

The Importance of Needs in Uses and Gratification Theory

Faiswal Kasirye
Department of Communication
International Islamic University Malaysia
Email: kasirye.faiswal@gmail.com

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Coined in the early 1940s by Katz and Blumler (1974), the uses and gratifications theory deals with understanding why people use certain types of media, what needs they have to use them, and what gratifications they get from using them. Historically, the theory was first introduced to understand why people chose to consume the various forms of media present at the time in the 1940s.

Currently, the theory relies on two assumptions regarding the media. First, it suggests that the audiences are active media members by selecting the preferred content that they consume. The second assumption is that the media users or consumers are more aware of the reasons why they choose the particular media they choose to use or consume. However, the scholars build on those two assumptions and list other vital assumptions.

- Media influence on behaviour is through psychological factors.
- Media usage is goal-oriented.
- A particular media is selected based on the notion that it will satisfy the specific needs and wants of the user.
- The media is always in competition with other communication types; and
- Since people are always in control of the media, it influences them vastly.

However, the theory recognizes that individuals have tremendous power over their decision on what they want in a media over the media's influence on them. Furthermore, the theorists (Katz, Gurevitch & Haas, 1973) categorized the uses and gratifications theory in some needs, including affective, cognitive, personal, integrative, and tension free needs. However, the current paper focuses on understanding the importance of these needs in understanding further the uses and gratifications theory and the needs are discussed below.

The Importance of Needs In Uses and Gratifications Theory

Cognitive needs

The first Needs in the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) relate to cognitive needs relating to getting knowledge and information as well as having an understanding of people's social environments, exploration and curiosity (Ruggiero, 2000). This need stresses that users choose particular media simply because they are looking for some information and facts because the media is known for publishing facts. For example, there could be a constant television program relating to the history of the prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The users looking for information and facts on the prophet then tune in to watch that particular program because it has some gratifications to give to the viewer or rather the user. However, the current social media rampant with fake news might prove otherwise, and if one is not careful, they might end up consuming misinformation relating to that very issue.

However, it should be acknowledged that people have different needs and want and why they choose to watch or view their programs. Moreover, different programs might give different satisfactions to the views. Therefore, it might not be easy for two people to want the same things simultaneously.

Therefore, it is vital to study and understand the uses and gratifications in detail, and later also understand the cognitive needs proposed by them to know how they can be applied in attitude and user behaviour studies in future.

Affective needs

These are appealing experiences and needs that relate to pleasure. In other words, people use different types of media for personal needs like pleasure and or emotional needs like getting satisfaction from a football match aired on television. When someone watches a football match, the most they can get from it is a pleasure to your mind and soul. It can happen when the opposite side they support scores them and then suddenly becomes sad because of the score. So the scoring of the rival team makes them sad to the point of getting emotional should one mock them on the matter.

Understanding how to handle oneself in such emotional situations is fundamental and also, and knowing that this type of need happens in human beings may reduce the person's adverse reactions should they encounter it with the knowledge. Therefore, studying it may be of great help to the user and those engaged in such activities that satisfy the users of those particular media.

Personal identity/interactive needs

This particular need is essential to people's lives because it touches their inner feeling. The need concerns self-esteem, personal stability, need for self-respect, self-confidence, integrity and social status and others in the same category (Stafford et al., 2004). In addition, it connotes that people choose to use the different media platforms to gain credibility and raise their status among their fellows. For example, being stable is a critical aspect of society. Therefore, people may watch or listen to television to stay connected and essential in the society so that he has a place among the residents of society.

Another example may be when one buys an expensive car they saw in a television advertisement to earn respect among his fellows and, in the end, change the way they live. That is why, usually, when respected companies are planning to make advertisements, they emphasize celebrities that might influence the viewers to buy products, such as those they have seen a celebrity advertising in a television advert. Since many people on television see the advert, his status will be high because he has an expensive car they bought after looking at the advert and gaining social status from other people.

