Blumler And Katz Uses And Gratifications Theory

Idea In Short

Uses and gratifications theory is an approach to understanding why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs. This theory asserts that people are active media users who are motivated to select media to gratify specific needs.

Origin

Early research investigated how the media, its producers and audience engaged with each other during media consumption. A popular idea in the early-mid 20th century was the effects model, which looked at media's impact on the audience. The research outcome revealed signs of early moral panic. The audience was passive at the mercy of media messaging. In this model, the media held all the power.

Media Effects Model

The Media Effects Model saw the audience as passive media users, which focused the research on how media affected users. Media Effects Theory include theories that explain how the mass media influence the attitudes and perceptions of audience members. This model is a compendium of theories that comprise of psychological mechanisms, such as framing, agenda-setting and priming.

Hypodermic Needle Theory

One of the theories of the Media Effects Model, the hypodermic needle theory - opineds that the media merely transports the message, directly to the audience. Also known as the magic bullet theory or transmission belt model, posits that media have a direct impact on the audience. This conception of media as omnipotent instruments appeared with the first

reflections on the mass communication phenomenon between 1920 and 1940 after researchers observed the effect of propaganda during World War I and events like Orson Welles' War of the Worlds broadcast. The Hypodermic Needle Theory is a linear communication theory which suggests that media messages are injected directly into the brains of a passive audience. This theory suggests that we're all the same and we all respond to media messages in the same way.

Uses and Gratification Theory

An alternative area of media research - Uses and Gratification - considered takes audiences' viewpoint. In this model, the audience were active participants in media exchange. In other words, they use media to satisfy their needs. Harold Lasswell, an American political scientist and communication theorist – published a book called Propaganda Technique in the World War. In this book, he questioned the Hypodermic Needle theory and argued that the audience had much greater power than what the Hypodermic Needle Theory suggested.

> From a propaganda point of view it was a matchless performance, for Wilson brewed the subtle poison, which industrious men injected into the veins of a staggering people, until the smashing powers of the Allied armies knocked them into submission.

The response was the Uses and Gratification Theory, which he developed in the 1940s. The Uses and Gratification theory is at the complete opposite end of the spectrum to the Hypodermic Needle Theory.

Blumler, Katz, Guarevitch, et. al

Blumler, Katz, Guarevitch, and some other theorists further expanded this theory in the 1970s. In 1974, these researchers made links between Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and how people use the media. Blumler and Katz published this theory and challenged the communication theories elucidated in the Media Effects Model.

Theory in detail

The Uses and Gratifications Theory is a user-centered approach that focuses on how people use media for their own personal uses and gratification. This theory emphasizes motives and the self-perceived needs of audience members. Blumler and Katz argued that different people could use the same communication message for different purposes. The same media content may gratify different needs for different individuals. This theory suggests that media has no power over audiences. Instead, audiences are highly active in their media usage, seeking out media to fulfill a certain need. Audiences create their own individual meanings after they seek out that media. Uses and Gratification actually come from the idea that the media serves a purpose. If the audience have certain uses or needs, then the media fulfills or gratifies those needs. Audience turn to media as a useful tool to gratify their needs. This model starts with the audience. You have an audience that is looking to fulfill a need. It goes and seeks out a medium that will actually fulfill that need. If the media gratifies that need, then the audience will stick to that channel and continue consuming the content from that channel. On the other hand, if the media fails to gratify that need, then the audience will go back and find a different media and continue through that process until the need is gratified. There are several examples where the audience stopped a TV show or movie from broadcast. Likewise, there are countless examples of the media being canceled or pulled from broadcast due to audience backlash or disinterest.

Audience Needs

Audiences have five different needs they seek to satisfy through different media use:

1. **Cognitive needs** are all about knowledge attainment
2. **Effective needs** are all about emotions
3. **Personal integrative needs** are about the need to socialize with others (e.g., family, friends, and co-workers)
4. **Social integrative needs** are based on self-esteem. Media allows us to compare our status and gain credibility by comparing ourselves to people or situations in the media
5. **Tension free needs** are about people using media to relieve tension in different ways

Key Elements

Blumler and Katz presented five core elements of Uses and Gratification. Namely;

- Media use is perceived to be goal-directed. We know exactly where to find the information we need. The audience is fully aware of the type of media it is looking for
- The audience is responsible for linking the type of media to fit their mass communication needs. The media itself doesn't look for an audience; instead, the audience chooses the media types that fulfill its needs
- Media competes with other sources for needs satisfaction. There are multiple ways to satisfy an audience's needs
- Modern media competes with more traditional media
- Audience has a sense of self-awareness of its motives and needs that allows it to share its media experiences as active media users

The last element explains that the audience chooses the information provided and explores the content on its own terms. Only the audience can apply value judgment to the media because each experience is unique and fulfills different needs.

Summary

The Uses and Gratification theory was first put forth by Blumler and Katz in1974. The five major elements of Uses and Gratification theory highlight how the audience are active media users instead of passive users. As an audience, you know exactly what needs you are trying to satisfy, what media type to satisfy it, and each selection is goal-oriented. This is a user-centered approach to media.