

نظرية الاستخدامات والإشباع: مراجعة شاملة لأصولها وافترضاها وانتقاداتها المعاصرة

Uses and Gratification Theory: A Comprehensive Review of Its Origins, Assumptions, and Contemporary Critiques

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الملخص:

استخدم الباحثون نظرية الاستخدامات والإشباع على مدى قرن من الزمان في دراسة استهلاك الأفراد لوسائل الإعلام. ويمكن اعتبار إشباع الأفراد لاحتياجاتهم عند استخدامهم لوسائل إعلام معينة عندما تُلبى توقعاتهم واحتياجاتهم. وتُعد نظرية الاستخدامات والإشباع من أكثر الأفكار شيوعاً وأهمية في مجال الاتصال الجماهيري. وتهدف هذه النظرية إلى استكشاف أسباب استخدام الناس لوسائل الإعلام، والتي تشمل أحياناً التعرف على الأشياء والتعرف على الذات وتمضية الوقت، بالإضافة إلى الإثارة، والصداقة، والاسترخاء. وتهدف هذه الورقة إلى توضيح ماهية نظرية الاستخدامات والإشباع، وتطورها، وافتراضاتها، وعناصرها الأساسية، ونقاط قوتها، وانتقاداتها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نظرية الاستخدامات والإشباع، وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، الإعلام، الإشباع، الاحتياجات.

Abstract:

The Uses and Gratification Theory has been used by scholars for a century in the study of individual media consumption. People's gratifications can be thought of as satisfying needs when someone consumes particular media that fulfils their expectations and needs. One of the most well-liked and important ideas of mass communication is the uses and gratifications theory. This theory's purpose is to explore and investigate why people utilize media, and these reasons or motivations sometimes include learning about things or oneself and passing the time, as well as for arousal, companionship, habit, and relaxation. This paper aims to clarify what Uses and Gratification Theory is, what the development, assumptions, essential elements, strengths and criticisms are.

Keywords: Uses and Gratifications Theory, SocialMedia, Media, Gratifications, Needs.

1) Introduction:

The Uses and Gratification (U&G) Theory, the concept first proposed in the 1940s and later revived in 1974 by Blumler and Katz and in 1985 by Rosengren, Palmgreen, and Werner, originates from a functionalist perspective in social sciences (Mehrad & Tajer, 2016). It suggests that media consumption satisfies individuals' psychological and social needs, akin to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Agyekwena, 2006). This theory is significant as it views audiences to be active participants, not just passive recipients of media messages, shifting focus from how media affects audiences to how audiences interact with media (Jessica Weber, 2020). It shifted the focus from traditional functionalist theories, which emphasized media's effects on the audience, to understanding how audiences interact with media. This theory emphasizes functionalism from the audience's perspective (Agyekwena, 2006).

Also known as "need seeking," the theory posits that media functions primarily to meet audience needs and motivations, with greater satisfaction correlating with needs fulfillment (Windahl, 2008). It addresses two key questions: why individuals are attracted to specific media and what satisfaction they derive from it (Mehrad & Tajer, 2016). Ultimately, this theory analyzes audience motives, media messages, and the social system to assess both the negative effects and positive effects of media use (Balakrishnan & Loo, 2012).

2) Tracing the Evolution of Uses and Gratification Theory: Historical Foundations and Theoretical Advancements

There are different accounts of the beginning of the uses and gratifications theory. However, radio listeners likely first noticed the uses and gratifications idea in the 1940s (Jessica Weber, 2020). Early research concentrated on several subjects, such as the effects of a newspaper strike and children's participation in comic books. A psychological explanation of

media consumption began to take shape during this period (Mehrad & Tajer, 2016). In 1948, Lasswell identified a macro-sociological approach that delineated four purposes of media: entertainment, correlation, surveillance, and transmission of culture for both individuals and society (Chuang, 2015).

Studies have summarized the history of the uses and gratifications theory's development in four stages, as will be explained below (Andrew Egede & Chuks-Nwosu, 2013a; El-Basit Ahmed, 2010; Mehrad & Tajer, 2016; West & Turner, 2010).

