

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 168 092

CS 502 446

AUTHOR
TITLE
PUB DATE
NOTE

Lull, James
Audience Methods and Gratifications.
Feb 79
14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
Western Speech Communication Association (Los
Angeles, California, February 18-21, 1979)

EDRS PRICE
DESCRIPTORS

MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
*Behavior Theories; *Cognitive Processes; Mass Media;
*Models; *Motivation; *Need Gratification; Needs;
*Television Viewing

ABSTRACT

A model of need gratification inspired by the work of K.E. Rosengren suggests a theoretical framework making it possible to identify, measure, and assess the components of the need gratification process with respect to the mass media. Methods having cognitive and behavioral components are designed by individuals to achieve need gratification. Deep gratification occurs when the behavioral act meets the intrinsic requirements of the method and when the method gratifies the need. Thus, if a mother perceives that being a "good mother" includes regulating a child's television viewing experience, she may gain satisfaction from regulation when the act meets the requirements of the method and the method reduces the disequilibrium (the need to feel like a good mother) that energized the drive. Differences between the Rosengren model and this one are: this model includes "drive" as the physical force; this model sees "society" and "individual characteristics" as influences too prohibitive to come within the limited scope of the model; and in this model, the organism is understood to assess the utility of each method, and judgments about the success or nonsuccess of method employment precede the experience of felt gratification or nongratification. (TJ)

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AUDIENCE METHODS AND GRATIFICATIONS

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Presented to the Mass Communication Interest Group of the Western Speech Communication Association at the annual convention--Los Angeles, Feb. 19, 1979

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AUDIENCE METHODS AND GRATIFICATIONS

Building from the social constructivist view, this brief paper proposes that media audience members create specific and sometimes elaborate practical actions involving television and other mass media in order to gratify particular needs in the context of family life at home. A model which links audience "methods" to need gratification is presented. This model, inspired by the work of Rosengren (1972), is suggested as a theoretical framework which makes it possible to identify and measure with precision those components of the method-creating and method-applying processes which characterize the behavioral dynamics of concern here. We know that the links between psychological and sociological needs (their means of gratification) and "uses" of the mass media (including "cognitive plans" and "media acts") have not been theoretically agreed upon or empirically verified (Blumler, 1979;

Levy, 1977; Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, 1974). The model which is discussed below provides one approach to assessment of the components of the need gratification process where the mass media are involved. The means by which basic human needs are gratified is a fundamental concern in all of psychology, sociology and communication. What follows is simply one attempt to account for these processes as they relate to a particular area of study.

The organic concept of *need*, which can be regarded as physiological, psychological, sociological, metaphysical or spiritual in nature, serves as a well-founded starting point for this discussion. Much of the early research on human need was limited to the study of physiological needs since these concepts could easily be controlled and measured with animals in laboratory settings. The "deficit" conception of need emerged suggesting that the organism attempts to gratify something which has become *lacking* in the system (food, water). However, higher-order conceptions of need, such as the well-known Maslow hierarchy, were founded on the idea that the organism also *wants* some things in the environment in order to gratify various needs (Maslow, 1954). Change, development, improvement, and growth take place because the organism seeks to actualize beyond the mere satiation of bodily deficiencies.

The concept of homeostasis, with origins in physiochemistry and physiology, is the condition of relative organic stability and constancy and can be considered, therefore, as the achievement of successful need gratification. Further, homeostasis is a useful concept for the "understanding of bodily needs, self-regulatory mechanisms, and those primary psychological drives that lead to the development of goal-directed behavior" (Young, 1961, p. 110). The *drive*, then, is random activity

which initiates the physical dynamics of the need gratification process.

In psychological research, the "motive" gives direction to the energy of the drive. (The motive "regulates and directs... behavior as (the organism) approaches a goal, and is activated in some way by excitations from the environment and from a state of organic need" (Young, 1961, p. 138). Motives which are reinforced are repeated and the result is an acquired neural organization.

In order to explain similar behaviors in more complex social circumstances, however, a more elaborate conception of the motive is required. First, for our purposes, the concept is better described as a *method* than as a motive. The drive engenders one or many behavioral methods which are designed by the individual for achieving need gratification. In the contemporary vernacular, each of these activities is termed an "ethnomethod." These planned routines are constructed by the individual in order to make his or her contributions to everyday scenes appear reasonable to the self and to others. They are practical actions which, when successfully undertaken, serve to gratify the needs of the organism, many of which are grounded in the social environment.

