

## Uses and Gratifications Theory in Social network Sites Studies

Imane SEKKOUR<sup>1</sup>, Lelya CHAOU<sup>2</sup>,  
Université d'Alger3, sekkour.imane@univ-alger3.dz<sup>1</sup>  
Université d'Alger3, journalismitfc@yahoo.fr<sup>2</sup>

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### نظرية الاستخدامات والاشباعات في دراسات شبكات التواصل الاجتماعي

الملخص:

خلال الأربعينيات من القرن العشرين، أدى إدراك الفروق الفردية وعدم المساواة الاجتماعية وتصور السلوك المرتبط بوسائل الإعلام إلى بداية منظور جديد للعلاقة بين الجمهور ووسائل الإعلام. كان هذا تحولاً من الجمهور كعنصر سلبي في اختيار الرسائل المفضلة والإعلام، أي المتلقي السلبي وكان هذا رد فعل على مفهوم قوة وسائل الإعلام كما في نظرية الرصاصة، ونظرية نقل المعلومات في مرحلتين، حيث تركز نظرية الاستخدامات والاشباعات بناءً على افتراض الجمهور النشط على كيفية استجابة وسائل الإعلام لدوافع احتياجات الجمهور. أي ماذا يفعل الجمهور بوسائل الإعلام؟. سوف نتحدث في هذه المقالة عن التطورات التي طالت تكنولوجيات الإعلام والاتصال، والتي بدورها غيرت النظرة السائدة للجمهور السلبي إلى جمهور نشط وتفاعلي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نظرية الاستخدامات والاشباع؛ شبكات التواصل الاجتماعي؛ دراسات الجمهور؛ الجمهور.

**Abstract:**

During the 1940s, the perception of the consequences individual differences, social inequality and media-related behavior led to the beginning of a new perspective of the relationship between public and media. This was a shift from audience as a passive element to the selection of preferred messages and the media, and a reaction to the concept of the power of the media as in bullet theory, the theory of transmission two step of information, and the theory of uses and saturation that based on the assumption of active audience focused on how the media responds to the motives of the needs of the public. What does the audience do in the media?

In this article we will talk about the transformation and the development of the media, which in turn changed the prevailing perception of the negative audience, to an active and interactive audience.

**Keywords:** Uses and Gratifications theory; social network site; audience studies; audience.

**Introduction**

Uses and gratifications theory is one of the most important functional theories that explain mass communication, it reflects an important shift in its research paths. If the previous communication research looks at the different effects of communication in its audience, it means that it is wondering what the communicator is doing in the public, but with the coming of Uses and Gratifications

theory, the question will be reversed to ask researchers what does the audience do with media?

Despite the application of the Uses and Gratifications theory to the case of Internet, most studies seem to be conducted either in the American or European context. Notably, a dark area prevails in the body of knowledge for an understanding on the application of this theory among the Internet users. Moreover, the application of this theory into web-specific scenarios remains scarce.

### **1- Overview of Uses and Gratifications theory:**

#### **1-1 Definition:**

"Uses and Gratifications Theory", is one of the theories of communications that focuses on social communications. This theory adapts a functionalistic approach to communications and media, and states that media's most important role is to fulfill the needs and motivations of the audience. Therefore, the more these needs are met, the more satisfaction is achieved. This theory is based on two core questions: 1) why are people attracted to certain media? and 2) what kind of satisfaction does media provide for people? (jafar & pegah, 2016). This theory initially focuses on the motifs of the audience and then analyzes the message and social system. In other words, this theory concentrates on how users seek media and to what extent they are satisfied with its type, content, and method of use. By answering the two mentioned questions in "Use and Gratification" the positive and negative outcomes of using specific media will be ultimately determined.

Various research using this theory have found it fruitful in understanding consumers' motivations and concerns for using various media such as radio, TV and electronic bulletins. In particular, this theory seeks to recognise the important role of the individual in the use of mass media by focusing on what people do with mass media. (ting, 2012)

Classifying the thirty-five needs according to their resource and mode, Katz formed five meaningful groupings.

