Suggested Readings


primary functions of the mass media: surveillance of the environment, correlation of events, and transmission of social heritage, which served as the basis for formulating media needs and expectations within the uses and gratifications model. Wright's (1960) addition of entertainment concluded the list of functions, which are reflected in motive categories and gratifications measured by USG researchers.

Early USG studies date back to the 1940s, with work that examined reasons why people listened to radio formats, including quiz shows and soap operas (see Herzog, 1940; 1944; Lasswell, 1940). These studies pointed out that the media can help fulfill several everyday needs, and led to an examination of media processes and effects from a functional perspective (Blumler & Katz, 1974). Similar studies followed in the late 40s and 50s, in response to the appearance of television as a mass medium and eventually branched off to studies of media and politics (Blumler & McQuail, 1969). The volume and state of USG research was at that point organized and reviewed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974), who defined the theoretical foundation of the perspective as resting upon:

- the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which leads 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. (p. 20)

Rosengren (1974) also sketched a model of the USG paradigm that clarified several of the above components and links among them. According to the model, basic needs interact with individual characteristics (psychological setup, social position, and life history) and society (including media structure) to produce perceived problems and perceived solutions to them. These problems and expected solutions are melded into motives for communication, and lead to media and other behavior.

At the same time, critics began to point out that USG presents a rather general approach to understanding media uses and consequences, and proposes key concepts and links to societal processes that are inadequately defined (Lomori, Reeves, & Bybee, 1972; McQuail, 1979; Swanson, 1977). For example, Swanson (1977) criticized the lack of clarity in key terms of the paradigm. McQuail (1979) argued that the approach was too individualistic, thus making it difficult to link personal media use to societal structures. Lomori, Reeves, and Bybee (1977) looked into the assumptions of uses and gratifications research and concluded that the exact relationship between gratifications sought and actual gratifications obtained remained undefined. Gitlin (1980), in a critique of limited effects empirical models, added the absence of any consideration micro or macro effects associated with power, media ownership, and ideology. Similarly, others argue that the perspective is too individualistic, making it difficult to focus on the impact media have on society and culture (Carey & Kellner, 1974; Ellick, 1974).

Subsequent work attempted to address criticism and further refine the conceptual foundation of USG. Specifically, Palggreen, Wynn, and Rayburn (1983) synthesized previous literature and developed the Gratifications Sought and Obtained (GS-GO) approach, as a way of applying the expectancy-value theory to media gratifications. Palggreen and Rayburn (1982) further explored the conceptual connections between gratifications sought and media exposure, within an expectancy values model. In the same vein, Babrow and Swenson (1980) investigated connections between antecedents and different levels of audience exposure, by relying on expectancy-value analyses of television news. Lichtenstein and Rosenfeld (1983) further undertook research that investigated the link between media choices and gratifications or functions expected, finding that gratifications are not medium specific. Such work placed media uses and consequences within the larger context of individual everyday social habits and routines, and suggested ways in which motivations and traits lead to consumption of the media over other avenues, for the fulfillment of individual needs, thus leading to the development of the Uses and Dependency Model (A. M. Rubin & Winseh, 1986). This model clarifies the interrelationships among societal systems and media audiences, and considers the relationship between media dependency and functional alternatives, thus suggesting that people who possess a wide variety of communication channels, and are willing to use them, should be less dependent on a particular channel. This relationship indicates an interface between personal and mediated communications, as these channels overlap, complement, and substitute each other for the fulfillment of individual needs and wants (e.g., A. M. Rubin & Rubin, 1985, 2001). Within this interface, several concepts, including loneliness, intervene and lead to particular media uses, attitudes, and behaviors.

Given these theoretical and conceptual adjustments, contemporary USG is grounded in the following five assumptions: (1) "communication behavior, including media selection and use, is goal-directed, purposive, and motivated"; (2) "people take the initiative in selecting and using communication vehicles to satisfy felt needs or desires"; (3) "is host of social and psychological factors mediate people's communication behavior"; (4) "media compete with other forms of communication (i.e., functional alternatives) for selection, attention, and use to gratify our needs or wants"; and (5) "people are typically more influential than the media in the relationship, but not always" (A. M. Rubin, 1994, p. 420).

