventy-four (58.0%) agreed while eighty-five (28.5%) remained neutral.

A striking factor in my data was that, in some cases, people were inclined to use social media but were still confused regarding online monetary exchange. Users were afraid of spam and other online scams affecting their purchases and personal accounts. Even though social media is now used widely across the globe, in Pakistan where social media is still an emerging trend, the usage of social media is a significant area of investigation. The younger population seems more inclined than older individuals to be social media users. It was observed that young people from the region of Lahore have more trust in social media money consumption than older people, as the majority of the respondents agreed with this idea.

The likeliness is an important feature to use any platform such as social media networking sites. Likelihood can be a step towards the other elements leading to a purchase decision. Here in this study, the likelihood of social media consumption is also viewed where (13.0%) disagree, forty-six (15.3%) were neutral, and a majority of hundred and seventy-eight (59.3%) agreed to the statement.

Trust plays a key role in the process of creating inclination. Here, after observing the factor of likelihood trust was also checked. When asked about their trust in social media for money consumption (23.0%) disagree, seventy-eight (26.0%) were neutral, one hundred and thirty-two

(44.0%) agreed, in addition to this eighteen (6.0%) strongly agreed to the idea.

When asked about their faith in the sincerity of social media sources for money consumption out of three hundred respondents, eight people (2.7%) strongly disagree, sixty-seven (22.3%) disagree, sixty (20.0%) were neutral, one hundred and fifty-five (51.7%) strongly agreed whereas, ten (3.3%) strongly agreed to the idea.

It is seen in some cases that people create their inclination towards social media usage but still is confused regarding the monetary exchange. Here when asked whether they feel any insecurity about social media sources for money consumption (23.7%) disagree, (22.3%) were neutral, (51.3%) strongly agreed whereas, (2.0%) strongly agreed to the idea.

Due to the spam that exists in virtual space people think twice about buying anything online. In the light of frauds when respondents were judged whether they expect any fraud on social media sources for money consumption (26.3%) disagree, a majority of one hundred fifty-three (51.0%) were neutral, whereas fifty-three (17.7%) agreed to the idea.

Presently, while buying anything online, the buyer has a certain hope attached to the product or service that he/she is buying. When it was asked if they expect a good business on social media for money consumption out of three hundred respondents, no one strongly disagreed with this, forty-seven (15.7%) disagree, eighty-seven (29.0%) were neutral, whereas the majority of one hundred sixty-six (55.3%) agreed to this impression.

The difference among the level of happiness was also measured where it was analyzed that young people for the sake of socializing and other

users feel happier than old people regarding their social media money consumption as a response indicated that fifty-five (18.3%) were neutral, fifty-five (18.3%) strongly agreed whereas a majority of one hundred and fifty-seven (52.3%) agreed to the statement.

McQuail et al. (1972) looked at another interesting side of Uses and Gratification by relating it to human psychological needs. Their research indicated that the audience looks for media content to get out of their frustrations and boring routines and that they consider media as a solution. But the individual psychology is important for seeking information and accomplishment via media content. In the context of new media, it can be seen that one of the reasons behind using social media as a source of monetization is because of the trust which is being created by the excessive usage of the medium.

Research Hypothesis

Three hypotheses guided this research: (1) In Pakistan, consumers' inclination towards social media, perceived credibility of the SNS and trust in online resources are positively correlated with the usage of social media monetized content; (2) There is a significant relationship between the high rates of income of social media consumers and utilization of monetized content; and (3) In Pakistan, young consumers are more confident toward utilizing monetized social media content than senior citizens.

The empirical findings of this research showed that there was a positive correlation between Pakistani consumers' inclination towards social media, the credibility of the SNS, as well as the trust of online resources and the usage of social media, and monetized content. It was found that, in the case of inclination, the P value was > 0.01 which is highly significant.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation test for Usage and perceived credibility of the SNS.

Correlations		Usage of social media	Perceived Credibility
Usage of social media	Pearson Correlation	1	.094
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.013
	N	300	300
Perceived Credibility	Pearson Correlation	.094	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.013	
	N	300	300

Then, the relationship between usage and credibility provided the P value of 0.013 which indicates significance. Furthermore, the Pearson Correlation between usage and trust was found highly significant having a P value of 0.012. This

shows a systematic outlook of the variables in a way that it starts from creating inclination moving towards gaining credibility and finally ending up in trust of the online sources by the users consuming social media monetization.

Table 3. Pearson Correlation test for Inclination and Trust.

Correlations		Inclination towards social media	Trust
Inclination towards social media	Pearson Correlation	1	.146*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.012
	N	300	300
Trust	Pearson Correlation	.146*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.012	
	N	300	300

The most interesting finding of this research is whether high income plays any role in the monetization habit. Pakistan is a developing country where people lack resources, but social media monetization comes as individuals have more economic stability. Pearson correlation was used to analyze if a user's high income has a

positive correlation with the usage of monetized content. The results suggested that there is no significant correlation given the P value of 0.392 which is not <0.05 . This finding suggested that users who are consuming social media are doing so regardless of the difference in income levels.

