

# Media as Instruments



**THE USES AND GRATIFICATIONS APPROACH**

## 1948 - Three general effects of mass comm "by virtue of their sheer existence"



- Lazarsfeld and Merton, "Mass Comm, Popular Taste and Organised Social Action, 1948"
  - **The status conferral function**
  - **The enforcement of social norms**
  - **The narcotising dysfunction**

# 1948 - What functions do media serve?



- **Harold Lasswell, "The Structure and Function of Communication in Society", 1948**
  1. The surveillance of the environment
  2. The correlation of the parts of society in responding to the environment
  3. The transmission of the social heritage from one generation to the next

# The Uses and Gratifications



- **Simple process view:**
  - Receiver passive
  - Study the effect of message
- **Uses and gratifications:**
  - Receiver active in selection and use
  - What gratifications are received?
    - ✦ Not just from content
    - ✦ But also from process of consuming

# Focus of U & G Theory



**The social and psychological origins of needs...**

**...which generate expectations...**

**...of the mass media or other sources...**

**...which lead to differential patterns of media exposure...**

**...resulting in need gratifications...**

**...and other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones.**

# Basic Assumptions of the Theory



- 1. The audience has prior social and psychological needs which are brought to the communication experience**
- 2. The audience is conceived of as active**
- 3. The media compete with other sources of need gratification**

# Theory → research



## **1. In understanding media effects, one must study**

- **not just the message being communicated**
- **but also the uses being made of the message by the audience**

**2. It is assumed that people are sufficiently self-aware to be able to report their interests and motives in using media**

**3. Value judgments on the cultural significance of media need to be based on audience perceptions, not just the researcher's perceptions**

# Katz, Gurevitch & Haas: "On the Use of Mass Media for Important Things."



<b>A. MODE</b>	<b>B. CONNECTION</b>	<b>3. REFERENT</b>
<p>1. <b>To Strengthen</b></p> <p>2. <b>To Weaken</b></p> <p>3. <b>To acquire</b></p>	<p>1. <b>Cognitive needs</b> (Information, knowledge, understanding)</p> <p>2. <b>Affective needs</b> (Emotional experience or gratification)</p> <p>3. <b>Integrative needs</b> (Credibility, confidence, stability/status)</p> <p>4. <b>Contact</b></p> <p>5. <b>Escape</b></p>	<p>with respect to</p> <p>1. <b>Self</b></p> <p>2. <b>Family</b></p> <p>3. <b>Friends</b></p> <p>4. <b>State, society</b></p> <p>5. <b>Tradition/culture</b></p> <p>6. <b>World</b></p> <p>7. <b>Others</b></p>

# Criteria of Uses...



- **Characteristic contents**
  - eg. drama, music, news, info
- **Typical attributes**
  - eg. print control vs broadcast immediacy
  - eg. iconic vs symbolic vs literate
  - eg. reading vs audio-visual
- **Typical exposure situations**
  - eg. in-home vs out-of-home
  - eg. alone vs with others
  - eg. control vs absence of control

# Some interesting findings from U & G research



- 1. The uses and gratifications derived from the different media differ for different population groups and change over an individual's life span.**
- 2. Different media typically serve different needs, although all may be turned to for entertainment and relaxation, and any one may serve all needs to some degree.**
- 3. The mass media become more important the greater the "distance" from a referent.**
- 4. The medium most readily available at a given period will be most heavily used by those with fewest resources.**

# Some interesting findings....



- 5. Television as the most accessible medium is very frequently the recourse when there is no involvement in other activities.**
- 6. Media aimed at broad audiences tend to appeal to the least positive in outlook. Those more forward looking tend to prefer the more specialised media.**
- 7. Taste in part reflects what the medium offers.**

## Some interesting findings



- 8. The search for more satisfying sources of gratification tends to be characterized by "satisficing" behaviour i.e. seeking and choosing alternatives which are satisfactory rather than optimal and reducing one's expectations to the level achieved.**
- 9. Even in media-related needs, personal communication is seen to be more helpful in satisfying needs than mass media.**
- 10. The uses of a new medium may be such that established interests and activities are affected.**