Palggreen (1984), summarized uses and gratifications research in six main areas that specifically relate to the scope of USG research: (1) gratifications and media consumption; (2) social and psychological origins of gratifications; (3) gratifications and media effects; (4) gratifications sought and obtained; (5) expectancy-value approaches to uses and gratifications; and (6) audience activity. This classification still covers most work completed within USG, which is diverse and prolific. USG has been employed to understand various media uses and consequences, covering for instance soap operas (e.g., Alexander, 1985; Babrow, 1987; Perse, 1986; A. Rubin & Wynn, 1987a; A. M. Rubin, 1985); news programs (e.g., Palggreen, Wynn, & Rayburn, 1983; A. Rubin & Perse, 1987b; A. M. Rubin, 1981b); using the VCR (e.g., Levy, 1981, 1983, 1987; A. Rubin & Banta, 1989; A. M. Rubin & Rubin, 1989); listening to talk radio (e.g., Armstrong & A. Rubin, 1989; Surlin, 1986; Turnow, 1974; watching cable TV (e.g., Becker, Dunwoody, & Rathsell, 1983; Jeffres, 1978); channel surfing (e.g., Ferguson, 1992, Walker & Bellamy, 1991); magazine reading (Payne, Severn, & Dazer, 1988; Towers, 1987); tabloid reading (Salwen & Anderson, 1984); the Internet (e.g., Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007); and religious television (Abelman, 1987; Korpis & Kin, 1996; Peterson, 1986). These particular areas of interest are examined in greater detail below.

The USG Framework of Analysis

The strength of the USG perspective lies in its applicability to a variety of media contexts. Despite the diversity of content and interests, USG studies tend to share a common frame of analysis that focuses on motives, social and psychological antecedents, and cognitive, attitudinal, or behavioral outcomes. A typical USG study will focus on a particular medium or compare uses and gratifications across media. In doing so, scholars will examine motives, a combination of relevant social and psychological antecedents, and consider consequences or effects associated with the given medium consumption. The following sections examine concepts typically encountered within USG research and research methods implemented in study design.

Motives present general dispositions that influence people's actions taken for the fulfillment of a need or want and behavior. Most USG studies investigate motives as ways of understanding media consumption. For example, researchers have investigated motives for watching soap
operas (e.g., Alexander, 1985; Bahrow, 1987; Perse, 1986; A. Rubin & Perse, 1987a; A. M. Rubin, 1985); watching news programs (e.g., Palmer's own life-course, while those with high external locus of control perceive that factors outside themselves steer their life (Leffkovitch, 1979, Trice, 1985) Locus of control has been shown to impact communication satisfaction (A. M. Rubin, 1993) and perceptions of fear cultivation for heavy television viewers (Wolber & Quarterer, 1982). Locus of control has also been shown to influence three important perceptual biases in a USG study of third person effects in the aftermath of terrorism (Haridakis & A. M. Rubin, 2005).

Affinity with certain media, and especially television, has also been linked to many motives, such as arousal, habit, past time, escape, entertainment, companionship, and information seeking (A. M. Rubin, 1981a). A. M. Rubin (1985) found that felt affinity toward soap operas was related to entertainment and relaxation needs. Perse (1986) added that motives of information, escape, and voyeurism were related to affinity for the same genre. Perceived realism refers to how real-to-life views understand reality depictions to be, and has been used to understand how different individuals react to TV messages based on motivation (e.g., Greenberg, 1974; Rubin, 1979), or specific content like TV news (Perse, 1990; A. Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985; A. M. Rubin, 1981b) and soap operas (Perse, 1986; Rubin & Perse, 1987a).

Unwillingness to communicate, a psychological construct that represents "a chronic tendency to avoid and/or deviate oral communication" (Burgon, 1970), has been connected to talk radio and Internet use. Talk radio callers, for instance, as compared to non-callers, were less willing to communicate in face-to-face interaction and found face-to-face communication to be less rewarding (Armstrong & A. Rubin, 1989). Similarly, Internet users who find face-to-face communication less rewarding are more likely to use the Internet for social communication (Papacharissi & A. Rubin, 2000; Papacharissi, 2002a, 2002b). Additional attributes linked to media consumption include loneliness (Perse & A. M. Rubin, 1992); parasocial interaction, anxiety, creativity, and sensation seeking (Comrey & A. M. Rubin, 1991). Specifically related to audience activity and involvement, Hawkins et al. (2001) found that mood and content preference were strong predictors of selective viewing and thinking while viewing. In the same vein, Sherry (2001) found that temperament was a strong predictor of television viewing motives, and made the case for incorporating biobehavioral tendencies into conceptualizations of USG research. Recently, individual attitudes toward the media were connected to flow of programming and media enjoyment (Sherry, 2004).