Table 4. Pearson Correlation test for Income and Usage of monetized content.

Correlations		Household income	Usage of monetized content
Household income	Pearson Correlation	1	.050
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.392
	N	300	300
Usage of monetized content	Pearson Correlation	.050	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.392	
	N	300	300

In addition, the age factor was analyzed to determine if it makes any difference in confidence levels of individuals' consumption levels on SNS. The P value is > 0.01 which indicates that there is a significant correlation between these two factors. So, it can be concluded that young people are more confident in their usage of social media monetized content. This is

a finding which suggests that people of more ages are still confused regarding their consumption of amount on social media. One of the reasons behind this is that more users of social media monetization belong to a younger segment of society. And due to having more exposure their level of confidence is growing with time.

Table 5. Pearson Correlation test for Age and Confidence level of consuming amount on SNS.

Correlation		Age	The confidence level of consuming amount on SNS
Age	Pearson Correlation	1	.030
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	300	300
The confidence level of consuming amount on SNS	Pearson Correlation	.030	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	300	300

Ioanas et al. (2014) in their study stated that audiences are now well-informed about the usage of new media because of its popularity. The

audiences are powerful enough to criticize or label them equally. It also stated that youth is more inclined towards this approach and, among the youth, higher numbers of women shop online.

Females found online shopping more convenient as the product is delivered to homes and they just have to order it.

Conclusion

Social media has extended up to new levels for the involvement of money as Search Engine Optimization (SEO), and online web channels are providing both investors and consumers with diverse ways to be involved in online businesses. In Pakistan, such trends are growing in the form of using social media, obtaining Google ad services and providing social media marketing strategies and consultancy.

The whole situation offers a promising picture of shaping social media into the form of an industry. The present study can be taken as an initial step to explore the demographic perspective (age and socioeconomic status) and practices (interactions, perceptions and reflections) of Pakistani consumers regarding their involvement in online money consumption.

Paying for social media content and Excessive social media usage were also studied. It was found that a significant relationship between excessive social media usage and paying for social media content. This indicates that those who use social media more believe in paying for its content also.

According to an assumption, high income has a positive correlation with the usage of monetized content. But when it was analyzed in the light of the current study it suggested that there is no significant correlation found among them. This finding suggested that social media users who are consuming their amount are doing so regardless of the difference in income levels. This means it is going to be a new trend in societies like Pakistan, with a majority of middle-class people who like to walk with the pace of the World. The trend of monetization is going to replace the conventional mode of money consumption.

Another angle of the study includes the use of the short-term subscription. The use of monetized content depends upon the reliance of consumers. Short-term subscriptions are a source to develop that reliance. This reliance ultimately converts into building trust and gaining profit out

of it. So the study can be concluded that excessive social media usage and short-term subscription are significantly correlated.

When the variables including age and confidence level of consuming amount on SNS were put into analysis under spearman's correlation a significant correlation was found between the taken variables. It was viewed that young people are more confident in their usage of social media monetized content. This is a finding which suggests that older people are still confused regarding their consumption of amount on social media. One of the reasons behind this is that more users of social media monetization belong to a younger segment of society. And due to having more exposure their level of confidence is elevating with time.

The current study can be helpful for future researchers to explore the spending patterns and routines of social media consumers in Pakistan. The study can be taken as a multi-disciplinary bridge among domains of marketing, consumer psychology and social media.

Limitations

There are a few limitations of the research which are stated below:

1. It was only able to cover the population from Punjab by adopting purposive sampling.
2. Although it was tried not to restrict the research to a particular class of society or gender, however at the same time it should be ensured that the respondents were mostly from the middle to upper middle class.
3. Another method of a self-administered questionnaire could have been applied to this research to give a better idea of the way how people are using monetization on social media for gratification.

Recommendations

In light of the findings, a few recommendations can be drawn:

1. When younger and older users are compared, there is a difference in acceptability and confidence in the usage of monetized social media content. As a

result, there is a need to develop ideas that would help older individuals gain more trust in social media. The older population are also a potential buyer, so by creating a simpler and easier way to engage with social media content, they would be more likely to engage with the platform.

2. Online portals should also work on making their interfaces friendly and easy to use.
3. Buying activity is always increased with consumer support initiatives from the company.
4. The current study can be helpful for future researchers who want to explore the spending patterns and routines of social media consumers in Pakistan. This study can be used as a multi-disciplinary bridge among domains of marketing, consumer psychology and social media.
5. In the context of the future of Pakistan, it can be inferred that social media monetization is going to set new trends by following the online modernization trend. At some point in time, social media monetization may replace the conventional style of consumerism.

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