

# Gender Differences in Digital Media Usage among Hungarian Religious Community Members

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**Abstract:** Based on empirical researches the article presents what gender differences can be unfolded in the digital media usage of Hungarian religious communities. In the theoretical background, the study overviews the literature of the research history of gender differences related to religions (King, 2004; Aune, 2015; Fedele, 2018). It also relies on the Religious Social Shaping of Technology (RRST) theory and the Uses and Gratifications theory, which serve the theoretical and methodological basis of this research (Brubacker & Haigh, 2017; Ratcliff, McCarthy & Ritter, 2017). Relying on these, the patterns of digital media usage of two Hungarian religious communities will be uncovered. The methodological process was the following: at first in-depth interviews were conducted with the communication leaders and bloggers of these communities, which were carried out concerning the RRST theory (Campbell, 2006, 2010, 2013, 2016; Cheong et al., 2012; Herteliu, 2018; Tudor & Herteliu, 2016; Falca, 2018). Following this, supported by the results of the interviews and the previous uses and gratifications researches, two questionnaires were composed (Laney, 2005). We got more than 600 respondents among the so-called “777” community (young Catholic bloggers community) and 64 respondents among the Hungarian Krishna-Conscious Believers community.

**Keywords:** gender differences, religious social shaping of technology, social media, uses and gratifications

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*Différences de genre dans l'usage des médias digitaux parmi les membres des communautés religieuses hongroises*

**Résumé :** Basé sur des recherches empiriques, l'étude présente les différences entre les genres qui peuvent être révélées dans l'usage des médias digitaux par les communautés religieuses hongroises. Sur le plan théorique, l'article donne une vue globale de l'historique de la recherche sur la différence des genres liés aux différentes religions (King, 2004; Aune, 2015; Fedele, 2018). L'étude s'appuie

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également sur les études culturelles ainsi que sur le modèle des enquêtes concernant l'utilisation et de l'expérience, qui servent de fondement théorique et méthodologique à cette recherche (Brubacker & Haigh 2017; Ratcliff, McCarthy & Ritter 2017). Sur cette base, l'article met en avant le modèle d'usage des media digitaux apr deux communautés religieuses hongroises. Le processus méthodologique a été le suivant: d'abord, nous avons mené des entretiens approfondis avec les responsables de communication et les blogueurs de ces communautés, portant sur la méthodologie des études culturelles (Campbell 2006, 2010, 2013, 2016; Cheong et al., 2012; Herteliu 2018; Tudor & Herteliu 2016; Falca 2018). Ensuite, s'appuyant sur le résultat des entretiens et des enquêtes précédentes sur les usages et l'expérience, nous avons établi deux questionnaires (Laney, 2005) qui ont été remplis par plus de 600 membres de la communauté « 777 » (communauté des jeunes blogueurs catholiques) et par 64 membres appartenant à la communauté hongroise des Krishna-Conscious Believers.

**Mots-clés :** études culturelles, théorie des usages et gratifications, différence de genre, entretien approfondis, média sociaux

## 1. Theoretical background

### 1.1. Gendered religion

An outstanding volume of the study on the relationship between religion and gender was published in 2004 by King and Beattie, in which Ursula King writes in the introduction that “they do not exist independently from each other, for patterns of gender are deeply embedded throughout all religions. The very embeddedness means that gender is initially difficult to separate out from other aspects of religion” (King, 2004, p. 3). While reviewing the recent research history of the two topics, she notices that none of the areas sees the other field and describes this phenomenon with the concept of double-blind, which has become a much-quoted term in the literature (Aune, 2015; Fedele, 2018; Höpflinger et al., 2012; Woodhead, 2012; Frauhammer, 2015). Fedele puts the question in the following way: „We can say that there exists a ‘double-blind’ in gender and religion in so far as gender studies have tended to neglect the importance of religious experiences and religious scholars have often underestimated the importance of the gender dimension. The lack of attention to religion and spirituality within feminist studies and gender studies has been interpreted as a consequence of the secular origins of European feminism... In these debates, ‘religion’ is usually opposed to modernity, freedom and emancipation” (Fedele, 2018, p. 137). Similarly, other researchers also emphasize that gender studies have had a negative attitude to religious issues. „As women’s and gender studies developed from the 1970s, its scholars often portrayed religion negatively, as an obstacle to feminism” (Aune, 2015, p. 126).

Since the Millennium, after the interest of the researchers turned to the topic of religion and gender, huge scientific material has been created. As a result, articles

categorizing researches have also been published, three of which are going to be presented written by King, Woodhead and Höpflinger. Ursula King offers three main directions for organizing studies. The first direction focuses on the gender roles in the teachings of the given religion and the examination of the gender position. Raising questions like: What status do the religions provide to men and to women? Can women participate in religious life just like men? Do they have any role in religious leadership or authority? The second main direction of the research deals with religious thinking, its concepts, language and symbolism. It is characterized by questions like: How do different scriptures describe man and woman? What is the language of these texts like? The third direction is engaged with internal religious experience and God experience, spirituality and how they are determined by gender. For example: How does religion influence the traditional roles of women in society? (King, 2008, p. 32-33 cited Frauhammer, 2015)