Studies of the psychological and social origins of media consumption confirm that individuals typically enjoy the mass media as functional alternatives, that is, to complement or substitute for aspects of their environment they are not satisfied with (A. M. Rubin & Windahl, 1980). This pattern is evident also in outcomes generated within the uses and gratifications model.

Consequences or effects of media use, as examined through USG, focus on the core concept of audience activity and employ the term "effects" with care. Uses and gratifications researchers recognize that audiences are not universally active, and frequently study levels of audience activity as function of orientation toward the media. Media orientation is typically measured through motives for media use, attitudes toward the media, and psycho-social origins of media consumption. Levy and Windahl (1984) produced a typology of audience activity which identified three levels of audience activity: selectivity, involvement, and use, across three periods of activity: before, during, or after exposure. Research indicated that activity relates to medium type and gratifications sought and obtained by the media (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973; Lombrani et al., 1972; McLeod & Becker, 1981; Palmegren, Wenner, & Rayburn, 1981; Rabinowitz, Palmegren, & Acker, 1984; A. M. Rubin, 1981a, 1981b, 1983). In a synthesis of previous research, A. M. Rubin (1994) distinguished between instrumental and ritualized orientations toward the media, arguing that these lead to different levels of audience activity and involvement with the
media. Ritualized use is primarily diversinatory in nature, and involves habitual use of a medium to pass the time, and relies to a greater use of and affinity with the medium. Instrumental use is utilitarian and selective in nature, and connects to prescriptive and informational uses of the medium. Instrumental use suggests greater involvement and interestinty of use (A. Rubin, 1994). Ritualized and instrumental orientations lead to different types of cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral effects associated with media use.

One particular outcome of media use that has received considerable attention by USG scholars is media dependency. Media dependency refers to the tendency to rely heavily on a particular communication medium for the fulfillment of needs or wants. The construct is associated with patterns of media use and has frequently been operationalized as the extent to which an individual would miss a particular medium if it were not available (i.e., Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976; Greenberg, 1974; Lassleff, 1986; A. M. Rubin, 1983, 1986; A. M. Rubin & R. Rubin, 1992a, 1992b, A. M. Rubin & Windahl, 1990). Dependency on a medium implies the absence of functional alternatives (Rosenzweig & Windahl, 1972). The Uses and Dependency Model (A. M. Rubin & Windahl, 1986) proposes a model of understanding media use and effects, by centering on media consumptions and studying relevant concepts. Dependency is affected by social and psychological attributes, because it is these attributes that influence the availability of communication alternatives. Some research has indicated, for instance, a relationship between low self-reliance and greater dependency on television (A. M. Rubin & R. Rubin, 1982b). In general, dependency on a particular medium augments the effects that a particular medium could produce (Miller & Reese, 1982; A. M. Rubin, 1994). Dependency also illustrates how uses and gratifications can interact mediated, personal, and political communication. The presence of functional alternatives demonstrates the multitude and diversity of communication channels individuals may use to fulfill certain needs and lessens dependency effects. Additional research in this area could connect dependency to more recent media content and phenomena, including virtual gaming, and public cynicism/decline of civic engagement to understand how reliance on a particular medium leads to certain cognitive, attitudinal, or behavioral consequences. Such research would serve to align and connect USG with parallel theoretical perspectives that examine framing and the generation of social capital.

Another approach to media effects involves expectancy-value models integrated with gratifications sought and obtained research. Gratifications obtained are an obvious outcome of gratifications sought, but scholars have criticized the lack of conceptual distinction between the two categories. Since gratification seeking involves expectations from media consumption, expectancy theory has been employed to reinforce the theoretical foundation of USG and understand connections between gratifications sought and obtained. The most notable effort to connect Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) expectancy-value theory with USG was conducted by Palmgreen and Rayburn (1982). Expectancy value theory distinguishes between informational beliefs and inferential beliefs, and considers intentions, attitudes, and behaviors as functions of the perceived likelihood (belief or expectancy) that a behavior will lead to a particular consequence. The combined model proposed by Palmgreen and Rayburn has been used primarily to measure and predict gratifications sought and obtained in new program use (e.g., Al-Amoudi, Heald, & Rayburn, 1993; Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1982). Another model, proposed by Rubin and Perse (1976b), sought to connect gratifications seeking to audience activity, and specifically involvement. This particular synthesis proposed that media use progresses from expectations about the media, to gratifications sought, to behavioral intention, exposure to the media, to attention and involvement with media content. Recently, researchers have combined the expectancy value approach to understand online media adoption behaviors (i.e., Li, Shih, & Yang, 2005), and combined it with diffusion of innovations to look and consider individual differences in gaming adoption (Chang, Lee, & Kim, 2006).

