

USES-AND-GRATIFICATIONS PERSPECTIVE ON MEDIA EFFECTS

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Media effects researchers try to isolate elements of the communicator, channel, or message that explain the impact messages have on receivers. One view of this process emanates from a mechanistic perspective and assumes direct influence on message recipients. A mechanistic perspective sees audience members as passive and reactive, focuses on short-term, immediate, and measurable changes in thoughts, attitudes, or behaviors, and assumes direct influence on audiences. *piece*

Some have suggested other elements intervene between media messages and effects. Klapper (1960), for one, questioned the validity of mechanistic approaches. His phenomenistic approach proposed that several elements intercede between a message and a response so that, in most instances, media messages that are intended to persuade actually reinforce existing attitudes. These mediating factors include individual predispositions and selective perception processes, group norms, message dissemination via interpersonal channels, opinion leadership, and the free-enterprise nature of the media in some societies. Accordingly, we could argue (a) by themselves, media typically are not necessary or sufficient causes of audience effects, and (b) a medium or message is only a single influence in the social and psychological environment, although it is an important crucial one.

A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

According to uses and gratifications, a medium or message is a source of influence within the context of other possible influences. Media audiences are variably active communicators, rather than passive recipients of messages. The perspective underscores the role of social and psychological elements in mitigating mechanistic effects, and sees mediated communication as being socially and psychologically constrained. Rosengren (1974) wrote that uses and gratifications rests on a mediated view of communication influence, whereby individual differences constrain direct media effects. Therefore, to explain media effects, we must first understand the characteristics, motivation, selectivity, and involvement of individual communicators. *audience*

Uses and gratifications, then, is a psychological communication perspective. It shifts the focus of inquiry from a mechanistic perspective's interest in direct effects of media on receivers to assessing how people use the media: "that is, what purposes or functions the media serve for a body of active receivers" (Fisher, 1978, p. 159). The psychological *communication*

perspective stresses individual use and choice. As such, researchers seek to explain media effects "in terms of the purposes, functions or uses (that is, uses and gratifications) as controlled by the choice patterns of receivers" (Fisher, 1978, p. 159).

In contrast to mechanistic views, writers have suggested functional and psychological views of media influence. In this chapter, I consider the roots of uses and gratifications, the objectives and functions of the paradigm, and the evolution of uses-and-gratifications research. Then, I address the links between media uses and effects, focusing on audience activity and media orientations, dependency and functional alternatives, and social and psychological circumstances. I also consider some directions, especially as linked to personal involvement, parasocial interaction, and newer media.

FUNCTIONAL APPROACHES TO MEDIA

Some early writings exemplify a functional approach. Lasswell (1948), for example, suggested that by performing certain activities—surveillance of the environment, correlation of different aspects of that environment, and transmission of social heritage—media content has common effects on those in a society. Lazarsfeld and Merton (1948) proposed that the media perform status-conferral and ethicizing functions and a narcotizing dysfunction. Wright (1960) added entertainment to Lasswell's three activities, and addressed the manifest and latent functions and dysfunctions of the media when performing surveillance, correlation, transmission, and entertainment activities.

Others suggested the media serve a myriad of functions for people and societies. For example, Horton and Wohl (1956) proposed that television provides viewers with a sense of parasocial relationship with media personalities. Pearlin (1959) argued that watching television allows viewers to escape from unpleasant life experiences. Mendelsohn (1963) noted that media entertainment reduces anxiety that is created by media news. Stephenson (1967) argued that television provides people the opportunity for play. And McCombs and Shaw (1972) hypothesized that media set the agenda in election campaigns.

Research focusing on audience motivation for using the media surrounded these functional studies. The belief that an object is best defined by its use guided such research. Klapper (1963) argued that mass communication research "too frequently and too long focused on determining whether some particular effect does or does not occur" (p. 517). He noted researchers had found few clear-cut answers to questions about the effects of the media. Consistent with Katz (1959), who suggested that a media message ordinarily could not influence a person who had no use for it, Klapper called for an expansion of uses-and-gratifications inquiry.

THE USES-AND-GRATIFICATIONS PARADIGM

The principal elements of uses and gratifications include our psychological and social environment, our needs and motives to communicate, the media, our attitudes and expectations about the media, functional alternatives to using the media, our communication behavior, and the outcomes or consequences of our behavior. In 1974, Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch outlined the principal objectives of uses and gratifications inquiry: (a) to explain how people use media to gratify their needs, (b) to understand motives for media behavior, and (c) to identify functions or consequences that follow

from needs, motives, and behavior. Uses and gratifications focuses on: "(1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones" (Katz et al., 1974, p. 20).

