

Audience reception researches: significance of involvement and reception patterns -field study-

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Abstract

The aim of this intervention is to point out the importance of two concepts in audience reception research which symbolize audience activity. The first concept is involvement and the second is reception patterns, we shed the light on various decoding models by analyzing the leading researches to understand audience interpretations of media content. We concluded that audience involvement and reception patterns carry different meanings and levels, which requires dealing with it theoretically and procedurally as a multi-dimensional variable and not a unified entity, this without underestimating the power of cultural producers and their role in framing audience interpretations.

Keywords : reception ; involvement ; audience ; reception patterns

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I- Introduction :

Many recent contributions published in international scientific journals specialized in media and communication research indicates the significant decline in the field. Especially after many important questions were left unanswered and there were no agreed questions about what needs researching, no settled—and therefore checkable—methodologies, no elaborated conceptual framework of what is meant by “an audience” (Barker, 2006, p132-141), this in addition to the ambiguity related to defining the general principles related to the different forms of audience responses and the relationship between audience reception and social situations, which some researchers respond to the absence of an acceptable and comprehensive model that shows the different reception patterns that viewers adopt in confronting A variety of programs, content and TV genres. Without a comprehensive conceptual framework, Morley says, audience ethnography runs the risk of relegating to anecdotal tales (Morley, 2006, p101-102) especially with the proliferation of studies that document divergent reception and glorify the unique readings of an active audience. Press has pointed out that we lack a common language that enables us to talk about audience reception in a coherent manner, which results in not placing audience readings, whether typical (preferred) or differentiated (unique) in their appropriate context and in relation to all interpretation possibilities (Press, 2006, p93-100). Therefore, within the limits of this intervention, we will try to analyze some researches that we have tried to combine with their contributions to provide a coherent perception of the question of audience reception, focusing on both the concept of involvement and the patterns of reception. So, from the foregoing, we ask the following question: What is the importance of both the concept of involvement and the patterns of reception in the audience's reception research, and what is its theoretical and methodological usefulness for the field?

I.1. Research issues of audience studies:

Several study results confirms that viewers shows activeness in dealings with television, and that engage in behaviours that allow them to feel that they are in control of their surroundings, and strongly supported the idea that “*audience members form their personal experiences with media.*” The concept of “Audience Activity” represents a key variable in understanding the influence of media, and it means “the cognitive, affective, and behavioral audience involvement with the media use process. It also includes that the use of technologies and the reception of their contents are controlled and directed by the goals, will, and selectivity of the user. Bauer (1960, 1963, 1964) and other researchers contributed to transferring the model from administrative approaches towards the receiver-oriented research perspectives or studies that care and shed light on the receiver.

But the difficulty here, as Morley points out, is centered on widely accepted rules that are based on anecdotal evidence with little systematic verification of unique patterns of audience reception based on activity and even creativity, so it would be unwise to build on special cases and conclusions to talk about a general rule that includes all audiences with their differences. As a result, researchers tend to adopt practical models that allow identifying the similarities and differences in the audience's reception of the contents they encounter in the multiple social and cultural contexts to which they belong.

Audience reception research is based on three focal points. The first focuses on the relationship between audience reception and the social and demographic membership of groups, and was inspired by the work of Stuart Hall who attempted to define -how the structures of subcultures within the audience (Hall, 1980, p128-138), and the sharing of various cultural codes and competencies within the audience and Various groups and classes- work on structuring decoding messages for different sections of the audience (Morley, 1980, p3). Studies have also proceeded based on Morley's suggestion that the socioeconomic class is the most important Hall (1980) factor in producing distinctive clustering in audience reception (e.g. Press, 1989 & 1991a; Seiter, Borchers, Kreutzner & Warth, 1989; Jensen, 1990 & 1995; Kim, 2004) Other research has focused on gender role (Hobson, 1980; Morley, 1986; Brown, Childers, Bauman, & Koch, 1990; Livingstone, 1994; Zwaga, 1994) race and ethnicity (Brown & Schulze, 1990; Jhally & Lewis, 1992; Schlesinger, Dobash, Dobash & Weaver, 1992; Gillespie, 1995; Hunt, 1997) and age (Comstock, Chaffee, Katzman, McCombs & Roberts, 1978; Barwise & Ehrenberg, 1988; Press, 1991b; Willis, 1995; Riggs, 1996)

Moreover, other researches has highlighted the relationships between divergent reception patterns and social group membership that disrupt traditional social groups, including political interests (Morley, 1980a; Corner, Richardson & Fenton, 1990a and 1990b; Roscoe et al., 1995), Political beliefs (Condit, 1989; Press, 1991a; Liebes & Ribak, 1994) experience of male violence (Schlesinger, Dobash, Dobash & Weaver, 1992) as well as degree of female consciousness (Ford & Latour, 1993) and sexual orientations (Cohen, 1991; Feuer, 1995) religious culture (Hamilton & Rubin, 1992; Stout, 1994; Valenti & Stout, 1996) also individual psychological characteristics (Livingstone, 1990, p6).