Linda Woodhead places research options on the relationship between religion and gender in a coordinate system. Her typology directs attention not only to gender orders in society, but also to the gender order(s) inherent in a religion or religious group. „The two axes give us four ‘cells’, which represent the four main ways in which religion (as a distribution of power) may relate to gender (as a distribution of power) – and hence four main ‘types’ of religion in relation to gender. First, religion can be integral to the existing gender order, and can serve to reproduce and legitimate gender inequality” This option she calls *Consolidating* (Woodhead, 2012, p. 39). The second option is called *Tactical*. Here religion can be integral to the existing gender order, but can be used to give access to power from ‘inside’ and use it in ways which may be subversive of the existing gender order. Third, religion may be marginal to the existing gendered distribution of power, but used as a means of access to that power from the outside, without necessarily intending to disrupt the distribution of that power. It is named *Questing*. The last one is called *Counter-cultural*. In this case religion may be situated in a marginal relation to the gendered distribution of power, and may be used to try to contest, disrupt and redistribute that distribution (Woodhead, 2012, p. 38-39).

The third typology to be presented was worked out by Höpflinger and her colleagues, in which they identify four different research directions. „There are numerous ways to intertwine gender and religion — or to consider their interplay. A first set of scientific works focuses on questions regarding religious practices and beliefs, often understood in the sense of (historically grown) religious traditions such as Christianity or Islam. A second set identifies different gendered systems and different constructions of masculinities and femininities. It analyses the role of religious beliefs as a constitutive or challenging factor for different constructions of gender. A third set addresses gendered uses and subversions of religious categories, symbols and signs. The fourth set merges work researching the relationships between men and women in the context of religion, often fighting for more equality between the social groups” (Höpflinger et al., 2012, p. 12-13).

The present study is mainly based on King's questions and focuses on topics such as what gender rules of religion can be noticed in the digital media usage of women and men within the community and how can women participate in digital religious life.

After reviewing the gender and religion research framework, the media research background will be also mentioned. The following overview of current literature provides both a framework and a context for my study. This session of the study begins with the exploration of the Religious Social Shaping of Technology Theory (RSST) and the Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&G) which serve a foundation to the work as they help to unfold the relationship between social media usage and religious communities.

### 1.2. *Religious Social Shaping of Technology*

The formation of religious communities is influenced but not determined by contemporary social contexts and traditional and new media. Modifying the theory of technological determinism we think that the media technology only encourages certain new community forms and sense of presence but doesn't determine them strictly. (Cheong et al., 2012; Hoover, 2012) The theory of *Religious-Social Shaping of Technology* (RSST) provides a useful analytical frame for the research. Within the *Social Shaping of Technology Theory* (SST) the technology is seen as a social process and the possibility is recognized that social groups may shape technologies towards their own ends, rather than the character of the technology determining use and outcomes. (Barzilai-Nahone & Barzilai, 2004; MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999) The *Religious-Social Shaping of Technology* (RSST) approach to technology as Heidi Campbell argues, involves asking questions about how technologies are conceived of, as well as used, in light of the religious community's beliefs, moral codes, and historical tradition of engagement with other forms of media technology. (Campbell, 2006, 2010, 2013, 2016; Herteliu, 2018, p. 334, 343-346; Tudor & Herteliu, 2016) The RSST emphasizes that religious communities do not outright reject new forms of technology, but rather undergo a negotiation process to determine what the technology may affect in their community. Identifying the process by which religious groups evaluate a technology's potential benefits or hindrances is important because it helps uncover the group's patterns of moral life and their visibility in the public sphere.

The religious-social shaping of technology offers a new research method, suggesting four distinctive areas that should be explored and questioned in order to deeply understand a religious community's relationship towards traditional and new forms of media. These four stages of the religious-social shaping of technology approach are (1) investigating the history and tradition – setting the stage for contemporary negotiation with media, (2) social values – identifying the dominant social values of a religious community and their contemporary meanings and relevance, (3) negotiation process – during this process religious communities decide which aspects of a new technology they will accept, reject, or need to

reconstruct in order for the technology to be compatible with the community's beliefs and way of life and finally (4) communal discourse of religious communities. During the evaluation of the interviews, we are using a combination of reception and ritual theories of communication and media (Carey, 2009; Andok, 2017, 2016). The RSST theory is really fruitful but has some limitations, as Tudor and Herteliu wrote: „ Heidi Campbell's approach on the use and religious users does not really explain what is going on in the space between the availability of the content and its appropriation” (Tudor & Herteliu, 2016, p. 210). That's why I think we need another theory too, the so-called Uses and Gratifications theory.

### 1.3. *Uses and Gratifications*

This approach was introduced in the 1970s in the media studies by Katz, Gurevits and Haas in order to enable researches to uncover how users actively seek to meet their needs from different media contents (Katz, Gurevitch & Haas, 1973). Uses and gratifications research is particularly fruitful because it can be adapted to the Computer Mediated Communication and social media as well. As a result of media convergence, digital media usage continue to be explored specifically using a uses and gratifications framework (Ratcliff et al., 2017, p. 16). In their research in 2011, Papacharissi and Mendelson found nine distinct motives for using Facebook (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011)<sup>1</sup>. Social media is also used in revealing religious identities and religious communication and encourage people to talk about their beliefs and spirituality. After the new Millennium several scholars conducted uses and gratifications researches relating digital media among religious community members. In the religious content, scholars found people engage with religious websites for (1) religious entertainment and information, (2) to donate money and (3) be involved, and (4) to explore and reinforce faith (Laney, 2005). Brubacker and Haigh also carried out uses and gratification examination related to religious content. „Facebook use for religious purposes is primarily motivated by the need to minister to others. Users do this by sharing faith-based beliefs and providing those who are both of their faith and those who are not with spiritual and emotional guidance and support. The three other motivations driving engagement with faith-based content reflect personal benefits gained, including spiritual enlightenment, religious information, and relaxing entertainment.” (Brubacker & Haigh, 2017, p. 8) Ratcliff and his colleagues investigated the topic for US users (Ratcliff, McCarthy & Ritter, 2017).