An example may serve to illustrate the point: A married woman with children may determine that one personal method which could lead successfully to the gratification of the need for "belongingness" is to properly fulfill the role of a "good mother" or a "good parent." In order to achieve a perception by other family members that she is indeed a good mother, she constructs a variety of everyday activities the successful completion of which, she believes, will achieve this recognition and appreciation. This is a purposesful plan of practical action-

the identification, cognitive encoding, and attempted performance of a set of behaviors which she believes will help meet the requirements of the role. Notice that this strategy (the method) has a cognitive as well as a behavioral component. The individual prescribes a general tactic (being perceived as a "good mother") and a facilitative array of observable behaviors (in this case a "media act" which will be described shortly) in order to find a means to ultimately gratify the need for interpersonal belongingness.

When an individual determines to construct a particular method, a survey of environmental resources of potential value for the successful carrying out of the method is made. Television and other mass media, accessible fixtures in most homes, become candidates for use. The affinity for television by children further heightens the potential usefulness of this medium as a resource for the demonstration of role competency in this case. Children's television viewing, a parentally-malleable activity, can be observed, evaluated, judged, and acted upon by the mother in a manner which evidences to herself, her husband, and her children that she is fulfilling the consensually-understood obligations of the role correctly. Regulation of the child's viewing experience is a "media act," selected from a host of environmental possibilities by the mother as a specific behavior deemed by her as likely to be facilitative in the "doing" of proper role performance. The media act is one observable manifestation of the method employed by the person in order to ultimately meet the demands of the larger objective.

When an individual believes that engaging in a media act has satisfied the planned requirements of the method, some degree of satisfaction will be experienced by the person. This pleasant sensation is caused by



the individual's belief that the behavior (media act or other activity) has satisfied the cognitive requirements of the method. Consequently, the person may also experience gratification of the basic need, thereby temporarily reducing the tension which energized the drive in the first place or giving meaning to some opportunity for human growth. *But, this profound need gratification only occurs when the person finds the method itself satisfactory.*

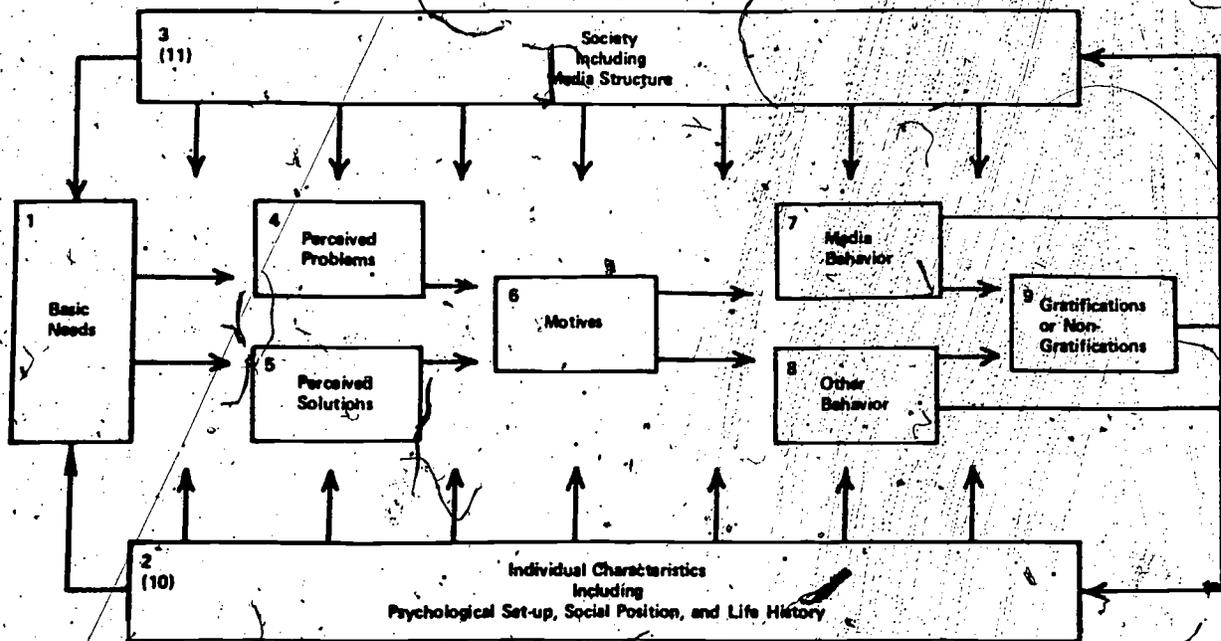
So, deep gratification of need occurs in two stages: First, the behavioral act must have met the intrinsic requirements of the method. Second, the method itself must be sufficient to reduce the disequilibrium which energized the drive, thereby gratifying the need.