The second focus of research focused on examining the role of cultural location and social identity in shaping the nature of the encounter between foreign cultural texts and local audiences (e.g. Liebes, 1984; Ang, 1985; Katz & Liebes, 1985; Michaels; Michelle, 1998; Liebes & Katz, 1989 and 1990; Wilson, 1996a) These studies offers a counter-argument to the claims of US cultural imperialism, arguing that cross-cultural reception requires an ongoing and active process of mediation, selection and

transformation by differently located audiences. And so on, rather than simply disseminating textual meanings among indifferent foreign audiences, it turns out that local audiences understand American productions from their cultural position, appropriating those texts in ways that alter their meanings and sometimes even in ways that compromise the basic meaning (Ang, 1980, p8).

Hence the third central foci within audience reception research, focuses on researching how media frames defined at the point of text encoding set an agenda (priorities) for audience responses and interpretations (Corner et al., 1990a and 1990b; Philo, 1990, 1993 and 1995). This approach was presented after questioning the ability of all audiences to resist texts and the dominant meaning, So that Curran and Corner as well as Morley pointed to the ease of talking about audience activity and their generation of special meanings when we place greater restrictions on the power of cultural producers and their role in framing audience interpretations.

I. 2. Semiotic democracy through Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding model:

Stuart Hall mentions criticism of the traditional view of mass communication research that conceives the process of communication as a circulation circuit and criticizes the model for being linear, for focusing on the level of message exchange, and for the absence of a structured conceptualization of the various stages of communication process complexity. Instead, Stuart Hall suggest the importance of thinking about the process in terms of a productive and sustainable structure in which it expresses interconnected and distinct moments of production, circulation, distribution, consumption, and reproduction, in which each stage maintains its own form and conditions of existence (Hall, 1980, p128-138).

All media content designers target a specific audience that they keep in mind during their work, and they encode their messages based on meanings they expect the audience to discover during the decoding process, but the audience's engagement with the content may result in providing readings that were not planned by the source or communicator. Through his Encoding-Decoding Model on television discourse, Hall presented a theoretical approach that explains the methods of encoding and disseminating media messages by designers and then interpreting them by audiences, Hall referred to the activity of the media audience as a possibility that goes beyond choosing the medium, to include the ability to provide meanings that may be different from those intended by the message designer.

Hasty assumptions, as Stuart Hall calls them, about the processes of encoding and decoding messages lead to simplification, regression, and ambiguity in understanding phenomena. It would be useful to direct research to analyze the social and political context in which messages are produced and consumed, while emphasizing the importance of public backgrounds and their economic status. And also their personal

experience. From this, Stuart Hall suggests that receivers provide three readings of media content: preferred reading, negotiated reading, and oppositional reading, which they provide as a result of the situation they assume during their reading of the text. Although most messages are designed in ways that cause the audience to adopt the designers' preferred reading, also called a dominant reading, it cannot be ruled out that the audience may provide alternative interpretations or even that they may misinterpret some elements of the message. Nweke supported this idea by saying (Nweke, 2018, p1019-1023):

“although people are susceptible to communication technologies, ‘they are able to exploit contradictions that enable them to resist, re-cycle and re-design those technologies... and people are capable of decoding and appropriating received messages and are not necessarily duped by them’”.

From the above, the message is no longer a simple means of conveying information but rather an amalgamation of a complex set of visual and linguistic symbols that generate multi-layered representations that are open to a variety of responses (Murdock, 2017, p1-11). The decoding process enables the message to enter into the structure of social practice, which leads to the production of a specific meaning and effect, so the meanings or discourse decoded is a set of influences that include entertainment, direction or persuasion, with a series of complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional or behavioral consequences.

