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Uses and Gratifications of Elihu Katz

A First Look at Communication Theory

9th edition

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Uses and Gratifications

Instead of asking “What do media do to people?”
Uses and Gratifications

Ask “What do people do with media?”
Five Key Assumptions

- People Use Media for Their Own Particular Purposes
- People Seek to Gratify Needs
- Media Compete for Your Attention and Time
- Media Affect Different People Differently
- People Can Accurately Report Their Media Use and Motivation
People Use Media for Their Own Particular Purposes

- The study of how media affect people must take account of the fact that people deliberately use media for particular purposes.

  - Uses and gratifications known for deliberate shift away from notion that powerful media messages have uniform effects on large audiences.
Say no to government corruption. Down with Ben Ali.

Meet in Tahrir Square 8:00 p.m. tonight.

Take back our country. Qaddafi must go!

No more dictators! March tomorrow 10 a.m.

Pro-democracy demonstration Thursday.

Hey, baby, for a good time call your Congressman!
People Seek to Gratify Needs

- Deliberate choices people make using media presumably based on gratifications they seek from that media

- **Straight-line effect of media** – specific effect on behavior that is predicted from media content alone – with little consideration of the differences in people who consume that content.
Media competes with each other for your time as well as other activities that don’t involve media exposure.
Media Affect Different People Differently

- Same media message may not affect everyone the same way
  - Griffin’s studies on effects of frightening media confirmed that media affect different people differently
  - Twitter and the Swine flu
People Can Accurately Report Their Media Use and Motivation

- Long tradition in communication research that asks people to report the amount of time they devote to different kinds of media
  - This tenet of the theory continues to be debated
  - Example—how do you code “because I like it?”
Rubin developed 8 motivations

- Passing time
- Companionship
- Escape
- Enjoyment
- Social interaction
- Relaxation
- Information
- Excitement
As of January 2014

- 90% of American adults have a cell phone
- 58% of American adults have a smartphone
- 32% of American adults own an e-reader
- 42% of American adults own a tablet computer
## Cell phone activities
*The % of cell phone owners who use their cell phone to...*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>send or receive text messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>access the internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>send or receive email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>download apps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>get directions, recommendations, or other location-based information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>listen to music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>participate in a video call or video chat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>“check in” or share your location</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project Spring Tracking Survey, April 17 – May 19, 2013. N=2,076 cell phone owners. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. The margin of error for results based on all cell phone owners is +/- 2.4 percentage points.
Some 70% of all cell phone owners and 86% of smartphone owners have used their phones in the previous 30 days to perform at least one of the following activities:

**Coordinate a meeting or get-together** — 41% of cell phone owners have done this in the past 30 days.

**Solve an unexpected problem that they or someone else had encountered** — 35% have used their phones to do this in the past 30 days.

**Decide whether to visit a business, such as a restaurant** — 30% have used their phone to do this in the past 30 days.
Find information to help settle an argument they were having — 27% have used their phone to get information for that reason in the past 30 days.

Look up a score of a sporting event — 23% have used their phone to do that in the past 30 days.

Get up-to-the-minute traffic or public transit information to find the fastest way to get somewhere — 20% have used their phone to get that kind of information in the past 30 days.

Get help in an emergency situation — 19% have used their phone to do that in the past 30 days.
Media Dependency

What effect has media use had on your life?

LET'S PLAY A GAME
Parasocial Relationships—Using Media to Have a Fantasy Friend

**Parasocial relationship** — sense of friendship or emotional attachment that develops between TV viewers and media personalities

- Knowing which media consumers will form parasocial relationships can help researchers predict how media will affect different viewers in different ways
Critique: Heavy on Description and Light on Prediction?

- One criticism is that theory is a descriptive typology of media uses and gratifications
  - Theory is not overly complex, but relies on ability of people to accurately report reasons for their media use
  - Assumes users are active participants in the media choices they make