Here is another example: An individual desires to gratify the need for "self-esteem." The method deemed appropriate and practical by the person for gratification is to become an expert on some worldly topic, thereby qualifying the self as a worthy individual who has access to important, useful, or desirable information. The planned, cognitive dimension of the method is to qualify as an informational expert. Media acts to be performed in order to attempt to achieve the objective are (1) subscribing to specialty magazines, (2) viewing selected television programs which consider the topic, etc. To the degree that the undertaking of these particular media acts is thought to successfully facilitate the requirements of the method, we can say that the first level of satisfaction has been reached. Gratification of the need for self-esteem will occur only if the method, successfully conducted, is then regarded by the person as sufficient to reduce psychological tension.

Figure 1 summarizes the relationship of the concepts discussed here. A natural and organic relationship exists between essential needs,

however defined, and the drives which serve to energize the organism in search of need gratification. The direction this energy takes is molded by the construction of particular task-oriented ethnomethods. These methods are comprised of a general cognitive strategy for the accomplishment of the objective and a repertoire of behavioral acts, sometimes involving the mass media, which are thought to be facilitative of the objective. The requirements of the method are met when the prescribed specific behaviors (regulation of the television set; the accumulation of useful opinion-leader information) are accomplished satisfactorily. When this is done, the adequacy of the method (being a "good mother"; becoming an opinion leader) is tested against the fundamental requirements of the organism--successful need gratification. It should be pointed out that some individuals may employ the mass media, especially television, to only vicariously achieve need gratification through identification with or recognition of favored program characters (Noble, 1975).

The visualized paradigm advanced by Rosengren (1972) involves many of the same concerns discussed here. For convenience of the reader, Rosengren's model is presented below:



There are some differences in the two models. While both Rosengren and I begin with "basic needs," my model includes "drive" as the physical force which energizes the need gratification process. Rosengren's model takes perceived problems and perceived solutions as the second aspect of this behavior. He ascribes "motives" to the audience member which impel "media" or "other" behavior. These behaviors then lead to gratification or non-gratification of the basic need. Rosengren's model also includes "society" and "individual characteristics" as elements which impinge upon all stages of the need gratification process. These influences are not presented in the model which I have proposed. Of course, I believe that these internal and external factors do contribute to the process, but identifying the various sources of influence subsumed under these headings seems prohibitive given the limited scope of the model.

One important distinction between these two models is the concept of "method" and the feedback system which informs individual audience members about the success ("satisfaction") of the methods which are employed. Rosengren's "perceived problems" and "perceived solutions" together with "motives" seems to take into account the essential cognitive state which I describe as a "method." The addition I make is that the organism assesses the utility of each method and that judgments about the success or non-success of method employment precedes the experience of felt gratification or non-gratification.

CONCLUSION

One purpose of this writing was to offer an approach for clarification of the concepts which characterize the traditional uses and gratifications perspective. The terms "uses" and "functions" should, perhaps, be used more precisely in future work in order to remove some of the chaos. "Uses," which is generally thought to be the equivalent of what is termed "methods" herein has been a confusing label because it is sometimes understandably mistaken as a reference to discreet media experiences (media acts). "Functions," which can also serve as a descriptor for methods, were originally posited as attributes of media systems themselves (Wright, 1974; Wright, 1960). When one says that the media "function" to serve or disserve society in various ways, a confounding change in reference to the direction of effects is introduced.

With ethnographic and in-depth survey techniques it is possible to determine what methods are constructed and employed by what people in order to gratify their needs. The researcher can further investigate the media acts (and other behaviors) used by individuals in order to

fulfill the demands of the methods they employ in the construction of their social realities. The degree of success attained by use of media-oriented methods and their non-media related competitors for need gratification is also open to quantitative and qualitative analysis. The model presented here is offered in the spirit of clarification and encouragement of future work in the "uses and gratifications" or "methods and gratifications" paradigm.

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FIGURE

Method-Satisfaction/Need-Gratification