Social interaction and integration needs

The needs under social interaction related to interacting with family, friends, and relatives but rather with technological integration nowadays, unlike two decades ago when there were no social media interactions. So nowadays, people decide to use the different media platforms to fulfil their desires of chatting and engaging with their family relations and friendship, the need for affiliation with other people, and the desire to feel a connection to the outside world from their location. This is common in the current times where even people in countries where they are not citizens may keep receiving information relating to their countries as though they are present there in real-time. In addition, this need might also be critical because it attracts people to come together to enjoy a specific program together. This may happen by exchanging information on what each one enjoys

while on television, social media, or even on another media website. So, for example, it could be a new movie, and both decide to exchange access to the media platform. Then each one enjoys the program on their own, but the central point is that the second person is enjoying the program not because they have any satisfaction that they are looking from it, but rather because their friends are watching it and also decide to watch the same and on the next meeting, they have a candid discussion about that movie that can combine their talk.

This need is essential to be explored and studied because its relation is to technology, and technology keeps evolving every other day; therefore, whenever a new technology emerges, new measures of accessing it may also emerge, and new needs also have to come up. For example, it is essential to know that social media is the fastest way of socializing and information flow because you no longer have to meet up with anyone even if you wanted to when several platforms allow online meetings for as many people as possible. Therefore, studying this type of need to satisfy the media users helps understand why they choose those media platforms and what they gain from using them.

Tension release needs (escapism)

This need may warrant users to use a particular media because they want to escape a specific unpleasant situation and take their minds off the issues that could have been bothering them. For example, it can be a quarrel with a friend, wife, husband or fellow worker, but instead of engaging in the quarrel, you decide to keep your mind on a particular media program to avoid thinking about the issue in question. This is usually done in anticipation that the time one will spend on the particular media program will help them calm down and or grab their attention from what was bothering them and instead decide to concentrate on the media program. It can be a radio program, tv or even chatting or scrolling through a social platform.

In a nutshell, the needs from the uses and gratifications theory are very particular because they touch and address individual users of the media and how the particular media platforms gratify their needs and want because people's needs are different. Therefore, the needs discussed above are fundamental to be explored and studied in every aspect of life.

Criticisms of uses and gratifications theory (Elliott,1974)

Firstly, the authors of the theory (Katz, Gurevitch & Blumler, 1974) assumed that the media users are aware of the needs and gratifications they want to get out of using them. However, the theory's main critique lies in the assumption that people know their needs and gratifications and that the theory is not particular. After all, it is practically impossible for people to be knowing all their needs and gratifications because some of them come along the way when they are using the media platforms and not thought about before.

An example may be deciding to watch a particular media program to escape an unpleasant situation that could have annoyed them, but at the end of the program, the reaction may fail to change or result in a different need or gratification. This issue is very pertinent and checks the core assumptions of the leading theory because they look like they do not have safe burtons.

Secondly, the theory only talks about how users are aware of the reasons and needs they use the media but forget to talk about the power of the media. Highlighting the power of the media is crucial because the media is the one that gives power and influences the user to opt for it; otherwise, if that particular media chosen by the user did not have good content or engaging content for that matter, the chances are that the user would most likely not have chosen it to gratify their needs. Also, the different media platforms, mainly social media, offer different options in how one can communicate and or otherwise use the platform to ensure that the program has changed their mindset and become satisfied at the end of the program.

The other criticism that scholars have found over tie is that the theory is more audience-centred than media-centred. The reason is that all its variables are related to the audience and or the users. Rather than assuming anything related to the media, the users have to use the media to gratify their needs. Therefore, more effort is needed on the part of the media and how it can be incorporated into the excerpts of the theory.

Furthermore, the theory mainly talks about individuals' selection of their preferred content to use in the media but instead forgets the effects it can bring about on their minds if they do not look at it objectively. The theory, in short, focuses on the content and media, and it neglects to address the issue of what is on people's minds when they are selecting the particular media they use to satisfy their needs for its usage.

Lastly, most studies that have used the theory have concluded that they always get subjective results rather than those covering a broader perspective. Part of the problem scales from the fact that the theory only focuses on the users, neglecting to consider the media; therefore, the subjectivity may apply.

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