I. 3. Different perceptions for audience involvement and participation:

Involvement (Participation) has been considered as a basic construct in many research areas, and has been the focus of large studies on communication and consumer behavior. It is considered as a mediator of responses to product advertisements, and is thus influenced by individual needs, communication sources, and surrounding factors. Krugman's 1965 article had a significant impact on subsequent analyzes of audience involvement, showing that the effects of persuasive communication depended on active audience processing efforts, and noted (Krugman, 1965, p349-356):

“Two entirely different ways of experiencing and being influenced by mass media one way is characterized by lack of personal involvement. . . . The second is characterized by a high degree of personal involvement. By this we do not mean attention, interest, or excitement but the number of conscious “bridging experiences” connections or personal references per minute that the viewer makes between his own life and the stimulus”

Krugman suggested that the receiver uses different levels of involvement to deal with the contents of the medium. He defined involvement as the number of personal experiences and references an individual places between the content of the medium and

his or her life, which requires a focus on the antecedents and outcomes of involvement (Krugman, 1965). Some studies tended to focus more on the role of involvement in “persuasion.” In a meta-analysis study on the effects of involvement on persuasion, Johnson differentiated between three types of involvement (Johnson, 1989, p290-293):

1- Value-relevant involvement: An individual defines himself as a set of acquired social and personal values. The closer the relationship between his position and these values, the more important these central values are, the greater the degree of participation in the positions.

2- Outcome-relevant involvement: It shows to the receiver of a particular message its importance and the relationship of the subject being addressed to the goals and outcomes.

3- Impression-relevant involvement: receiver may pay attention to the details of a persuasive message in order to become familiar enough with the topic to win others approval. However, they may be reluctant to be greatly influenced, even with strong and acceptable arguments, or to reject appeals outright on the grounds that the arguments are weak and disingenuous due to the advantages of self-presentation related to maintaining a flexible and unpolarized attitude.

The social judgment theory presented by Sherif and Hovland also posits that the degree of personal importance of an issue influences the individual's self-concept and the importance he attaches to this issue. Individuals who share a high Ego are less likely to undergo changes in attitudes and thus be more difficult to persuade (Sherif, 1961, p33-37). Accordingly, there are many possibilities through which individuals process the messages, including subjecting it to critical thinking, more important, the social judgment theory suggests that individuals' appreciation of messages is based on three situations:

First: the latitude of acceptance Second: the latitude of rejection Third: the latitude of non-commitment. In this context, Greenwald, stated (Greenwald, 1984, p581-592):

“Sherif and Hovland's (1961) analysis of ego-involvement was influential in leading consumer behavior theorists to recognize that high involvement could be associated with resistance to (rather than acceptance of) persuasion”

Judith asserts that involvement is a stimulus. When individuals involve, that means that they pay attention, realize the importance of what is in front of them and act differently than when they are not aware, so when facing messages, the audience shows different patterns of involvement (Judith, 1986, p4-15):

-First, consumers respond differently to the same messages because of their inherent characteristics.

-Second, when consumers are engaged with a particular message, they give it more counterarguments.

-Third, consumers use different message signals to form estimations depending on their involvement degree with the topic.

Accordingly, if the degree of involvement is high, the attitudes are affected by the quality of the arguments in the content, while if the degree of implication is low; the attitudes are affected primarily by the experience of the source or the message designer.

Some communication researchers focus on the participatory nature of involvement, so that Krugman measures involvement as an individual's direct personal experience while receiving messages, and researchers describe this participatory involvement as interactive, with paying attention to the degree to which individuals are cognitively and behaviorally engaged in their conversations, while others consider as a personal trait. Many media studies have followed the uses and gratification theory and its perception of the concept of involvement in the context of audience activity (Palmgren, 1984; Rubin, 1994). Participation has been studied as a feature of audiences that deliberately seek the media to satisfy some expectations and needs.

It is important to note that some researchers have focused on audience activity as participation/involvement, Hawkins and Pingree (1986) show that the "cognitive effort" expressed by receivers has become a subject of theoretical and methodological debate, Levy used the concept of involvement to describe both the level of "emotional arousal" and the cognitive and structural organization of information. The concept of "activity" has also been used to refer to behavioral manifestations of active involvement, such as parasocial (Biocca, 1987, p51-80) interaction like responding to television.

In parallel, Reception/critical studies began with the work of Lull and Morley, and Radaway's (1984) study on romance novels, as well as Ang's analysis of the Dallas series which shows that most media researchers view audience involvement as "parasocial interaction," a concept that is conceptualized as a close friendship relation between audience members and the content characters. Some linked it to the perception of viewer (Rosengren, Windahl, Hakansson, & Johnsson, 1976; Tsao, 1992), while some saw it as equivalent to emotional engagement between individuals (Perse, 1990; Rubin & Perse, 1987). Recently, qualitative studies invoke the importance of the emotional, cognitive and behavioral dimensions of social interaction.