With this empirical research we will be able to execute a systematic exploration of how religious women and men engage with, and respond to a variety of media technologies; highlighting how views of religious authority and community influence these interactions and their social presence.

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<sup>1</sup> These nine motives are the following: expressive information sharing, habitual pass time, relaxing entertainment, cool and new trend, companionship, professional advancement, escape, social interaction, new friendships.

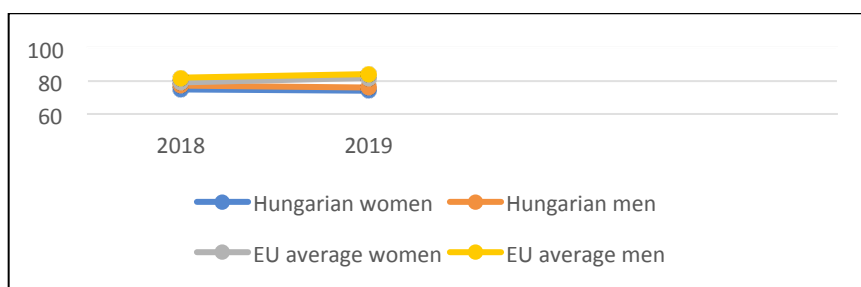
## 2. The Hungarian context of digital media usage

This section gives an overview of what general data the Hungarian digital media usage can be characterized by. The study relies on the Digital Economy and Society Index besides the figures of Digital News Project. The European Union has been measuring the digital development of the member states with the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) since 2000. The DESI examines five principal policy areas for development which are (1) *connectivity*, (2) *human capital*, (3) *use of Internet services*, (4) *integration of digital technology* and (5) *digital public service*. In 2018 Hungary was the 23<sup>rd</sup> among the 28 member states. Let's look at it in detail! *Connectivity* shows what percentage of the country is covered by fixed or mobile, fast and ultra-fast broadband. Regarding connectivity to broadband networks (1st row) Hungary shows one of the lowest overall connectivity level (95%) but compared to the EU average (97%) this data doesn't reflect big differences. The next dimension is the *human capital*, which measures the skills needed to take advantage of the possibilities offered by digital technology. Hungary is at the 21<sup>st</sup> position in this comparison in the EU. The results of the *use of Internet services* reveal what contents (news, video, music, games, etc.) citizens use, how they communicate (video calls, SNSs) and how frequently they carry out online transactions (shopping, banking). The Hungarian data are the following: reading online news position in EU is 10, percentage of Internet users 85% (EU average 72%), SNSs usage position in EU is 2, percentage of Internet users 84% (EU average 65%), online shopping position in EU is 20, percentage of Internet users 49% (EU average 68%), online banking position in EU is 22, percentage of Internet users 49% (EU average 61%). The fourth category refers to how and to what extent *digital technology* is integrated into *business* operations. Hungary stands at the 25<sup>th</sup> place. And the last one is the digital public services, which is about eGovernment and eHealth services that are available for citizens. Hungary stands at the 27<sup>th</sup> position in this respect.

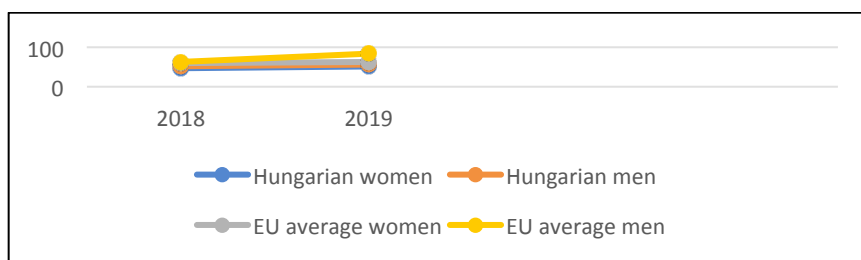
The EU has been measuring the data of DESI by gender differences since 2017. The Commission's Women in Digital (WiD) Scoreboard monitors women's participation in the digital economy. The scoreboard assesses Member States' performance in the areas of Internet use, Internet user skills as well as specialist skills and employment based on 13 indicators. These figures provide a relevant interpretative context for the research findings which reveal gender differences of digital media usage among religious community members.

