

# Patrician College of Arts and Science

Department of Visual Communication

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# Passive Audience and Effects Tradition

## Agenda Setting Theory:

- This theory is concerned with the ability of the media to influence the significance of events in the public's mind.
- The media might not tell us what to think but they tell us what to think about.
- The media set the agenda for what we talk about.
- The media may mentally order and organise our world for us.
- This theory can be related to the word 'consensus' which means a generally shared agreement.
- The media are complicit with common-sense views of groups and issues in society.

## Conspiracy Theory:

- This view assumes that a small and powerful, and often hidden, elite are able to use the mass media to condition and persuade passive audiences into conforming to the powerful elite's wishes.
- It depends very much on the notion of all-powerful media and easily duped audiences.
- Political criticism of the media is very close to this theory.

## Copycat Effect:

- This is also called the contagion effect or imitation effect.
- It refers to the supposed power of the media to create an 'epidemic' of behaviour based on what has been seen or heard in the media.
- In many ways it is clear that as consumers and users of media we consciously imitate many of things we find there – dress codes, appearance, music, etc.
- There is plenty of evidence of media patterns of behaviour being copied in the real world.
- The difficulty comes when this is applied to the theme of media violence.

## Cultivation Theory (George Gebner):

- This theory says that heavy exposure to mass media, in particular television, creates and cultivates attitudes more consistent with a media-constructed version of reality than with what the reality actually is.
- Cultivation theory asserts that viewers who have a constant diet of television have attitudes that are cultivated primarily by what they watch on television.
- Gebner views this television world as reality itself.
- The concrete base behind the cultivation theory states that viewers tend to have more faith in the television version of reality the more they watch television.

# Active Audiences Theories

## Uses and Gratifications:

- This approach focuses on why people use particular media, rather than on content.
- In contrast to the concern of the media effects tradition with 'that media do to people' the theory can be seen as part of a broader trend among media researchers which is more concerned with 'what people do with media', allowing for a variety of responses and interpretations.



- During 1960's, as the first generation to grow up with television became grown ups, it became increasingly apparent to media theorists that audience made choices about what they did when consuming texts.
- Far from being a passive mass, audiences are made up of individuals who actively consumed texts for different reasons and in different ways.
- In **1948 Lasswell** suggested that media text had the following functions for individual and society:

- ✓ **Surveillance**
- ✓ **Correlation**
- ✓ **Entertainment**
- ✓ **Cultural transmission**

Researchers **Blulmer and Katz** expanded this theory and published their own in 1974, stating that individuals might choose and use a text for the following purposes (Uses and Gratifications):

- **Diversion** – Escape from everyday problems and routine.
- **Personal Relationships** – Using the media for emotional and their interaction, example – substituting soap operas for family life.
- **Personal Identity** – Finding yourself reflected in texts, learning behaviour and value from texts.
- **Surveillance** – Information which could be useful for living example – weather reports, financial news, holiday bargains.

**Denis McQuail (1987)** offers the following typology of common reasons for media use:

**Information:**

- Finding out about relevant events and condition in immediate surroundings, society and the world.
- Seeking advice on practical matters or opinion and decision choices.
- Satisfying curiosity and general interest.
- Learning, self-education.
- Gaining a sense of security through knowledge.

**Personal Identity:**

- Finding reinforcement for personal values.
- Finding models of behaviour.
- Identifying with valued other (in the media).
- Gaining insight into one's self.

## **Integration and Social Interaction:**

- Gaining insight into circumstances of others; social empathy.
- Identifying with others and gaining a sense of belonging.
- Finding a basis for conversation and social interaction.
- Having a substitute for real-life companionship.
- Helping to carry out social roles.
- Enabling on to connect with family, friends and society.

## **Entertainment :**

- Escaping, or being diverted from problems.
- Relaxing.
- Getting intrinsic cultural or aesthetic enjoyment.
- Filling time.
- Emotional release.
- Sexual arousal.



# Thank you

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