1. Needs related to strengthening information, knowledge, and understanding these can be called cognitive needs;

2. Needs related to strengthening aesthetic, pleasurable and emotional experience or affective needs;

3. Needs related to strengthening credibility, confidence, stability, and status these combine both cognitive and affective elements and can be labeled integrative needs;

4. Needs related to strengthening contact with family, friends, and the world. These can also be seen as performing an integrative function;

5. Needs related to escape or tension-release which we define in terms of the weakening of contact with self and one's social roles. (Elihu, michael, & hadassah, 1973)

Therefore, based on the mentioned assumptions, Rubin (1994) suggests that the primary objective of the Uses and Gratifications theory is to explain and understand the psychological needs which shape people's reason for using the media and the reasons which motivate them to engage in certain media use behaviors for gratifications that fulfill their

inherent needs, including the identification of the positive and negative consequences of individual media use.

### **1-2 the highlights steps of Uses and Gratifications s theory:**

The theory of Uses and Gratifications has long been employed since 1940s to analyze the impact of mass media on various subjects of the study . This approach originated from the areas of communications research, where it was used to examine what attracts and retains the attention of audiences to a particular media (newspaper, radio) and the kinds of matters or topics that fulfilled their sociological and psychological needs. The concept of Uses and Gratifications was first given by Herzogg (1944). (saima, kamran, & muhammad, 2017), we present the highlights steps of this theory:

– **1950S AND 1960S RESEARCH** : Despite disagreement by communication scholars as to the precise roots of the approach, in the next phase of Uses and Gratifications research, during the 1950s and 1960s, researchers identified and operational zed many social and psychological variables that were presumed to be the precursors of different patterns of consumption of gratification. Accordingly, Schramm, Lyle, and Parker (1961) concluded that children’s use of television was influenced by individual mental ability and relationships with parents and peers. Katz and Foulkes (1962) conceptualized mass media use as escape. Klapper (1963) stressed the importance of analyzing the consequences of use rather than simply labeling the use as earlier researchers had done. Mendelsohn (1964) identified several generalized functions of radio listening: companionship, bracketing the day, changing mood,

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counteracting loneliness or boredom, providing useful news and information, allowing vicarious participation in events, and aiding social interaction. Gerson (1966) introduced the variable of race and suggested that race was important in predicting how adolescents used the media. Greenberg and Dominick (1969) concluded that race and social class predicted how teenagers used television as an informal source of learning. (Ehikwe & eloka, 2013)

– **1970S RESEARCH :** Until the 1970s, uses and gratification research concentrated on gratifications sought, excluding outcomes, or gratifications obtained. During the 1970s, Uses and Gratifications researchers intently examined audience motivations and developed additional typologies of the uses people made of the media to gratify social and psychological needs. This may partially have been in response to a strong tide of criticism from other mass communication scholars. Critics such as Elliott (1974), Swanson (1977), and Lometti, Reeves, and Bybee (1977) stressed that uses gratifications theory continued to be challenged by four serious conceptual problems: **(a)** a vague conceptual framework, **(b)** a lack of precision in major concepts, **(c)** a confused explanatory apparatus, and **(d)** a failure to consider audiences' perceptions of media content. Uses and Gratifications researchers produced multiple responses. Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas (1973) assembled a comprehensive list of social and psychological needs said to be satisfied by exposure to mass media. Rosengren (1974), attempting to theoretically refine Uses and Gratifications, suggested that certain basic needs interact with personal characteristics and the social environment of the individual

to produce perceived problems and perceived solutions. Those problems and solutions constitute different motives for gratification behavior that can come from using the media or other activities. Together media use or other behaviors produce gratification (or non gratification) that has an impact on the individual or society, thereby starting the process anew. Seeking to more closely define the relation between psychological motives and communication gratifications. (Weiyan, 2015)

– **1980S AND 1990S RESEARCH** : in this step Rubin (1983) noted that gratifications researchers were beginning to generate a valid response to critics. He concluded that his colleagues were making a systematic attempt to **(a)** conduct modified replications or extensions of studies, **(b)** refine methodology, **(c)** comparatively analyze the findings of separate investigations, and **(d)** treat mass media use as an integrated communication and social phenomenon.