2.1 Stage 1:

The first developmental phase, which started in the 1940s, involved descriptive research with methodological and conceptual shortcomings. The majority of studies conducted at this time focused on determining and contrasting the radio audience with that of hard copy media (Mehrad & Tajer, 2016). Mass communication academics, in the 1940s and 1950s, concentrated more on the media's influence on people than on how individuals use and find satisfaction in media, as the purpose of media was to affect human behaviour. (Mehrad & Tajer, 2016). The first stage of Herta Herzog's (1944) research was marked by her work looking at the earliest forms of use and gratification, as well as her classification of the reasons behind people's choice of media. She distinguished three types of satisfaction in her research: emotional, wishful thinking, and learning. Wilbur Schramm developed the selection formula in 1954 to evaluate media preferences based on the anticipated gratification and effort required. This formula helps determine which mass media a person might choose based on the expected satisfaction relative to the effort needed to obtain it (Andrew Egede & Chuks-Nwosu, 2013).

2.2 Stage 2:

The second stage, which began in 1969, saw Jay Blumler and Denis McQuail classify audience reasons and motives during the 1964 United Kingdom election to comprehend potential mass media effects. They did this by looking at why people watched political television programs. The audience's motives they identified helped lay the groundwork for their 1972 study and, eventually, the Uses and Gratifications Theory. The second stage of this theory's development, according to Blumler and Katz (1974), is the practical application of psychological and sociological factors that may produce the disparate media usage patterns (Patino et al., 2012). McQuail, Blumler, and Joseph Brown divided media usage into four groups in 1972: surveillance, diversion, personal relationships, and personal identity. Elihu Katz, Michael Gurevitch, and Hadassah Haas joined McQuail, Blumler, and Brown in their media research in 1973–74. They worked together to perform a study that further influenced how people view mainstream media (Mehrad & Tajer, 2016).

During the 1970s, scholars of the uses and gratifications theory looked closely at audience motives. They created further typologies of how people used media to meet social and psychological demands. This may have been done partly in reaction to a barrage of criticism from other academics studying mass communication. Critics of the purposes and gratifications theory, such as Elliott (1974), Lometti et al. (1977), and Swanson (1977). These issues include (a) a lack of precision in important concepts, (b) a failure in how audiences perceive and interpret media content, (c) A bewildered explanation system, and (d) a vague conceptual framework.

At the end of the second developmental phase, the typology of motives was evaluated using more methodical techniques to prepare for the third developmental phase of the Uses and Gratifications theory. These techniques were combined with media-based approaches that conveyed

the elements of the study on pleasure. To put it another way, typological attempts were made to operationalise basic variables systematically (Cobley, 2008). According to Blumler (1974), this stage involves using gratification data to identify further mass communication elements that could be linked to the expectations and motives of the audiences.

2.3 Stage 3:

In the third developmental stage, the gratification process achieves theoretical consistency, which gives assurance about the Uses and Gratifications Theory's strength and instills confidence in its robustness. Significant efforts were made to guarantee the theoretical coherence of this approach, and numerous hypotheses were produced, some of which were changed or combined (Mehrad & Tajer, 2016). At this point, the concept of the Uses and Gratification Theory was greatly impacted by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974) as well as Katz, Haas, and Gurevitch (1973). According to them, people's expectations of the media and other sources are shaped by their psychological and social requirements. This ultimately leads to various tendencies or patterns of media usage, which most of the time satisfy demands or produce other effects without requiring conscious thought. In order to describe the key elements of the uses and satisfaction theory, Katz et al. (1973) and Katz et al. (1974) benefited from using Rosengren's (1974) conceptual framework. Figure 1 shows the simplified Uses and Gratification Theory model (Rosengren, 1974).

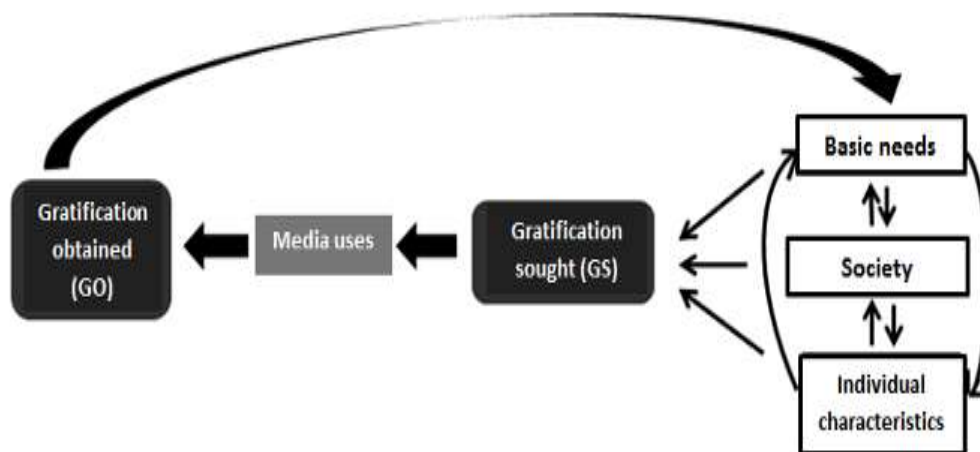


Figure 1 The simplified uses and gratification model based on Rosengren's conceptual framework (Rosengren, 1974)