USG and gratifications

Contemporary Studies

Contemporary studies explore dominant trends in uses and gratifications research and apply the framework for the study of newer media and genres. Uses and gratifications researchers routinely apply the framework to focus contemporary social phenomena and problems. For instance, in the aftermath of the Columbine and other similar violent incidents in high schools, several scholars have (re)turned their attention to the effects of viewing aggressive content. Haridakis (2002) investigated the links between viewer characteristics and exposure to television violence and aggression, and found that viewer characteristics, such as disinhibition and previous experience with crime were stronger predictors of aggression than television violence. Similarly, Rubin, Haridakis, and Eyal (2003) investigated viewer aggression and preferences of talk shows. They found that those with higher levels of aggression were drawn to content that featured displays of anger and shock, had negative attitudes toward women, enjoyed watching others being belittled or harmed, and used the shows as a vehicle for social interaction with others. Haridakis (2006) further examined how these relationships differed by gender. In the same vein, Slater (2007) found that gender, sensation seeking, aggression, and frequency of Internet use were connected to violent media consumption, including website use, while alienation from school and family also mediated these effects. Finally, Knoepfle and Kran (2005) found that neuroticism was positively related to watching violent media, with extraverts not drawn to general TV watching, but demonstrating a preference for violent content. Greene and Kran (2005) added that sensation seeking, verbal aggressiveness, argumentativeness, and instrumental aggression were positively associated with exposure to violent films and horror movies, without necessarily predicting liking of those genres. These results demonstrate the utility of uses and gratifications in differentiating among several factors, including but not limited to the media, contributing to aggressive behavior. Moreover, recent studies extend the scope of USG by adding antecedent social and psychological variables not previously explored.

In response to the present political environment, researchers have also looked at how individuals employed the media in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In support of the functional alternatives hypothesis, Dutra-Bergman (2004) found evidence of complementary channel use in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Boyle, Schmierbach et al. (2004) added that negative emotional response was a strong predictor of motivation for information seeking and reducing uncertainty in the aftermath of 9/11. Haridakis and Rubin (2005) investigated third person effects within the USG framework and found internal locus of control to be a predictor of information seeking to be negatively connected to third person perceptions. Considerable attention has also been devoted to the informational and social uses of newer media, like the Internet. Hardy and Scholfield (2005) combined research on computer-mediated communication and uses and gratifications to understand how exposure to hard news, combined with interpersonal communication could lead to greater participation in public affairs.

Uses and gratifications assumptions were also employed to understand how users select and what they expect of online news vs. traditional news media (DeWaal, Schoenbach, & Lauf, 2006; Schoenbach, DeWaal, & Lauf, 2005). A similar approach was employed to understand differential exposure to online news during the conflict with Iraq, finding that those most opposed to the Bush administration were more likely to supplement their use of domestic news with an online foreign news source (Best, Chmielowski, & Krueger, 2005).

The distinction between online and offline news content presents a primary research interest. Althaus and Tewksbury (2004) found that use of online news sources is connected to newspaper reading but not to TV viewing. Along the same lines, Dinnick, Chen, and Li (2004) detected overlap between the niches of offline and online media, and a pronounced tendency for the
Interest to displace traditional news sources, like television and the print media. Kaye and Johnson (2002) identified guidance, surveillance, entertainment, and social utility as the four primary motivations of political uses of the web, connected to amounts of use, trust in government, feelings of efficacy, political interest, and likelihood to vote. Finally, Chyi (2002) employed the uses and gratifications framework to understand user willingness to pay for online news content.

Finally, social connectivity enabled by new media has also drawn attention from USG researchers. Perse and Ferguson (2000) found learning to be the most salient motive for surfing, followed by information and entertainment. Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) examined ritualized and instrumental uses of the Internet, and found that the medium to be a functional alternative for people with diminished mobility, economic security, and social interaction offline, and also for people who found face-to-face communication less rewarding. In another study of chronic loneliness and online behavior, Leung (2001) found connections between instrumental use of the media for the nonlonely, but no support for ritualized uses and the lonely group. Papacharissi further researched the uses and gratifications of personal web page authoring (2002a, 2002b) and blogging (2002b), to understand how they facilitate social environments and identity expression. Hiller and Frant (2004) used USG assumptions to trace patterns of interpersonal communication online for pre-migrants, settled, and postmigrants, and to study how the Internet helps sustain diasporic identity.