Examples include Eastman's (1979) analysis of the multivariate interactions among television viewing functions and lifestyle attributes, Ostman and Jeffers's (1980) examination of the associations among television viewing motivations and potential for lifestyle traits and television attitudes to predict viewing motivations, Bantz's (1982) exploration of the differences between general medium and specific program television viewing motivations and the comparability of research findings, Rubin's (1981) consideration of viewing motivations scale validity and the comparability of research results in Uss and Gratifications research, and Palmgreen and Rayburn's (1985) empirical

comparison of alternative gratification models. Likewise, Windahl (1981) also sought to advance Uses and Gratifications theoretically. In his “Uses and Gratifications at the Crossroads,” he argued that the primary difference between the traditional effects approach and the Uses and Gratifications approach is that a media effects researcher usually examines mass communication from the perspective of the communicator, whereas the Uses and Gratifications researcher uses the audience as a point of departure. (Ruggiero, 2000)

Believing it was more beneficial to emphasize similarities than differences, Windahl coined the term cons effects and argued for a synthesis of the two approaches.

Thus, he suggested, observations that are partly the results of content use itself and partly the results of content mediated by use would serve as a more useful perspective. Windahl’s approach served to link an earlier Uses and Gratifications approach to more recent research.

## **2- Social network sites:**

### **2-1- Definition:**

The concept of Social Network sites is top of the agenda for many business executives today. Decision makers, as well as consultants, try to identify ways in which firms can make profitable use of applications such as Wikipedia, YouTube, Facebook, Second Life, and Twitter. Yet despite this interest, there seems to be very limited understanding of what the term “Social Media” exactly means; this article intends to provide some clarification. We begin by describing the concept of Social Media, and discuss how it differs from related concepts



such as Web 2.0 and User Generated Content. Based on this definition, we then provide a classification of Social Media which groups applications currently subsumed under the generalized term into more specific categories by characteristic: collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds. (Kawsar, 2014). Also Social Networking Sites (SNSs), as forms of communication have gained immense popularity. The growth of the Internet and the subsequent advent and development of the World Wide Web laid the foundation of the much touted online communications SNSs are defined as: Web-based services that allow individuals to **(1)** construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, **(2)** articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and **(3)** view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (chatora, 2010)

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary online, Social work site is defined as “forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and micro blogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos).”

Wikinvest defined Social network sites as, “describes websites that allow users to share content, media, etc. Common examples are the popular social networking sites like Friendster, Facebook, MySpace, etc. Social media also includes YouTube, Photobucket, Flickr, and other sites aimed at photo and video sharing. News aggregation and online reference sources, examples of which are Digg and

Wikipedia, are also counted in the social media bucket. Micro- blogging sites such as twitter can also be included as social media.” (Varinder & Priya, 2012)

### **2-2- Characteristics social network site:**

Social network site is best understood as a group of new kinds of online media, which share most or all of the following characteristics:

**Participation:** social media encourages contributions and feedback from everyone who is interested. It blurs the line between media and audience.

**Openness:** most social media services are open to feedback and participation. They encourage voting, comments and the sharing of information. There are rarely any barriers to accessing and making use of content – password-protected content is frowned on.

**Conversation:** whereas traditional media is about “broadcast” (content transmitted or distributed to an audience) social media is better seen as a two-way conversation.

**Community:** social media allows communities to form quickly and communicate effectively. Communities share common interests, such as a love of photography, a political issue or a favorite TV show.