2.4 Stage 4:

Throughout its evolution, the Uses and Gratifications theory responded to criticism, improving methodologies and acknowledging the significance of the audience's active participation in media consumption (Weiyang LIU, 2015). The theory expanded from early classifications of gratifications sought to more nuanced and complex analyses of individual motivations and outcomes (Mehrad & Tajer, 2016). The uses and gratifications theory has become a valuable and helpful framework for comprehending the dynamic relationship between audiences and media, emphasizing the multifaceted ways people seek gratification through media consumption (Weiyang LIU, 2015).

The fourth developmental stage, which entailed developing and testing a theory, was where Palmgreen (1979) introduced a quite intricate theoretical framework. The satisfaction that is sought and the satisfaction that is received should not be considered to be equivalent in theory and research, according to Palmgreen & Rayburn, (1985). They argued that even if people choose a certain form of media with the intention that it will

be helpful, there are several reasons why they might not use or like it. As noted by (Windahl, 2008), this challenges the idea that anything could succeed if others find it attractive or even pay for it.

Rubin (1986) underscored the adaptability of gratification scholars to criticism, emphasising detailed analysis and methodological refinement. Windahl (1981) proposed a theoretical advancement, stressing the need to integrate traditional media effects and the Uses and Gratifications theory. He introduced the term's effects. He argued for a perspective that considers audience use and media content, thereby demonstrating the theory's adaptability and continued relevance in the evolving media landscape.

Webster (1983) combined the opposing viewpoints of the Uses and Gratification Theory and "models of choice" in an attempt to increase the theoretical validity of structural determinants. He accomplished this by trying to determine how content preferences are exchanged (e.g., preferring news over entertainment), programming structures (e.g., scheduling a popular show), and viewing conditions (e.g., watching alone or with friends) when selecting a program. Similarly, Dobos (1992) forecasted television channel choice and satisfaction within certain communication technologies using the Uses and Gratification Theory applied to media satisfaction and choice in enterprises (Ruggiero, 2000).

In conclusion, the Uses and Gratifications Theory has evolved significantly, responding to criticism and incorporating a deeper understanding of media effects and audience participation. The research trajectory has transitioned from experimental studies to functional analyses, with a strong emphasis on the role of the audience in media consumption. This evolution is a testament to the theory's growth and development, which we, as researchers and scholars, can appreciate and learn from.

2.5 Uses and Gratifications in the Context of Traditional Media Platforms:

Literature on traditional media through the lens of uses and gratifications theory explores various motivations for media consumption. Greenberg (1974) identified reasons British kids watch TV, including escape, companionship, habit, enjoyment, relaxation, and passing time. Rubin (1983) categorized television-watching motivations into two groups: time-killing entertainment and information-seeking. Rubin (1984), classified these motives as instrumental (goal-oriented) and ritualistic (habitual).

Papacharissi and Mendelson (2007), noted that reality entertainment and companionship were primary motivations. Farquhar and Meeds (2007) emphasized arousal and surveillance over other motives like escape or social interaction. Agyekwena (2006) highlighted that TV satisfies needs for information, identity, entertainment, social interaction, and integration, with different genres attracting varied responses.

Nabi et al. (2006) suggested voyeurism distinguishes reality TV from fiction, while Ebersole (2007) identified five motives for watching reality shows: entertainment, personal identification, mood change, pastime, and vicarious participation. Barton (2009) concluded that viewers seek perceived reality, vicarious participation, relaxation, background distraction, and social utility from reality TV. Lastly, Vincent & Basil (1997) discovered that as college students progressed through their academic careers, their media consumption and surveillance requirements grew. A summary of the primary benefits of using traditional media is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Gratifications based on traditional media study

Motivation	Definition
Companionship	Do you need someone or something to accompany you?
Escape	Leave what they were doing alone.
Enjoyment	Take pleasure in the television stuff.
Habit	Regular propensity or settled.
Pass time	Watch television to kill time.
Relaxation	Release yourself from stress and worry.
Participation	Engage in social situations.
Social utility	Use the program as a topic in social interactions
Education	The program is educational, and participants gain knowledge from it.
Social relationship	Create any kind of connection between two or more people.