Human emotions are based on evaluating the situations they face or find themselves or others in, and thus the process of evaluating the situations presented by the media becomes more complex, as it requires the focus of receiver on many aspects related to these situations such: The content of the medium - the position of the receiver - the nature of the product - the daydreams and the recalled memories - the interaction between the content and the situation (Till, 2011, p149-160). And based on this, the individual approach becomes very important in the face of media stimuli.

In the context of their research on the audience's processing operations, MacInnis and Jaworski distinguish between 6 different levels of participation that they consider to

be mental activities that require the analysis of processed information: feature analysis, base classification, meaning analysis, information integration, role taking, and Structural processes. On the basis of these levels, they proposed to separate involvement from attention and perception (MacInnis, 1989, p1-23).

I. 4. Reception patterns as an individual strategies:

Research has shown that each receiver has special approaches during the process of learning and socialization, which are known as modes/patterns of reception, it can be described as distinct and variable forms of involvement with media content that allow a certain level of activity, Suckfull believes that reception patterns are: Individually learned and practiced strategies used by the receiver during their consumption of media content and reflect a particular approach to counteracting the media's stimuli during the reception process.

Worth and Gross (1974) presented the first model in which they differentiate between inferential and attributional readings. the inferential reading does not reveal any acknowledgment of the structural nature of the text, or that the text was created by an "external author" or production team, This pattern of reading infers the meaning of the text by relating it to the real world, where depicted characters and events are treated as naturally occurring phenomena (Worth, 1974, p24-36) Whereas descriptive (referential) reading recognizes the structural nature of texts and draws attention to textual and aesthetic characteristics such as performance agreements, narrative expectations, and text symbols...this scheme makes a very useful distinction between readings that do or do not demonstrate awareness of textual structure.

In the framework of her study, Neuman questioned the extent to which television has become a major force for social integration and cultural unification, and do individuals from different cultural and social backgrounds respond in an identical manner to the common cultural forms presented? For this she puts some questions: Does television make people thinking? Does the response to television differ according to the educational level variable? Does the level of response differ according to the type of program? To what extent do the expectations and attitudes of the viewer affect the effect of the mediator? (Neuman, 1982 , p472-473).

Neuman proposed a model that differentiates between interpretive and analytic decoding, as two types of cognitive response to the program (Neuman, 1982). The "interpretive decoding" links the program's content to the private life of the individual or to broad community issues, and this reading includes looking at the social, cultural and organizational factors that may have affected the writers or producers of the program, On the other hand, how the program can affect the thinking of a particular viewer and his sense of the broader meaning, if any, of the program's topics or their relevance to his social status. Neuman links the "analytical decoding" to Worth and Gross' concept of attributional reading, highlighting the viewers' recognition that a text is a construct

contains meaning encoded by its author (its producer), so that analytical decoding entails an assessment of the quality of events and the style of text writing as well as the presentation of the characters and technical elements associated with the production.

Richardson and Corner showed their dissatisfaction with the approaches that some researchers employ to study communicative and cultural processes and through which they give texts exclusive attention, so they expressed that (Richardson, 1986, p485-500):

“The assumption, which text-centered studies have tended to encourage, that meanings somehow exist as inherent properties of textual signification and are thus available there for identification and plotting, provided that a sufficiently powerful or sensitive 'reading' can be brought to bear on them, is rejected. Along with it is rejected the idea that such a 'reading' could ever provide an adequate base for pronouncements about the character and strength of audience response”

Instead, they suggested that the meaning is the product of certain interpretive agreements (common or unintended), and therefore any study that examines audience relations with the media and attempts to understand its sensory and cognitive perception must take these agreements and their application patterns into consideration. Their study aimed to reach an understanding of the general nature of interpretation and the way it uses social knowledge to nourish it (Richardson, 1986, p501-508). And they came up with another scheme through which they differentiate between two types of reading (reception) that viewers use to understand TV contents. The first is mediation reading, which refers to the audience's ability to pay attention to the writer of the text and the artificial aspects of his work. In contrast to this reading, Richardson and Corner present a second reading that they call a transparency reading in which events and characters are evaluated and commented on in real time, where viewers focus on the manipulative motive behind producing these texts.