According to the 2018 figures of Women in Digital (WiD) research Hungary stands in 23<sup>rd</sup> position in the EU among the 28 member states. General findings are: Gender differences in attitudes towards technology and digitalization: women are somewhat more concerned and less informed. Differences in the personal preferences that men and women have regarding technology have generally been considered as a factor influencing their educational and professional choices, and partially explains the lack of women in STEM studies and ICT careers. Gender differences are not only visible in career options but also in citizens' attitudes

towards technology and innovation. As the results show, 75% of Hungarian women use the Internet regularly. Seventeen percent of Hungarian women never use the Internet as opposed to the 14 % average of the EU women. From the available digital opportunities Hungarian women use the following: online banking 47%, eGovernment 42%, using professional social networks 13%, doing an online course 4,6%, consulting or voting online 3,9%. The comparative data is shown in Diagram 1. and Diagram 2.

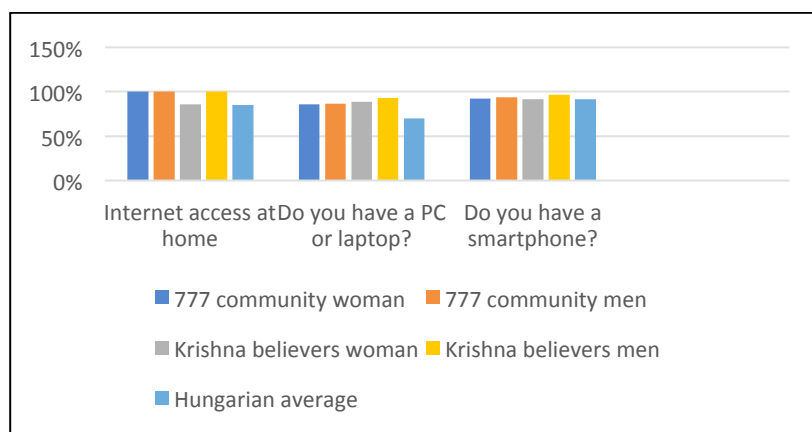


**Diagram 1.** Regular Internet use in Hungary (source DESI)



**Diagram 2.** Online banking in Hungary (source DESI)

The aim of the research is to find out if these gender differences can also be detected when they use the internet for religious purposes. Firstly the extent of digital access in the religious communities was examined as it presented by Diagram 3. From the data it can be seen that in both religious communities access is higher compared to the Hungarian average. This can be explained by the fact that the members of these communities have a higher proportion of graduates and a higher proportion of urban residents than the Hungarian average.



**Diagram 3.** *Internet access, PC (laptop) and smartphone ownership (source of Hungarian average: Budapest Business Journal<sup>2</sup>)*

In connection with the media usage of the two communities investigated, the question arises whether male or female usage is more similar to each other, or the differences stemming from their religious belief (Catholic – Krishna-Conscious) are stronger. In other words, whether a member of the 777 community or the Krishna-Conscious community, the pattern of media usage of women and men is more alike than that of the men and women in the same religious community. More explicitly, gender or religious affiliation will be the stronger influencing factor in digital media usage?

### 3. Empirical research

The study would like to demonstrate a comparative research of the digital media usage of a particular Hungarian youth Catholic community (777 Community) and a Hungarian Krishna-Conscious Believers community. In the article these religious communities will be introduced and compared, because one of them is a traditional offline based community while the other is a mostly online existing community connected to more religions but not officially (Andok & Vigh, 2018). The gender differences can be revealed based on the preliminary results of the questionnaires, which are presented in the following part of the article.

<sup>2</sup> Budapest Business Journal 2018. Nov. available [https://bbj.hu/economy/six-in-ten-households-in-hungary-own-lcd-or-plasma-tv\\_157477](https://bbj.hu/economy/six-in-ten-households-in-hungary-own-lcd-or-plasma-tv_157477)



### 3.1. *The 777 community digital media use*

At first some facts about the background of *777 community* will be shown and after that the media usage in this religious group will be evaluated. During the evaluation of the interviews a combination of reception and ritual theories of communication and media are used (Carey, 2009; Andok, 2017). The focus is on the process of meaning-making viewed through an interpretive cultural studies framework and the intersections between individual and social creation of meaning through media usage are sought (Bögre, 2016).

The *777* group is an online community deriving from a blog site and still based on it. It presents current issues from a Christian viewpoint but it isn't connected officially to a particular church. The *777* blog was launched on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2016 by Zoltán Martf. The name of the blog has a theological reference, the *777* symbolizes the Holy Trinity. The blog doesn't connect directly to a historical church; among the editors we can find Roman Catholics, Protestants and Presbyterians, too. There are currently 15 blog writers, 7 women and 8 men. Their work is voluntary, everybody posts from their home. They are writing blog posts about the Bible, happiness, about being a father, how to prepare for marriage, about faith, everyday life and so many other topics. Their slogan is "Faith is not a private matter". The blog operates as an association, which can be financially supported. On Facebook 42 thousand people like and follow them.

Their YouTube channel was started on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2017, they have 4300 subscribers and from one thousand to twenty thousand viewers per video. On Instagram they have 4.000 followers.<sup>3</sup>

The *777* blog and community exists not only online but offline, too; the editors organize one event a month which is called OFFLINE. From this practice we can clearly see the phenomenon that we mentioned and described previously as the intersection between offline and online surfaces of everyday life. As a founder suggests: "Let's break down the virtual walls."

Methods. We carried out two researches about the digital media usage of *777* community, one of them in February 2018, and the other in February 2019. First we<sup>4</sup> made in-depth interviews with six bloggers, these interviews were semi-structured containing both open and closed questions. The results were evaluated according to the methodology of the RRST theory (Campbell, 2010). Following this, we set up two uses and gratifications questionnaires, the former contains 30 while the latter contains 44 questions. In the current article the results of the second questionnaire will be presented.