2.6 Uses and Gratification Theory in the 21st Century:

Uses and Gratification Theory traditionally assesses how people use mass communication media like television, print media, and radio stations. Ruggiero (2000) argues that this theory is foundational to communication science and has gained importance with advances in technology. As media options expand, understanding users' motives, needs, and satisfaction becomes crucial. Research supports Ruggiero's findings on the Internet and cell phones (Balakrishnan & Loo, 2012; Smock et al., 2011). Ruggiero emphasizes the need for future models that account for interactivity, hypersexuality, demassification, and synchronicity in communication technologies (Rezagholizadeh, 2013). These features influence

communication behaviors and require evaluation. To advance this theory in the 21st century, researchers must adopt a holistic methodology, focusing more on qualitative and interpersonal aspects of communicative behavior (Ruggiero, 2000).

2.7 Uses and Gratifications (U&G) Theory in the Age of the Internet:

New media is becoming a part of everyday life due to the quick development of communication technologies. According to Ruggiero (2000), the Internet differs from traditional media in three ways: asynchrony, interactivity, and demassification. Demassification enhances content selectivity, interactivity allows for communication and active information seeking, and asynchrony gives users the freedom to access media anytime.

Elliott & Rosenberg (1987), highlight the Uses and Gratification Theory to understand motivations for using new communication tools. Korgaonkar (1999) identified seven motivations for website use: security and privacy concerns, social escapism, information, socialization, economic motivation, non-transactional privacy, and interactive control. These can be summarized as: (1) quick information access, (2) escape, (3) enjoyment of interactivity, and (4) social interaction.

Stafford et al. (2004) categorize Internet gratifications into three types: (1) content gratifications through learning or message sharing; (2) process gratifications from media use; and (3) social gratifications from networking and interaction. Research by Ko et al. (2005) and Jun (2007) explored gratifications like entertainment, convenience, and social interaction. Mendes-Filho & Tan (2009) examined the motives behind user-generated content with an emphasis on social, content, and procedural aspects. "The uses and gratifications theory" is particularly relevant for research on the Internet and particular websites for several reasons:

- a) Active Audience and Interactivity: The Internet promotes active engagement, as users seek information and interact, contrasting with the passive consumption of traditional media like radio and TV (Johnson & Kaye, 2003).
- b) Mutability: The Internet offers a broader range of content than traditional media, enhancing the theory's application (Newhaven, 1996). This extensive accessibility allows for more diverse uses of the medium (Ebersole, 2000).
- c) Intentional Consumption: Internet users make purposeful choices about which websites to visit, reflecting an awareness of their needs and goals (Ruggiero, 2000; Johnson & Kaye, 2003).
- d) Variety of Material: The Internet satisfies various needs beyond those met by traditional media (Johnson & Kaye, 2003).

2.8 Uses and gratifications in the Age of social media:

With the rise of social media, numerous studies have explored its uses and gratifications, focusing on audience needs (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Users share content to meet intrinsic and extrinsic needs, such as social interaction—self–presentation, self–expression, and maintaining relationships (Malik et al., 2016)—as well as functional needs like feedback and escape (Chen, 2008).

Ng (2016) identified several social media gratifications: social effects, self–presentation, perceived danger, enjoyment, and convenience. Utz et al. (2015) highlighted distractions, connection with friends and family, and finding new relationships as key gratifications. Whiting & Williams (2013) further outlined ten themes, including social interaction, information seeking, relaxation, and entertainment.

Most research has centered on Facebook, where Malik et al. (2016) identified gratifications related to photo sharing, such as affection–seeking

and entertainment. Stanley (2015) noted that undergraduates prefer Snapchat over Facebook, revealing gender differences in platforms like Pinterest (Duggan, 2015). Park et al. (2009) found that entertainment, socializing, self-status seeking, and searching for information drove participation in Facebook groups. Lastly, Bayer et al. (2016) indicated Snapchat's role in reducing self-presentation concerns. Overall, social media serves diverse needs, shaping how individuals connect and share in their online environments. An overview of the primary gratifications associated with social media is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Gratifications based on social media study

Motivation	Definition
Convenience	No restrictions on time or location, portability.
Self-presentation	Preserve and cultivate a positive social image.
Attention seeking	Obtaining people's attention and importance.
Information seeking	Seek some information.
Information sharing	To express oneself and share information with others.
Pass time	Inadvertent and frequently seen behavioral pattern.
Relaxation	When people utilize social media, they get calm.
Communicating	Make use of social media as a channel for communication.
Affection seeking	The need to express supportive and considerate.
Social relationship	Create any connection between two or more people.