On the other hand, and through his study that questioned why people are addicted to Dynasty series, Schrøder suggested a stereotypical reception of imaginary content, calling the former involvement subjunctive, which requires the elimination of disbelief and the denial of the structural nature of the texts in order to accept the situation Imaginary life, even if temporarily, with the aim of allowing viewers to enter and participate in the fantasy world, as he said about the experience of one of the respondents:

“Through identification with fictional characters, it enters into the subjunctive mode, an "inevitable" moment in which everyday situations are temporarily suspended in favor of daydreaming about what might be. Daydreaming invests heavily with emerging needs in the burden of daily

life, and reflects her desire for more time for herself” (Schrøder, 1986, p61-80)

Schrøder argues that the second mode is indicative involvement, which consists in evaluating characters in terms of like-us-ness that viewers express explicitly by comparing the fantasy world to the real world or implicitly by paying attention to the gaps between events, experiences, and problems depicted on the screen and those in the broader context of reception (Schrøder, 1986, p61-82), this what Schroder calls "rational evaluation."

Dahlgren (1988) presents a somewhat different classification of the reception patterns that individuals use to talk about television programs, suggesting that viewers use first: an official style that expresses their awareness of the various elements of script construction, so that they are aware of the producers' intentions, and can adopt one of two positions, either be (critics/cultured) or just (fans). Second: Viewers use a personal pattern through which they combine what is shown on television with their personal experiences in life, so that they use the information presented to them in other contexts (Dahlgren, 1988, 285-301). The contribution of Liebes and Katz (1986, 1989 and 1990) is one of the reference studies, as they identified two patterns of reception in their analysis of the Dallas series are as follows (Liebes, 1986, p153-154):

The first pattern is Referential: a reference reading that establishes relationships between the artificial life depicted on television and one's personal knowledge and experiences. Characters are associated with viewers as if they were real characters, in contrast these characters are compared to real-life individuals and situations.

The second pattern is Critical: A critical reading is summarized in the viewers adopting an analytical perspective that contributes to presenting a remote approach that is “subjective” specific to each receiver, which sees the program as an imaginary construction with aesthetic rules.

On another level, Hoijer presented an approach based on cognitive theory, and explained the effect of mental representations or cognitive structures of audience reception. He identified three areas of accumulated experiences represented in the cognitive structures of the viewers, and he showed how they are used as interpretive frameworks of reference in the process of constructing meaning (Hoijer, 1992, p583-603):

The first field: the global experience that humans share as living creatures such as childhood, old age, disease, health...etc.

The second field: cultural experience, including social standards and some representations, especially those related to gender, the social class to which the individual belongs, the region in which he lives, the school he attended...etc.

The third domain: Special experiences, which are the only expression of the experiences present in the individual's cognitive scheme.

Suckfull asserts that the patterns of reception differ according to the individual's personality and status, and the receiver shows a pattern or combination of patterns that he uses and changes during the reception process, and he suggests six 6 patterns of films reception (Till, 2011 , 149-160):

Social participation: This pattern refers to a process by which the receiver compares himself with the heroes in the film based on a form that the viewer is interested in a particular character on the screen similar to identification.

Ego sharing: This pattern refers to the receiver's experience when trying to find suggestions and points of view within the content that help him improve his life or solve his problems.

Diegetic Involvement: Describes an activity in which a person engages in the events of a movie, imagining themselves as part of the story, so they are getting absorbed in the fictional world. This pattern is equivalent to the concept of transition, and is also related to the concepts of presence and escape.

Emotional engagement: Describes a pattern in which the viewer acts on the basis of his emotions, and shows his willingness to touch his feelings and emotions. Suckfull believes that this pattern correlates with the concept of the need for emotion.

Imagination: It is a very creative reception style in which the recipient inserts his imagination into modifying the events of the film, for example: providing an alternative ending.

Production: This pattern refers to the receiver's interaction with the way the film was produced or some of its clips. This pattern is a defensive mechanism against certain undesirable sensations.

In this context, we stress that these patterns are different among themselves, but the relationships between them are broad, and we conclude by saying that the audience's response to the content is influenced by the patterns of receiving.

6. Conclusion

The intervention constituted a contribution towards dismantling the relations between the receiving audience and the content, in which we reviewed a set of established studies, and clarified through them our perception based on two basic concepts, the first relates to the concept of participation or involvement, which refers to one of the aspects of the audience's activity that contradicts negativity, and the degree of Their awareness of the relationship between themselves and the content of the media, as well as the degree of their psychological interaction with the medium or its messages. The second concept is reception patterns that show first the audience's distinct responses to the same content, and also show its interpretive capabilities in an accuracy scientific manner, so we believe that this contribution has presented an accumulation that help interested researchers in reception studies to frame their perceptions and their research procedures to study new media.

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