Participants (n=604) took on online survey by Survio. The final sample was 63,4% female, 36,6% male. The medium age of respondents was 32,7. The greatest

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<sup>3</sup> Data was verified on July 8, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> These interviews were made in cooperation with my former BA student, Fanni Vigh.

number of participants followed by Roman Catholic Church (85,6%), by Reformed Church (5,3%), Unitarian (2%), Orthodox (1%) other (4,6%) and no answer (1,3%).

### 3.2. Results in the 777 community

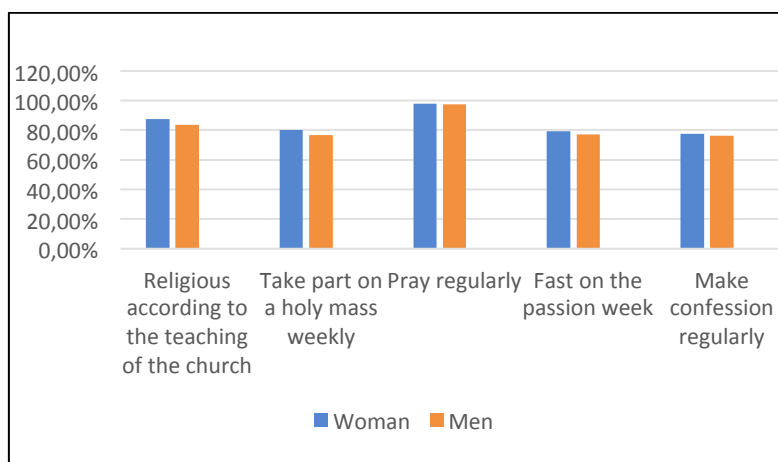
The introduction of the results will begin with the description of religious self-classification and religious practices carried out offline. After that, the questionnaire will focus on what the Internet is used for by female and male members of the religious community, and whether their social media profile refers to their religious beliefs. Then the aim is to find the answer to what religious content they are looking for, consuming, and what content they usually upload to their social network sites. And finally, specifically for religious purposes, what social media is used by women and men for.

Surveys carried out among the members of the 777 community show that the majority of the group, 86.3% said of their religious self-classification that they are religious according to the teachings of the church.<sup>5</sup> Small differences can be identified, with slightly more women (87.7%) than men (83.7%). About the same degree of difference was noticed in offline religious practices. 80.2% of women attend masses weekly, while for men this figure was 76.9%. 97.9% of women pray regularly, 97.7% of men, and 79.3% of women, 77.3% of men adhere to Lent requirements. 77.5% of females and 76.4% of males regularly make a confession. As it reflected by Diagram 4. It is not a big difference but like international trends, it indicates that women's traditional religious practice is stronger (Pew Research 2016, 2018<sup>6</sup>).

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<sup>5</sup> The questionnaire and the study used the categories suggested by Hungarian sociologist Miklós Tomka: I am religious according to the teaching of the church OR I am religious on my own way, although in international surveys mostly Grace Davies's categories are used: believing without belonging (Bögre, 2016; Davie, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Pew Research 2018 „In many parts of the world, women – especially Christian women – are more religious than men. ... A similar dynamic is evident when it comes to church attendance. Christian women say they attend religious services at higher rates than Christian men”  
Pew Research 2016 „Among Christians in many countries, women report higher rates of weekly church attendance than men. ... more women than men say they pray on a daily basis. Some social scientists have argued that women are universally more religious than men across all societies, cultures and faiths. More controversially, a few sociologists have theorized that the gender gap in religion is biological in nature, possibly stemming from higher levels of testosterone in men or other physical and genetic differences between the sexes. (Miller & Stark, 2002, “Gender and Religiousness: Can Socialization Explanations Be Saved?” *American Journal of Sociology*.)



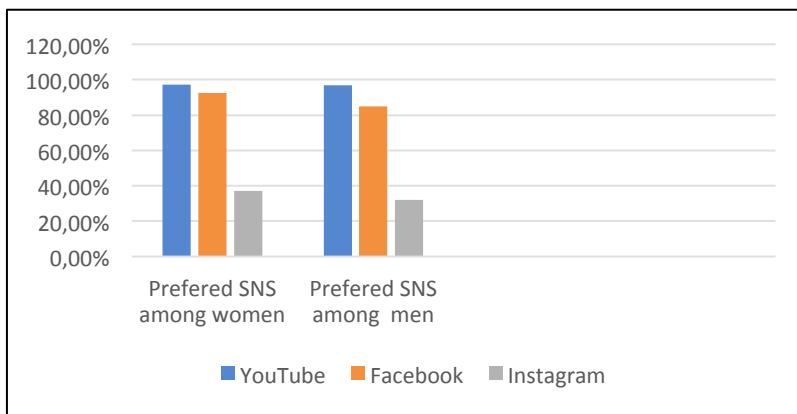
**Diagram 4.** *Offline religious practices in 777 community*

To the question of what purpose they use the Internet for, the members of the community responded as follows. Both the most used and never used functions, with a few exceptions, marked the same activities for men and women. The difference was that, among women, games were second within the never used functions, while among men they were the fifth. The other difference is that, although the most commonly used functions are the same for men and women, more men picked them with approximately 10% each.