**Connectedness:** Most kinds of social media thrive on their connectedness, making use of links to other sites, resources and people. (Mayfield, 2008)

### **3- Uses and Gratifications in social network site studies:**

Past researchers have tried to identify the psychological and behavioral aspect of Internet users to recognize the underlying motivations for Internet usage. According to Kaye and Johnson (2001), users of the Web are more actively involved and engaged in using the Internet because of its interactivity. Since one of the key strengths attributed to the Internet is its interactivity and since an active audience is the core concept of the U & G theory, the U & G theory is regarded as the most effective theoretical basis for studying this medium.

This is supported by Ruggiero (2000) as the rapid growth of the Internet has strengthened the potency of the U & G theory because this medium requires a higher level of interactivity from its users in comparison with other traditional media. Indeed, past research has also suggested that the Internet is 'intentionally consumed' as audiences must make purposive choices about which site to visit. (ting, 2012)

Research has demonstrated that SMS Uses and Gratifications s vary as a function of user characteristics, such as age, gender, and personality. The Uses and Gratifications s can also depend on the type of SMS engaged in. For example, Facebook can be used to satisfy the need to belong and for self-presentation; Instagram can be used for self-expression and social interaction, surveillance/knowledge about others, documentation, coolness, and creativity; and Snapchat can be used for communication with the immediate environment. Uses and Gratifications Theory helps explain the gratifications sought and obtained in the use of social media, and also shows that these gratifications differ according to

individual characteristics. (kagan, saleem, sule, & mark, 2018)

### **3-1- Social network site and audience:**

Exploration of the relation between what's technologically new and what's socially new generates a new research agenda for media audiences. Audiences are significant for new media research in two respects:

**First**, the 'implied audience' the audience as presumed, imagined or mythologised plays a key, if often unacknowledged, role in the discourses surrounding new media (livingston s. , 1998). For example, audiences may be implicitly construed as participants in and beneficiaries of a new democracy or as victims of a new and highly manipulable panoptic on. The challenge of applying empirical methods to public speculation, whether utopian or dystopian, is stimulating many researchers to begin the project of mapping new media audiences. This approach takes its starting point, therefore, less from media theory than from varieties of public imagination concerning the audience - are cyber friendships 'real', are children becoming video games 'addicts', who are the 'information poor', will e-commerce alter the domestic gendered division of labor.

**Second**, empirical research on audiences is ever more important for new media research. As audiences become less predictable, more fragmented or more variable in their engagement with media, understanding the audience is even more important for theories of social shaping, design, markets and diffusion than, perhaps, was true for older media. Successfully identifying the audience represents the Holy

Grail without which no new medium any economic or social importance can emerge. For many of the same reasons that commercial pressures to 'know' the audience are growing, the academic community too must understand how audiences play a role in both the social shaping of technologies and their appropriation, consumption and impact. (Livingston, 1999) Here social researchers can draw on theory and research on the introduction of previously 'new' media, although it is debatable whether new media represent a new domain for old theories or whether new frameworks and questions are required. Perhaps problematically, because of the historical coincidence of the expansion of social science with the half century of the dominance of television, the grounding assumptions of most media theory make it primarily television theory, yet television is a medium very different in key respects from today's new media, especially when conceived as national, mass market, public service television.

#### **Conclusion:**

As commonly understood by gratifications researchers, the term "audience activity" postulates a voluntaristic and selective orientation by audiences toward the communication process. In brief, it suggests that media use is motivated by needs and goals that are defined by audience members themselves, and that active participation in the communication process may facilitate, limit, or otherwise influence the gratifications and effects associated with exposure. Current thinking also suggests that audience activity is best conceptualized as a variable construct, with audiences exhibiting varying kinds and degrees of activity, and the Emergence of the social network sites also changed

the concept of the audience in the old media, that why Researchers were interested by studying the Uses and Gratifications theory in the virtual context of communication.

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