3) Uses and Gratifications Theory Assumptions:

In their study, Katz et al. (1973) outline five key assumptions of Uses and Gratifications Theory. First, audiences are active participants in goal-

directed media use rather than passive recipients. Second, individuals connect their needs to their media choices, complicating the idea of a direct media impact on behavior. Third, the media only meets a portion of people's needs and competes with other sources of need satisfaction. Fourth, audience members can self-report on their motivations and interests, providing data on media use. Lastly, cultural value judgments about media should be set aside when examining audience perspectives (Lim & Ting, 2012).

4) Strengths and Weaknesses of Uses and Gratifications Theory:

As with other theories, we shall start by talking about the uses and pleasure theory's advantages, which can be summed up as follows: 1) This theory emphasizes the individuals involved in the communication process; 2) it respects the capacity of media consumers; 3) it provides an analytical framework for the way in which media consumers interact with media content; and 4) it offers a valuable and productive perspective on the usage of new media. 5) Examining psychological demands, motives, and gratifications within a specific setting aids researchers in their study and comprehension of mediated communication scenarios. 6) it distinguishes between media consumers who are more passive ("what media do to people") and those who are more active ("what people do with media") (Katz & Blumler, 1974; Ko et al., 2005a; Luo, 2002).

As for the weaknesses of this theory, the Uses and Gratifications Theory has some limitations, and they can be summarized in two points: First, the Uses and Gratifications Theory does not acknowledge that the media can unconsciously affect consumers' motives and gratifications (Elliott, P, 1974). Second, according to Swanson (1977), it sometimes needs more precision and clarity in its dimensions and constructs (such as uses, motivations, and gratifications); thus, researchers may need clarification.

5) Key Criticisms of Uses and Gratifications Theory:

The uses and gratifications theory has attracted attention from mass communication scholars but faces criticism. Key criticisms of the theory include:

- a) According to Katz, Gurevitch, and Blumler's (1974) theory, media consumers are conscious of their wants and the pleasures that come from consuming media. However, a key criticism is that individuals may not fully recognize all their needs, as some emerge spontaneously while using media. This raises concerns about the theory's fundamental assumptions, suggesting they lack clear boundaries (Kasirye, 2024).
- b) Vague conceptual framework: Three theoretical stances can be used to analyze the uses and gratifications theory: cultural, motivational, or functional (McQuail & Gurevitch, 1974). Therefore, the conceptual framework supporting this theory study is not totally clear (Swanson, 1977).
- c) Lack of precision in major concepts: There is a lack of a well-understood understanding of central concepts in uses and gratifications research, including motives, gratifications, uses, and functional alternatives (Rubin, 2002).
- d) The methodological reliance on self-report data: This approach has drawbacks because people might not completely explain their behaviors or be aware of the reasons behind their content choices (Rubin, 2002).
- e) Confused explanatory apparatus: A key challenge with the uses and gratifications theory is the substantial confusion surrounding its explanation, specifically: (1) which components are necessary for a valid explanation, (2) how these components offer justification and clarity, and (3) how this theory differs from alternative explanations for the same behavior (Swanson, 1977).

- f) It ignores the media content: The Uses and Gratifications theory is criticized for being insensitive to media content, neglecting its textual and cultural specifics (El-Basit, Ahmed, 2010). It focuses more on the audience rather than on the media itself, emphasizing user needs over the media's role. As a result, there's a call for the media to be more integrated into the theoretical framework (Kasirye, 2024).
- g) The theory mainly addresses people's media preferences but overlooks the effects on their minds when they don't engage with it objectively. It focuses on media content while neglecting to consider individuals' thoughts during their selection process (Kasirye, 2024).

6) The fundamental elements of uses and gratifications theory:

6.1. Active Audience:

According to Katz & Blumler's (1974) uses and gratification theory, media consumers actively choose media to meet specific needs. This theory suggests that users have alternatives for satisfying their desires, indicating an active audience. In the 1980s, scholars began to explore audience behavior more deeply, acknowledging both the effects and uses of media while considering audience initiative (Rubin, 1986). Levy (1984) aimed to enhance the concept of audience activity, positing that this activity varies across communication contexts and stages.