Most commonly used functions for women: keeping in touch with friends (56.3%), general information seeking (43.6%), doing work (39.6%). For men: general information seeking (66%), doing work (57%), and keeping in touch with friends (46%).

Among the never-used functions, women mentioned the following most frequently: searching a partner (88.7%), games (47.2%) and following trends (46.9%), in the case of men these are: searching a partner (83.2%), following trends (48.8%) and looking for work (47.9%).

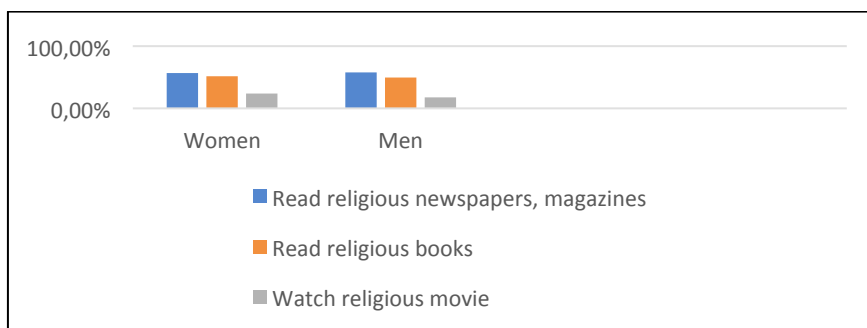
As Diagram 5. reflects, of the social media surfaces, the same three surfaces are preferred by men and women, but Facebook is slightly more popular for women.



**Diagram 5.** Preferred SNSs

When asked if their Facebook profile or background image refers to their religious beliefs, 20.9% of women, and 19.5% of men answered yes.

Regarding offline religious media content (newspapers, magazines, films, books, television or radio) consumption (see in Diagram 6.), for both women and men newspapers, magazines, books and films stand at the first place. But the proportion of women consuming religious films is higher.



**Diagram 6.** Offline religious media contents consumption

There were also interesting differences in what the members were looking for and not by the following topics: religious content, spirituality, mental hygiene, psychological content, esoterically content. The detailed results are summarized in Table 1. and Table 2.

**Table 1.** They look for the following contents very often

	Women	Men
Religious content	76,7%	71,9%
Spirituality	26,8%	30,3%
Mental hygiene	22,9%	7,2%
Psychological content	27,4%	10,4%
Esoterically content	1,8%	0,9%

**Table 2.** Never searching the following contents

	Women	Men
Religious content	1,5%	1,8%
Spirituality	26,1%	28,5%
Mental hygiene	29,2%	48,8%
Psychological content	17,4%	33%
Esoterically content	83,8%	90%

So it can be seen from the data that within the 777 community men are less likely to seek psychological or mental hygiene content than women.

The questionnaire also searched for the content that they upload frequently and what content they refuse to upload on their own pages. Here we find roughly the same activities. Most often, both women and men send birthday greetings (women 36%, men 26.6%), upload religious content (women 22.4%, men 20.3%) and artistic images (women 9.1%, men 5.8%). These data support the fact that social media sites are used primarily to keeping in touch with friends. There is a difference among the never used functions, where women mentioned that they never upload content related to purchase (84.5%), photos of their own home (83.8%) and food photos (80.9%). Men do not upload images of pets (85%), they do not share content about purchase (84.6%) and do not post photos of their own home (82.3%).

In the 777 community, the use of digital media by women is somewhat higher (usually plus 5-7 percent) related to religious activities than men. Both women and men most often read religious blogs, 48.3% women and 41.6% men. Among women the activities in the second and third place are performed equally often by 43%, these are the search for information about religious events and the events of the 777 community. Men's second most frequent religious activity is the consumption of online content of church media by 36.1%, and the third is the search for information on religious events by them, too, with 34.3%. Men are more advanced in digital skills than women, and are slightly more open to innovation, for example, 30.2% of men use religion related applications as opposed to the 27.4% of women.

The Internet is most rarely used for the following religious purposes: joining a pilgrimage on the Internet, 87.2% of women and 90.9% of men have never done so, getting involved digitally in a fast, 87.4% of men and 90.4% of men have not participated, and 79.1% of women and 86.6% of men have not took part in a common digital prayer. From further data, it is also apparent that women are slightly more open to these digital forms of spirituality than men.

### *3.3. The digital media usage of the Hungarian Krishna - Conscious Believers Community*

The church of Hungarian Krishna-Conscious Believers has been an officially registered church in Hungary since 1989 with 10 000 members. (Kamarás, 1996, p. 209-210) Within the leadership of the church the spiritual leadership and the management are separated from one another but they work together during the decision making. The church of the Krishna-Conscious Believers has a Communication Department which keeps in touch with the members of the community and sends messages outside as well. In-depth interviews were made with two communication leaders of the church in their Hungarian spiritual centre in Budapest on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2018. The centre consists of a temple, a college, a restaurant and a shop. After the interviews a questionnaire was composed and shared whose results will be presented later in the article.