A contemporary view of uses and gratifications is grounded in five assumptions (see, e.g., Palmgreen, 1984; Palmgreen, Wenner, & Rosengren, 1985; A. M. Rubin, 2002):

- Communication behavior, including the selection and use of the media, is goal-directed, purposive, and motivated. People are relatively active participants who choose media or media content. That functional behavior has consequences for people and societies.
- Audience members are variably active participants who initiate the selection and use of communication vehicles. Instead of being used by the media, people select and use media to satisfy felt needs or desires (Katz, Gurevitch, & Haas, 1973). Media use may respond to needs, but also satisfies wants or interests such as seeking information to solve a personal dilemma.
- Social and psychological factors guide, filter, or mediate behavior. Predispositions, the environment, and interpersonal interactions shape expectations about media and media content. Behavior responds to media and their messages, which are filtered through social and psychological circumstances such as personality, social categories and relationships, potential for interaction, and channel availability.
- The media compete with other forms of communication—or, functional alternatives—such as interpersonal interaction for selection, attention, and use to gratify our needs or wants. There are definite relationships between personal and mediated channels in this process. How well the media satisfy needs, motives, or desires varies based on individuals' social and psychological circumstances.
- People are typically more influential than the media in this process, but not always. Individual initiative mediates the patterns and consequences of media use. Through this process, media may affect individual characteristics or social, political, cultural, or economic structures of society, and how people may come to rely on certain communication channels (Rosengren, 1974; A. M. Rubin & Windahl, 1986).

Katz and his colleagues (1974) listed two other early assumptions. First, methodologically, people can articulate their motives to communicate, so that self-reports can provide accurate data about media use. Second, value judgments about the cultural significance of media and their content should be suspended until we fully understand motives and gratifications. Self-reports are still typically used, but so are other qualitative and quantitative modes of inquiry. We also now have a clearer understanding of the role of motives and gratifications, so that inquiry does include questions of cultural significance. Some have advocated a shift in audience-based research toward examining cultural interaction of people and media (e.g., Massey, 1995).

The assumptions of uses and gratifications underscore the role of audience initiative and activity. Behavior is largely goal directed and purposive. People typically choose to participate and select media or messages from an array of communication alternatives in response to their expectations and desires. These expectations and desires emanate from, and are constrained by, personal traits, social context, and interaction. A person has the capacity for subjective choice and interpretation and initiates such behavior as

media or message selection. This initiative affects the outcomes of media use. Our degree of initiative or activity, though, has been seen as more variable than absolute over the past few decades (e.g., Blumler, 1979; Levy & Windahl, 1984, 1985; A. M. Rubin, 1993; A. M. Rubin & Perse, 1987a, 1987b).

THE EVOLUTION OF USES-AND-GRATIFICATIONS RESEARCH

Uses-and-gratifications research has focused on audience motivation and consumption. It has been guided by revised research questions shifting the focus to what people do with the media, instead of what the media do to people (Klapper, 1963). Research was descriptive and unsystematic in its early development, mostly identifying motives rather than explaining the processes or effects of media use. The early work was a precursor to research depicting typologies of media motives. For the most part, subsequent research became more systematic, and some investigators began to ask about the consequences of media use.

Media-Use Typologies

Early investigators of media gratifications sought to learn why people used certain media content. Lazarsfeld (1940), for example, considered the appeals of radio programs. Such studies preceded formal conceptualization of a uses-and-gratifications perspective. The early studies described audience motives rather than media effects. Examples include: (a) the competitive, educational, self-rating, and sporting appeals of a radio quiz program, *Professor Quiz*, for its listeners (Herzog, 1940); (b) the emotional-release, wishful-thinking, and advice-seeking gratifications listeners received from radio daytime serials (Herzog, 1944); and (c) the reasons why people read the newspaper—to interpret public affairs, as a daily tool for living, for social prestige, and to escape (Berelson, 1949). Such early descriptive research was largely abandoned in favor of studies of personal influence and media functions during the 1950s and 1960s.

In the early 1970s researchers sought to identify the motives of audience members for using the media, developing typologies of how people used the media to gratify social and psychological needs (Katz et al., 1973). Needs were related to social roles and psychological dispositions and often took the form of strengthening or weakening connections with self, family, or society. Katz et al., for example, developed a typology of the helpfulness of media in satisfying needs: strengthening understanding of self, friends, others, or society; strengthening the status of self or society; and strengthening contact with family, friends, society, or culture.

Lull (1980) addressed links between personal and mediated communication by observing the behavior of families when watching television. He developed a typology of the social uses of television. He suggested that television could be used *structurally*—as an environmental resource (e.g., for companionship) or as a behavioral regulator (e.g., punctuating time)—or *relationally*—to facilitate communication (e.g., an agenda for conversation), for affiliation or avoidance (e.g., conflict resolution), for social learning (e.g., behavioral modeling), or for competence or dominance (e.g., role reinforcement).