**Future Directions**

A principal strength of the Uses and Gratifications approach is its inherent ability to interface interpersonal and mediated communication (A. M. Rubin & Rubin, 1985, 2001). In the contemporary converging environment of traditional and newer digital technologies, media are selected by users for their availability to sustain multiple and diverse channels of communication and to fulfill needs that are both interpersonal and mediated for. For instance, a blog fulfills expressive needs for some bloggers, social communication needs for others, and information seeking and surveillance needs for yet others. BBSs can yield results like the popular American Idol fulfill pass time, to social connectivity to entertainment needs on variety of interactive platforms, from television to online to mobile telephone content. With a range of functions that cover the gamut of media history, contemporary media cater to individual needs via media environments that are convergent: overlapping and complementary. With its developed repertoire of interpersonal and mediated media, as well as social and psychological antecedents and possible communication outcomes, USG is an ideal framework for the study of newer and convergent medium use.

To this point, the assumption of functional alternatives, modeling of the contemporary articulation of USG and related to the uses and dependency model (A. M. Rubin & Windahl, 1980), is central to the use of convergent media. As individuals select among media, old and new, that allow them to be engaged as viewers, or users, or even media content producers, it is clear how the functional alternatives illuminate individual choices, behaviors, and consequences. Medium use takes place in an environment that not only enables, but also encourages that communication channels be used simultaneously, in a complementary or substitute fashion. In a convergent media environment, all media potentially present functional alternatives to each other, based on individual needs or wants. USG thus allows the study of this convergent media environment, without limiting researchers to specific medium use. From this point, collaboration or integration with social network perspectives could broaden the interpretive scope of USG, by allowing it to examine not only overlapping networks of media, but also overlapping networks of media users and producers.

Integration with other perspectives could also broaden the way in which USG handles media effects. Media effects are routinely critiqued as an underdeveloped area for USG researchers.
communication to uses of the Internet as a functional alternative for people who do not find face-to-face communication rewarding (e.g., Papacharissi & A. Rubin, 2000). Similarly, lack of mobility, diminished economic insecurity, or lack of channels for interpersonal communication has been associated with increased use of online communication channels as functional alternatives. In this sense, blogging could provide a functional alternative for individuals who do not feel comfortable, for whatever reason, expressing opinions or feelings in a face-to-face setting. Moreover, for individuals with little access to other channels of personal expression, blogging could present a meaningful outlet. Unwillingness to communicate (Burgoon, 1976) and contextual age (A. M. Rubin & Rubin, 1982) present two dispositions that, based on previous research, could play a part in shaping motives. Scales measuring both motives and these constructs have been developed in previous research and could be adapted to the blogging context and reused in this study. A survey of bloggers, conducted via e-mail, a website or over the phone, would then combine items measuring these concepts.

More importantly, however, not all bloggers use this tool in the same manner or with the same frequency. Patterns of blogging use also need to be identified because they could naturally connect with motives and dispositions influencing blogging use. Therefore, bloggers could be surveyed about the frequency with which they blog and the type of content they prefer to feature. General media and online use should also be measured and compared to blogging. However, with blogs, researchers have an additional invaluable research resource at hand that can be used to inform their study: the content of the blog itself. Through textual or content analysis, blog content can be coded to understand (1) how the blogger puts the medium to use, in terms of post frequency and content categories; (2) strategies for communication and self-presentation the blogger adopts; and how they relate to motives and personal dispositions; and (3) how well needs are met by the medium (i.e., if needs reported in the survey match the uses expressed in the content), an argument could be made for gratifications sought (match the gratifications obtained). The combination of survey and content analysis would thus expand the methodological scope of U&G. The use of the blog text would provide a promising way of assessing consequences of medium use, besides those self-reported because bloggers frequently express satisfaction with the medium, affinity with it, and other communication outcomes via this online forum.

Conclusion

Uses and gratifications presents a strong theoretical perspective, with a history that spans more than a half century, in a field that is relatively young. The strength of the perspective lies in its ability to describe, explain, and expect media uses and consequences. The flexibility of the theoretical model it proposes progresses from motives and individual dispositions to patterns use and possible cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral effects. Timeless assumptions the perspective contains about individual preference and interchangeability of communication channels allow its explanatory power in a traditional and convergent media environment.

References


Suggested Readings