The members of the church follow four main rules which can be derived from the principle: „We are not the same with our body, we are spirits.” The four commandments are the following: (1) They don't eat meat, eggs, fish, they eat only vegetables. (2) They don't use drugs and other intoxicating agents. (3) They don't have sexual relationship except within marriage in order to have children. (4) They don't gamble (about core Hindu / Krishna- Conscious Believers concepts see Scheifinger, 2017).

The Church of Hungarian Krishna-Conscious Believers doesn't reject any forms of technology including communication technology such as the Internet, smartphone, or CMC. „We can use anything provided that it serves Krishna.”- states one of the communication leaders. However, they make differences between the use of communication devices and the contents of mass communication and CMC. The usage of these devices is permitted but they are careful with the contents. In the international literature several scholars deal with the research of online Hindu rites and religious practices (Balaji, 2017; Helland, 2010).

The official website of the Hungarian Krishna-Conscious Believers is krisna.hu. They also have a Facebook site with 8700 followers, a Twitter account with 1385 followers and a YouTube channel with 2.600 subscribers. The most well-known Hungarian spiritual leader Sivarama Swami Guru's Facebook site is followed by 300.000 people.<sup>7</sup> In their religion respect and hospitality are the most emphasized

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<sup>7</sup> Data was verified on July 8, 2019.

values. They are careful not to say anything or post on SNSs that the other party cannot exactly understand, has not been prepared for or has not received enough points to understand it accurately. For this reason, they post special religious contents within closed Facebook groups rather than in public ways.

The survey was carried out between 5 January - 5 February 2019 among 64 participants. It contains 55 questions (my questionnaire is based on Ratcliff at al 2017). The first part focuses on the demographic data, the second part deals with the members' supply with digital tools and the final part reveals the religious purposes the Internet is used for by them. The final sample was 55,6% female, 44,4 % male. The medium age of respondents was 36,3.

3.4. *Results in the Hungarian Krishna-Conscious Believers Community*

As regards their religious self-classification, the members of the Krishna-Conscious community were asked to choose from the following options: (1) I am getting to know the religion, I am not yet a disciple, (2) I am a disciple, my first (Hari Nama Diksha) initiation has taken place, (3) I am a disciple after the second (Brahmana) initiation. Tabel 3. presents the proportion of answers. Among those who completed the questionnaire, we find more men who have become masters (guru) after the second initiation.

**Table 3.** Religious self -classification in Krishna-Conscious Believers Community

	Members before the initiation	Members after the first (Hari Nama Dikhsa) initiation	Members after the second (Brahmana) initiation
Women	45,7%	31,4% %	17,1% %
Men	46,4%	21,4%	28,6%

The questionnaires were asked about their offline religious practices, and women are somewhat more active similarly to the 777 community as it is visible in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Offline religious practices

	Do religious practices on daily basis	Do religious practices on weekly basis
Women	34,3%	42,9%
Men	21,4%	42,9%

When asked about the purpose of using the Internet in general, from the options *often* and *never* they almost picked the same, though in slightly different proportions. The extensive results are shown in the Table 5.

**Table 5.** What purposes do you use the Internet for?

	Women	Men
Most often I use the Internet for the following purpose 1.	For work – 60%	For work – 71,4%
Most often I use the Internet for the following purpose 2.	General information seeking 40 %	General information seeking 35,7 %
Most often I use the Internet for the following purpose 3.	Keep in touch with friends 40 %	For religious purposes – 32,1%
I most rarely use the Internet for the following purpose 1.	Seeking for a romantic relationship, dating – 82,8%	Seeking for a romantic relationship, dating – 85,7%
I most rarely use the Internet for the following purpose 2.	Gaming – 62,8 %	Gaming – 78,5 %
I most rarely use the Internet for the following purpose 3.	Keeping up with the trends – 62,8%	Keeping up with the trends – 67,5%

When asked if their Facebook profile or background image refer to their religious beliefs, 62.9% of women, and 60.7% of men answered yes.

The members of the community were also asked about the content they upload frequently and what content they keep away from uploading on their own pages. Similar activities can be found here, too. Most often, both women and men share religious content (women 54.2%, men 57.1%) and self-help, motivational content (22.8% women, 21.8% men). Among women, the festive greetings became the third most common post type (14.2%) and among men natural images (10.7%). Functions never used are also the same: no political content is uploaded (women 88.5%, men 75%), photos of pets (80% women, 89.2% men) and their own home (80% women, 71.4% men).

It can be seen in Table 6. and Table 7. that there were also interesting differences in what they were looking for and not in the following topics: religious content, spirituality, mental hygiene, psychological content, esoterically content.



**Table 6.** Very often looking for the following contents

	Women	Men
Religious content	71,4%	78,5%
Spirituality	42,8%	57,1%
Mental hygiene	20,7%	14,2%
Psychological content	20%	10,7%
Esoterically content	11,4%	3,5%

**Table 7.** Never looking for the following contents

	Women	Men
Religious content	2,8%	7,1%
Spirituality	17,1%	25%
Mental hygiene	40%	32,1%
Psychological content	25,7%	32,1%
Esoterically content	40%	50%

In the community of Krishna-Conscious believers, women's digital media usage - similarly to the female members of the 777 community - is related to a religious activity to a higher extent (usually plus 5 percent) than that of the religious men. Both women and men most often search for news about Krishna-Conscious gurus, women 62.8%, and men 57.1%. For women, second and third place activities are listening to religious lectures, 51.4% of them do so frequently, and seeking information about Krishna-Conscious community events (45.7%). Men's second most frequent religion-related activity is listening to religious music by 57.1%, and the third one in their case is the search for information about the Krishna-Conscious community (53.5%). They most rarely use the Internet for the following religious purposes: taking part in a common meditation, 71.4% of women, 82.1% of men have never done it, digitally joining a pilgrimage, 65.7% of women are 53.5% of men have not done so, and 65.7% of women, 57.1% of men have not used digital religious applications either. From further data, it can also be traced that women are slightly more open to these digital forms of spirituality and meditation than men, however, in the use of applications men go a little further than women.