Researchers used such typologies to describe and explain media consumption. The typologies speak to connections between goals and outcomes, and suggest the complexities of media uses and effects. McQuail, Blumler, and Brown (1972), for example,

categorized the types of gratifications people seek from viewing television content. They linked people's background and social circumstances with gratifications sought, and formulated a typology of media-person interactions. They observed that people are motivated to watch television for: diversion—to escape and for emotional release; personal relationships—for companionship and social utility; personal identity—for personal reference, reality exploration, and value reinforcement; and surveillance—to acquire news and information.

Rosengren and Windahl (1972) also considered the links between audience involvement, reality proximity, and media dependency. They noted that people might seek media as functional alternatives to personal interaction—as a supplement, complement, or substitute—for such reasons as compensation, change, escape, or vicarious experience. They suggested needs for interaction and identification can result in different degrees of media involvement: detachment, parasocial interaction, solitary identification, or capture. Rosengren and Windahl argued, by merging the traditions of media effects and media uses, it is possible “to ask what effect a given use made of the mass media, or a given gratification obtained from them, may have” (p. 176).

Criticisms

During this period, some criticized the early state of affairs and assumptions of uses and gratifications (e.g., Anderson & Meyer, 1975; Carey & Kreiling, 1974; Elliott, 1974; Swanson, 1977). The criticisms focused on (a) the compartmentalized nature of typologies, making it difficult to predict beyond those who were studied or to consider the implications of media use, (b) the lack of clarity of central constructs and how researchers attached different meanings to concepts such as motives and gratifications, (c) the treatment of the audience as being too active or rational in its behavior, and (d) the methodological reliance on self-report data.

Most criticisms have been addressed in the many studies of the past few decades. Researchers adapted and extended the use of consistent media-use measures across different contexts. Greenberg (1974), for example, developed motivation scales with British children and adolescents, and observed links among media behavior, television attitudes, aggressive attitudes, and viewing motives. A partial replication of that work in the U.S. identified six reasons why children and adolescents watched television: learning, habit/pass time, companionship, escape, arousal, and relaxation (A. M. Rubin, 1979). Habitual viewing related negatively to watching news and positively to television affinity and watching comedies. Viewing to learn related positively to perceived television realism. Arousal motivation was linked to watching action/adventure programs. Such results were similar to Greenberg's, presenting a consistent portrait across cultures.

This research also supported stability and consistency of responses via test-retest reliability of viewing-motive items and convergent validity of the motive scales with responses to open-ended queries of viewing reasons (A. M. Rubin, 1979). Participants were able to verbalize their reasons for using media. A similar technique in a later study supported convergent validity for a wider sample, ranging from children to older adults, and continued programmatic development and synthesis (A. M. Rubin, 1981a).

Besides supporting the consistency and accuracy of self-report motive scales, researchers also used experimental (e.g., Bryant & Zillmann, 1984), ethnographic (e.g., Lemish, 1985; Lull, 1980), and diary/narrative (e.g., Massey, 1995) methods. Investigators also sought to develop and extend conceptual, focused, and systematic lines of inquiry. They came to regard the audience as less than universally active and treated audience

activity as a variable rather than an absolute (e.g., Blumler, 1979; Levy & Windahl, 1984, 1985; A. M. Rubin & Perse, 1987a, 1987b).

Contemporary Studies

Uses-and-gratifications research has demonstrated systematic progression during the past few decades. Research has helped explain media behavior and has furthered our understanding of media uses and effects. Researchers have provided a systematic analysis of media use by adapting similar motivation measures (e.g., Bantz, 1982; Eastman, 1979; Greenberg, 1974; Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1979; A. M. Rubin, 1979, 1981a, 1981b). Studies within and across research programs have included replication and secondary analysis. Several research directions are identified below. Some links to media effects research are drawn in the following sections:

- One direction has been the links among media-use motives and their associations with media attitudes and behaviors. This has led to the development of typologies of motives. Research suggests consistent patterns of media use such as meeting cognitive and affective needs, gratifying utilitarian and diversionary motivations, and fostering instrumental and ritualized orientations (e.g., Perse, 1986, 1990a; A. M. Rubin, 1983, 1984, 1985; A. M. Rubin & Bantz, 1989; A. M. Rubin & Rubin, 1982b). Lometti, Reeves, and Bybee (1977), for example, identified surveillance/entertainment, affective guidance, and behavioral guidance media-use gratification dimensions. Some focused on typologies and differences among types of consumers. Farquhar and Meeds (2007), for example, used Q-methodology to identify types of online fantasy sports users (e.g., casual, skilled, and isolationist thrill-seeking players). These types differed in their arousal and surveillance motives, whereby social interaction motives were only minimally important to these players.
- A second direction has been comparing motives across media and with newer media. This has produced analyses of newer media such as the Internet and comparative analyses of the appropriateness and effectiveness of channels—including evolving communication technologies such as the VCR, the Internet, and the World Wide Web—to meet people's needs and wants (e.g., Bantz, 1982; Cohen, Levy, & Golden, 1988; Dobos, 1992; Ferguson, 1992; Ferguson & Perse, 2000; Katz et al., 1973; Kaye & Johnson, 2002; Lichtenstein & Rosenfeld, 1983, 1984; Lin, 1999; Westmyer, DiCioccio, & Rubin, 1998). Elliott and Quattlebaum (1979), for example, reported various media serve similar needs, namely to maintain societal contact or to satisfy personal needs. Cowles (1989) found interactive media were felt to have more personal characteristics than noninteractive media. Perse and Courtright (1993) observed that interpersonal channels (i.e., conversation and telephone) had more social presence and better met personal needs, when compared with channels such as the computer. And Ko, Cho, and Roberts (2005) found that consumers with stronger information seeking motives engage in human-message interaction on a website, whereas those with stronger social interaction motives engage in human-to-human interaction.
- A third direction has been examining the different social and psychological circumstances of media use. Researchers have addressed how various factors influence media behavior (e.g., Adoni, 1979; Dimmick, McCain, & Bolton, 1979; Finn & Gorr, 1988; Hamilton & Rubin, 1992; Lull, 1980; Perse & Rubin, 1990; A. M. Rubin et al., 1985; A. M. Rubin & Rubin, 1982a, 1989; R. B. Rubin & Rubin, 1982;

Windahl, Hojerback, & Hedinsson, 1986). Researchers have examined the role of life position, lifestyle, personality, loneliness, isolation, need for cognition, religiosity, media deprivation, family-viewing environment, and the like.

- A fourth direction has been linking gratifications sought and obtained when using media or their content. This research has addressed how people's motives for using media are satisfied. Authors have proposed transactional, discrepancy, and expectancy-value models of media uses and gratifications (e.g., Babrow, 1989; Babrow & Swanson, 1988; Donohew, Palmgreen, & Rayburn, 1987; Galloway & Meek, 1981; Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1979, 1982, 1985; Palmgreen, Wenner, & Rayburn, 1980, 1981; Rayburn & Palmgreen, 1984; Wenner, 1982, 1986). For example, expectancy-value models predict gratification seeking from communication channels based on an expected outcome. They stress the consideration of expectancy and evaluative thresholds for behaviors, and comparisons of the congruence of expectation and outcome.
- A fifth direction has assessed how variations in background variables, motives, and exposure affect outcomes such as perceptions of relationship, cultivation, involvement, parasocial interaction, satisfaction, and political knowledge (e.g., Alexander, 1985; Carveth & Alexander, 1985; Garramone, 1984; Perse, 1990a; Perse & Rubin, 1988; A. M. Rubin, 1985; R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987). Others, for example, have observed that motivation for watching violent television content, personality characteristics such as locus of control, and experience with crime have been underemphasized in research and policy when considering viewer aggression (Haridakis, 2002; Haridakis & Rubin, 2003).
- A sixth direction includes theoretical developments in thinking and extensions that link uses and gratifications with other communication perspectives. For example, Slater's (2007) reinforcing spirals perspective is based on positive feedback loops in general systems theory, whereby attitudinal and behavioral outcomes of media use would feed back to influence people's selection of and attention to media content. In considering new measures of gratifications sought as outcome expectations, Peters, Rickes, Jockel, Criegern, and Deursen (2006) extended uses and gratifications in a social-cognitive framework of the model of media attendance (see LaRose & Eastin, 2004). And, in finding that habituated use of a public safety campaign predicted a third-person effect, Banning (2007) suggested uses and gratifications might be the root cause of third-person effects findings in other studies. Similarly, Haridakis and Rubin (2005) found locus of control and viewer motives to be important antecedents of third-person perceptual bias, suggesting an expansion of third-person effects research from perspectives such as uses and gratifications. Others have suggested models linking uses and gratifications and perspectives such as cultivation (Bilandzic & Rossler, 2004) or information processing (Eveland, 2004).
- A seventh direction has considered the method, reliability, and validity for measuring motivation (e.g., Babrow, 1988; Dobos & Dimmick, 1988; McDonald & Glynn, 1984).