On the basis of the survey men donate more frequently to the religious community. This is why Krishna – Conscious Believers were asked in the interviews if they regulate the financial management within the family or who and how controls it. The answer was: „This is an agreement between the couple, we haven't got any religious rules. The recommendation comes from our Indian culture that the husband is to ensure the financial security for the family. The everyday expenses are handled by wives, while bigger ones are discussed by the couple. We know some ideal examples when the husband offered that his wife would not need to go out to work.

There were some women in this case who continued working because they wanted to take part in making a living but some of them took the opportunity to give up their job and start a theological course at our college.” – said one of the communication leaders of the community.

Both women and men generally share very few photos of their home. But this pattern cannot be linked to religious rules rather to security. However, women regularly upload close-up pictures of their home altar in order to present how they decorated their home Goddess because it is very important for them and it can be unique. It is also women who share pictures of vegetarian dishes. Sometimes with funny comments like: „Oh, poor starving vegetarians!” (The Hungarian culture misconcepts the vegetarian cuisine as not delicious and not substantial.)

During the research, it was revealed that men who have passed the second initiation, and are themselves gurus, have much more acquaintances and followers on their Facebook page than women in a similar situation. So we asked if there are female gurus among the Krishna-Conscious believers, how it is regulated compared to traditional roles, as Fedele writes: „Religions influence imagined and real gender roles, offering examples of how an ideal woman ... should behave. ... A gender approach to religion and spirituality therefore analyses how the prescribed gender rules and roles are reinforced or challenged in the context of religious or spiritual theories and practices” (Fedele, 2018, p. 136).

The answer was: “According to tradition, spiritual leaders, gurus can be men. There are many reasons for this in Krishna's scriptures. Originally, only men can enter the 4<sup>th</sup> order of life. The female body is more sensitive and needs more care. And, as a result of the mental nature of women, we are much more inclined to the security of a home and to satisfy the basic life functions. Female leaders are not instructive spiritual leaders, but they may be responsible for one topic or field. For example: bringing up, educating young children, healthcare, or topics that are closer to their personality. In our international community, in the various ministries, they provide leading positions and roles, but only men, the so-called spiritual leaders, the gurus can perform initiation.” This also means that gender roles are not questioned in the community, and Houtman's and his colleagues' statement that young people would question traditional gender roles within religious communities (Houtman & Aupers, 2007, p. 313) cannot be justified in their case.

### **Conclusion**

In connection with the media usage of the two communities examined, the research intended to find out whether male or female usage is more similar to each other, or the differences arising from their religious belief (Catholic - Krishna conscious) are stronger. The answer in this way is not evident, as the study has found aspects where the usage of by gender was more decisive, while in other cases religious affiliation was the key factor.

All in all, both communities can be said to highly adhere to and follow their traditions. For this reason, gender roles were not questioned in the communities. It is important to note, however, that the 777 blog is written by almost the same number of women as men, who can faithfully present female spirituality. This is especially important, because 63.4% of the members of the community and the followers of the blog are women. There is also a similarity between the two communities that they have better digital access than the Hungarian average.

For points where *gender* was more dominant than religious affiliation the following may be mentioned. Men's access to digital technology is a bit better and their digital skills are also more advanced. They are characterized by a higher degree of technological openness and susceptibility to innovation. At the same time, they prefer to be informed from sites that are in line with traditional religious authority. Women's digital access is slightly lower, but they are more open to new forms of digital spirituality. This does not mean unconditional acceptance of new forms of online religious practices, but they are certainly more open to them than men. In addition to religious content, they seek psychological and spiritual content more often than men. On the whole, we can say that men tend to be more technological, while women are more open to spirituality when using social media.

For points where religious affiliation was stronger and not gender specific, we can mention the following. All of the basic religious standards of the Krishna-conscious community were reflected in the digital media usage of both women and men. They do not use the Internet to search partners, play games, or post political content. However, they sometimes post their food photos - mostly women - of rich vegetarian dishes and the home altar decorated by them. Although the 777 community members do not use the Internet to search partners either, but sometimes they use online games (not significantly, the male members of the 777 community are in 9 %) and in the blog's description we find that they are not completely out of politics: "... news - which avoids daily politics but is not apolitical".<sup>8</sup>

Thus, it is apparent that where the regulations of the particular religion are strong and decisive, there are hardly any differences in the use of digital media between female or male members of that community. However, in areas that are less regulated, which reveal more attitudes, gender determinants will be the stronger factor in digital media usage. That is, the female and male digital media usage will converge in accordance with the strength of religious rules, at least in the two Hungarian religious communities having been examined.

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<sup>8</sup> Source: <https://777blog.hu/rolunk/>.

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