MEDIA USES AND EFFECTS

Some have proposed a synthesis of uses-and-gratifications and media-effects research (e.g., Rosengren & Windahl, 1972; A. M. Rubin & Windahl, 1986; Windahl, 1981). The primary difference between the two traditions is that a media-effects researcher

"most often looks at the mass communication process from the communicator's end," whereas a uses researcher begins with the audience member (Windahl, 1981, p. 176). Windahl argued that it is more beneficial to stress the similarities rather than the differences of the two traditions. One such similarity is that both uses and effects seek to explain the outcomes or consequences of communication such as attitude or perception formation (e.g., cultivation, third-person effects), behavioral changes (e.g., dependency), and societal effects (e.g., knowledge gaps). Uses and gratifications does so, however, recognizing the greater potential for audience initiative, choice, and activity.

Audience Activity and Media Orientations

Audience activity is the core concept in uses and gratifications. It refers to the utility, intentionality, selectivity, and involvement of the audience with the media (Blumler, 1979). Uses-and-gratifications researchers regard audience members to be variably—not universally—active; they are not equally active at all times. According to Windahl (1981), depicting the audience "as superational and very selective . . . invites criticism" (p. 176). A valid view of audience activeness lies on a continuum between being passive (and, perhaps, being more directly influenced by media or messages) and being active (and, perhaps, making more rational decisions in accepting or rejecting messages) (A. M. Rubin, 1993).

Levy and Windahl (1984) tested the proposition that audience activity is variable and identified three activity periods for Swedish television viewers: previewing, during viewing, and postviewing. Although they found preactivity or intention to watch to be weakly related to entertainment media use, it was strongly related to surveillance use. They argued that viewers actively seek news to gain information, but may not actively seek diversion. Lin (1993) noted that strongly motivated viewers engage in more activities and experience greater satisfaction when watching television as compared with weakly motivated viewers. She also found that the diversification of the home-media environment affects activity levels (Lin, 1994). Because they present more options, more diversified media households (e.g., greater cable, satellite, and computer opportunities) enable greater audience choice and selectivity.

Some researchers have approached motives as interrelated structures—or complex viewing orientations—rather than isolated entities (e.g., Abelman, 1987; Perse, 1986, 1990a; Perse & Rubin, 1988; A. M. Rubin, 1981b, 1983, 1984; A. M. Rubin & Perse, 1987a; A. M. Rubin & Rubin, 1982b). As such, Finn (1992) suggested proactive (mood management) and passive (social compensation) dimensions of media use. McDonald (1990) noted that two orientations—surveillance (i.e., needing to know about the community and world) and communication utility (i.e., using information in social interaction)—explained much of the variance in news-seeking behavior. Abelman and Atkin (1997) also supported interrelated patterns of television use by identifying three viewer archetypes: medium-, station-, and network-oriented viewers. Some of these approaches stem from work that suggested that media use could be described as primarily ritualized (diversionary) or instrumental (utilitarian) in nature (e.g., A. M. Rubin, 1984).

Ritualized and instrumental media orientations tell us about the amount and type of media use, and about one's media attitudes and expectations. These orientations reflect the complexity of audience activity. *Ritualized* use is using a medium more habitually to consume time and for diversion. It entails greater exposure to and affinity with the medium. Ritualized use suggests utility but an otherwise less active or less goal-directed state. *Instrumental* use is seeking certain message content for informational reasons.

It entails greater exposure to news and informational content and perceiving that content to be realistic. Instrumental use is active and purposive. It suggests utility, intention, selectivity, and involvement.

To a large extent, activity depends on the social context, potential for interaction, and attitude. Elements such as mobility and loneliness are important. Reduced mobility and greater loneliness, for example, result in ritualized media orientations and greater reliance on the media (Perse & Rubin, 1990; A. M. Rubin & Rubin, 1982a). Attitudinal dispositions such as affinity and perceived realism also are important. Attitudes affect our media expectations and how we perceive and interpret messages. They filter media and message selection and use. This is consistent with Swanson's (1979) notion of the importance of "the perceptual activity of interpreting or creating meaning for messages" (p. 42).

Potter (1986) and others have argued that such outcomes as cultivation are mediated by the differential perceptions people have about how realistic the media content is. For example, in one study we found watching action/adventure programs predicted a cultivation effect of feeling less safe, whereas watching television, in general, led to perceptions of greater safety (A. M. Rubin, Perse, & Taylor, 1988). Stronger cultivation effects were evident when media content was seen as being realistic. Perceived realism was also seen as a key element in explaining more variance in the enjoyment of reality-based versus fictional programming (Nabi, Stitt, Halford, & Finnerty, 2006).

Blumler (1979) argued that activity means imperviousness to influence. In other words, activity is a deterrent to media effects. This conclusion, though, is questionable. Activity plays an important intervening role in the effects process. Because activity denotes a more selective, attentive, and involved state of media use, it may actually be a catalyst to message effects. In two studies we found more active, instrumental television use led to cognitive (i.e., thinking about content), affective (i.e., parasocially interacting with media personalities), and behavioral (i.e., discussing content with others) involvement with news and soap opera programs (A. M. Rubin & Perse, 1987a, 1987b). Later, we observed that *different* activities could be catalysts or deterrents to media effects (Kim & Rubin, 1997). Activities—such as selectivity, attention, and involvement—facilitate such outcomes as parasocial interaction, cultivation, and communication satisfaction. Other activities—such as avoiding messages, being distracted, and being skeptical—inhibit these outcomes because they reduce message awareness and comprehension.

Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that differences in audience activity—as evidenced in ritualized and instrumental orientations—have important implications for media effects. In other words, as Windahl (1981) argued, using a medium instrumentally or ritualistically leads to different outcomes. Instrumental orientations may produce stronger attitudinal and behavioral effects than ritualized orientations because instrumental orientations incorporate greater motivation to use and involvement with messages. Involvement suggests a state of readiness to select, interpret, and respond to messages.

Dependency and Functional Alternatives

According to McIlwraith, Jacobvitz, Kubey, and Alexander (1991), watching television can relax and distract viewers and decrease negative affect, and some viewers may excessively depend on television because they anticipate this effect. The notion of media

dependency is grounded in the availability and utilization of functional alternatives (Rosengren & Windahl, 1972). Dependency on a particular medium results from the motives we have to communicate, the strategies we use to obtain gratifications, and the restricted availability of functional alternatives. It mediates how we use the media and the potential impact of the media (e.g., Lindlof, 1986; Windahl et al., 1986).

On one hand, dependency results from an environment that restricts the availability of functional alternatives and produces a certain pattern of media use. Dotan and Cohen (1976), for example, found that fulfilling cognitive needs was most important and fulfilling escapist and affective needs was least important when using television, radio, and newspapers during and following the October, 1973, Middle East war. People turned to television and radio during a war-time crisis to fulfill most needs, especially surveillance needs. Recently, Diddi and LaRose (2006) suggested that strength of habit is the strongest predictor of news consumption.

Besides societal events and structure, individual life-position attributes—such as health, mobility, interaction, activity, life satisfaction, and economic security—also affect the availability and choice of communication alternatives, our motives to communicate, our strategies for seeking information and diversion, and dependency on a medium. In two studies of a life-position construct we called *contextual age*, for example, we found a negative link between one's degree of self-reliance and television dependency: the less healthy and less mobile depended more on television than did the healthier and more mobile (A. M. Rubin & Rubin, 1982a; R. B. Rubin & Rubin, 1982). Miller and Reese (1982) argued that "dependency on a medium appears to enhance the opportunity for that medium to have predicted effects" (p. 245). In their case, political effects (i.e., activity and efficacy) were more evident from exposure to a relied-upon medium.

We also proposed a model to highlight the links among media uses and effects. The *uses and dependency model* depicts links between one's needs and motives to communicate, strategies for seeking information, uses of media and functional alternatives, and media dependency (A. M. Rubin & Windahl, 1986). According to the model, needs and motives that produce narrow information-seeking strategies might lead to dependency on certain channels. In turn, dependency leads to other attitudinal or behavioral effects, and feeds back to alter other relationships in the society. Different outcomes would result from ritualized use of a medium and instrumental use of media content.

In one application of this model to development communication in Sierra Leone, Taylor (1992) found those who were dependent on radio for information about development used that medium instrumentally—they planned to acquire information and sought stimulating information from the radio. Those who were dependent on newspapers for information about development also used that medium instrumentally—they intentionally sought and selected stimulating information from the newspapers. As compared with the less dependent, Taylor observed that those who were more dependent on radio showed greater interest and participation in national development.

Social and Psychological Circumstances

The concept of media dependency highlights the interface of personal and mediated communication, including the importance of social and psychological circumstances—that is, individual differences—in media effects. Resourceful communicators have "a wider availability of alternative channels, a broader conception of the potential channels, and the capacity for using more diversified message- and interaction-seeking strategies"

(A. M. Rubin & Rubin, 1985, p. 39). They might, for example, use several available channels—including e-mail—to maintain their interpersonal relationships (Stafford, Kline, & Dimmick, 1999). Resourceful communicators are less likely to be dependent on any given person or communication channel. Effects should be more pronounced for those who come to depend on the messages of a particular medium such as talk radio or the Internet.

For example, telephoning a talk-radio host to express one's views is an accessible and nonthreatening alternative to interpersonal communication for those talk-radio listeners with restricted mobility, who are apprehensive about face-to-face interaction, and who feel others do not value what they have to say in interpersonal encounters (Armstrong & Rubin, 1989; also see Avery, Ellis, & Glover, 1978; Turow, 1974). Similarly, the Internet is a functional alternative to face-to-face communication for those who are anxious about interpersonal interaction and do not find such interaction to be rewarding (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; cf. Flaherty, Pearce, & Rubin, 1998). On the other hand, those who are extroverted and agreeable might prefer conversation with others instead of media (Finn, 1997). Such individual differences contribute to communication preferences and to the opportunity for certain sources to influence people.

Media uses and effects, then, depend on the potential for interaction and the context of interaction. This is heavily influenced by people's social and psychological circumstances, including lifestyle, life position, and personality (e.g., Finn & Gorr, 1988; A. M. Rubin & Rubin, 1982a). Life satisfaction, mobility, loneliness, and mood, to name a few factors, can determine media behavior. For example, crime victims who experience greater psychological distress and lower levels of felt social support use television to seek **companionship**, presumably to compensate for limited social interaction (Minnebo, 2005). **Reduced** life **satisfaction** and **anxiety** contribute to escapist television viewing (Conway & Rubin, 1991; A. M. Rubin, 1985), and restricted mobility and greater loneliness result in **ritualized media behavior** and reliance on television (Perse & Rubin, 1990; A. M. Rubin & Rubin, 1982a). Those who are heavily reliant on television—that is, self-reported television addicts—have been found to be neurotic, introverted, and easily bored, watching television to forget unpleasant thoughts, to regulate moods, and to fill time (McIlwraith, 1998). In addition, mood influences media choice so that boredom leads to selecting exciting content and stress to selecting relaxing content (Bryant & Zillmann, 1984).

Differences in personality, cognition, social affiliation, and motivation affect exposure, cultivation, satisfaction, parasocial interaction, identification, and content attention and elaboration (e.g., Carveth & Alexander, 1985; Perse, 1990b, 1992; R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987). Krcmar and Kean (2005) found that personality factors, including neuroticism, extroversion, openness, and agreeableness, are differentially related to watching or liking violent television content. Krcmar and Greene (1999) found that disinhibited adolescents tend to watch violent television programs, but **sensation seekers** who exhibit risky behavior are unlike those **who watch violent content**. Johnson (1995) noted that four motivations—gore, thrill, independent, and problem watching—affect adolescents' cognitive and affective responses to viewing graphic horror films. Harwood (1999) found that, by selecting programs that feature young characters, young adults increase age-group identification. Besides factors such as locus of control, gender differences also influence media exposure and mediate selection and impact. Haridakis (2006), for example, found motivation to be a more important predictor of viewer aggression for males than for females. Lucas and Sherry (2004) found that women are less motivated than men to play video games in social situations.

CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTIONS

Uses and gratifications sees communication influence as being socially and psychologically constrained and affected by individual differences and choice. Variations in expectations, attitudes, activity, and involvement lead to different behaviors and outcomes. Personality, social context, motivation, and availability—based on culture and economic, political, and social structure—all affect the potential influence of media and their messages.

In 1974 Katz and his colleagues argued, “hardly any substantive or empirical effort has been devoted to connecting gratifications and effects” (p. 28). Five years later, Blumler (1979) echoed those sentiments: “We lack a well-formed perspective about which gratifications sought from which forms of content are likely to facilitate which effects” (p. 16). Although some precision has been lacking, this state of affairs has changed during the past three decades as investigators have sought to link social and psychological antecedents, motivation, attitudes, activity and involvement, behavior, and outcomes. More focused consideration of media orientations and audience activity has produced renewed interest in examining the place of motivation in explaining communication processes and outcomes. Yet, we still need increased specificity, especially as our attention continues to turn to newer media.

Blumler (1979) summarized cognitive, diversionary, and personal identity uses of the media. He proposed three hypotheses about media effects based on these uses: (a) cognitive motivation will facilitate information gain, (b) diversion or escape motivation will facilitate audience perceptions of the accuracy of social portrayals in entertainment media, and (c) personal identity motivation will promote reinforcement effects.

Such hypotheses have received some attention to date. For example, we have learned that cognitive or instrumental motivation leads to seeking information and to cognitive involvement (Perse, 1990a; A. M. Rubin, 1983, 1984; A. M. Rubin & Perse, 1987b; A. M. Rubin & Rubin, 1982b). Levy and Windahl (1984), for example, found that increased planning and intention to watch television was strongly related to surveillance use. Vincent and Basil (1997) found that increased surveillance needs resulted in greater use of all news media among a college-student sample. And researchers have observed links between cognitive or instrumental information-seeking motivation and information gain during a political campaign (McLeod & Becker, 1974), about political candidates (Atkin & Heald, 1976), and about candidates’ stands on issues. They found that public affairs media use and interest lead to increased political knowledge (Petty, 1988).

The second hypothesis about diversionary motivation and acceptance of role portrayals, though, must recognize the mediating role of attitudes and experiences in media effects. We have learned that attitudes and experience affect perceptions. Some studies support cultivation effects contingent on the perceived reality of content (Potter, 1986; A. M. Rubin et al., 1988), audience members’ personal experiences with crime (Weaver & Wakshlag, 1986), and media utility and selectivity (Perse, 1986). There is much room for researchers to expand attention to links between attitudes, motivation, and involvement, on one hand, and perceptions of media content and role portrayals, on the other.

As to the third hypothesis, we have seen that media function as alternatives to personal interaction for the immobile, dissatisfied, and apprehensive (Armstrong & Rubin, 1989; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Perse & Rubin, 1990; A. M. Rubin & Rubin, 1982a). In addition, social utility motivation might lead to a reduced sense of parasocial interaction with television personalities (A. M. Rubin & Perse, 1987a).

One fruitful path has been the study of personal involvement in the media uses and effects process. Involvement influences information acquisition and processing. It signifies attention, participation, cognitive processing, affect, and emotion. It also has led to the study of *parasocial interaction*, emphasizing the role of media personalities in real and perceived relationships with audience members. Parasocial interaction accentuates the relevance of interpersonal concepts such as attraction, similarity, homophily, impression management, and empathy to understanding the role and influence of media and newer technologies. Harrison (1997), for example, argued that interpersonal attraction to thin media characters promotes eating disorders in women college students. And O’Sullivan (2000) considered the role of mediated communication channels (e.g., telephone, answering machine, electronic mail) for managing impressions in relationships.

Over 50 years ago, Horton and Wohl (1956) proposed that television and radio personalities foster an illusionary parasocial relationship with viewers and listeners. Parasocial interaction is a sense of friendship with these media personae. It suggests an audience member’s felt affective or emotional relationship with the media personality (Rosengren & Windahl, 1972; A. M. Rubin & Perse, 1987a), which may be experienced as “seeking guidance from a media persona, seeing media personalities as friends, imagining being part of a favorite program’s social world, and desiring to meet media performers” (A. M. Rubin et al., 1985, pp. 156–157). Audience members often see particular media personalities in a manner parallel to their interpersonal friends—as natural, down-to-earth, attractive people holding similar attitudes and values. Media formats and techniques encourage and promote the development of parasocial relationships. As with other media, audience members must choose to participate or interact.

We have looked at parasocial interaction with television newscasters and soap-opera characters (A. M. Rubin & Perse, 1987a, 1987b), with talk-radio hosts (A. M. Rubin & Step, 2000), and with favorite television personalities (Conway & Rubin, 1991; R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987). We developed a measure to attempt to gauge the extent of the relationships (A. M. Rubin et al., 1985; A. M. Rubin & Perse, 1987a). Basically, involved viewers, not necessarily heavy viewers, appear to form parasocial relationships.

Parasocial interaction suggests involved and instrumental media use, that is, a more active orientation to media use (e.g., Kim & Rubin, 1997; Perse, 1990b; A. M. Rubin & Perse, 1987a). It has been linked to being socially and task-attracted to a favorite television personality (R. B. Rubin & McHugh, 1987), to reducing uncertainty in relationships (Perse & Rubin, 1989), and to attitude homophily with television personalities (Turner, 1993).

As affective and emotional involvement, parasocial interaction affects media attitudes, behaviors, and expectations, and should accentuate potential effects. For example, in an analysis of critical responses of British viewers, Livingstone (1988) suggested the personally involving nature of soap operas has important implications for media effects. Brown and Basil (1995) found that emotional involvement with a media celebrity mediates persuasive communication and increases personal concern about health messages and risky sexual behavior. Also, we found parasocially interacting with a public-affairs talk-radio host predicts planned and frequent listening, treating the host as an important source of information, and feeling the host influences how listeners feel about and act upon societal issues (A. M. Rubin & Step, 2000).

Windahl (1981) argued that a synthesis would help overcome limitations and criticisms of both media uses and media effects traditions. Such a synthesis recognizes that: media perceptions and expectations guide people’s behavior; motivation is derived from

needs, interests, and externally imposed constraints; there are functional alternatives to media consumption; there are important interpersonal dimensions to the media experience; and audience activity, involvement, and attitudes about media content play an important role in media effects.

Since the early days of media-use typologies, we have sought to address theoretical links among media uses and effects. We have learned more about audience members as variably active and involved communicators. We have seen the contributions of interpersonal communication for understanding media uses and effects. The media uses and effects process remains complex, requiring careful attention to antecedent, mediating, and consequent conditions. Single-variable explanations continue to have appeal to some researchers and policymakers. However, such explanations distract us from the conceptual complexity of media effects. As Ruggiero (2000) argued, uses and gratifications has been "a cutting-edge theoretical approach" in the early stages of new communication media. Uses and gratifications will continue to be especially valuable as we seek to understand the newer and continually evolving, interactive digital environment.

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