There are five fundamental modes of audience activity: utilitarianism, selectivity, intentionality, resistance to influence, and involvement (McQuail, 1998). Levy (1984) summarized the audience activity typology through the qualitative orientation of the audience and the temporal dimension:

According to McQuail (1998), audience activity can be categorized into five basic modes: utilitarianism, intentionality, selectivity, resistance to influence, and involvement. Building on this, Levy (1984) conceptualized audience activity through two key dimensions: the qualitative orientation of

the audience and the temporal aspect of their engagement. "The qualitative orientation of the audience may be considered as having three nominal values: (1) audience selectivity, (2) audience involvement, and (3) audience use. Moreover, the temporal dimension can be distinguished into three times or values: (1) before exposure, (2) during exposure, and (3) after exposure. This activity formulation carries with it a notion about the qualitative interaction of audiences with time consideration and communications, meaning that different degrees and types of activity may be connected with particular stages of the communication process" (Levy, 1984: 53).

6.2. The Social and Psychological Origins:

Blumler (1979) proposed three primary social origins of media gratifications. First, normative expectations influence individuals' goals regarding media consumption. Second, an individual's socially distributed life chances may shape media use in contrasting ways. Third, subjective interpretation or personal adjustment to one's social context plays a role in determining the gratifications sought from media.

6.3. Needs and Motives:

Discussions within the uses and gratifications theory often begin with the premise that individual needs serve as the primary drivers of media use. This model's early iterations regarded needs as being equivalent to fundamental human needs. According to recent advances in this theory, needs include more than just the basic five requirements (Maslow's hierarchy of wants); they also include needs for guidance, security, reciprocal connection, and a reprieve from stress and tension (Windahl, 2008). Figure 2 presents the updated model of the Uses and Gratifications Theory, illustrating its evolution across various developmental stages.

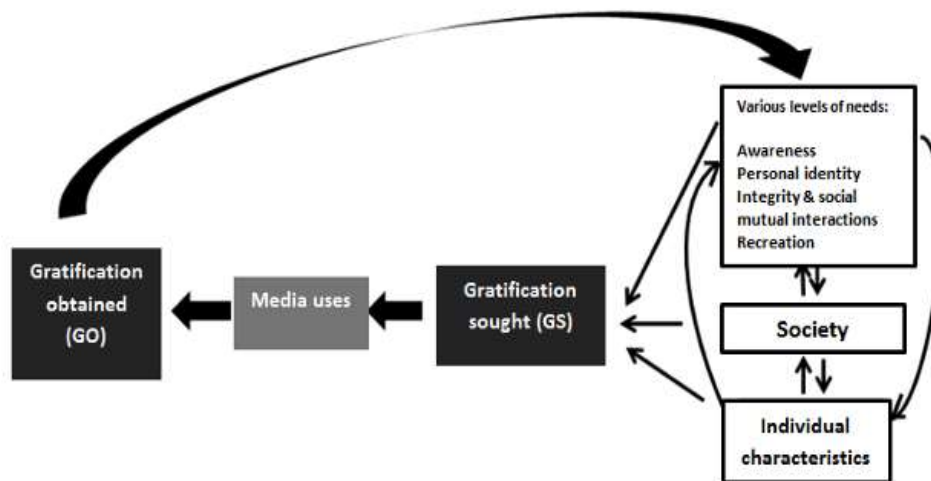


Figure 2 The revised model for Uses and Gratification Theory from Mehrad & Tajer (2016)

6.4. Expectancy (Potential Gratifications):

Expectancy is a key concept in uses and gratifications theory, indicating that individuals' actions are influenced by their perceived likelihood of specific outcomes. This concept highlights that audience expectations about media features and potential gratifications are crucial for understanding media consumption behavior (McQuail & Windahl, 1997). When audiences select from multiple media options, they do so based on which choices they believe will best meet their needs (Rayburn, 1984).

6.5 Gratification:

Getting and sending communications should be satisfying at best. The idea of uses and pleasure does not take usage as a goal; instead, it frequently concentrates on the gratifications that come from utilizing (Mehrad & Tajer, 2016). Outcomes of Current Uses and Gratitude. According to theoretical studies, people use media for the information or amusement it conveys, or just for the enjoyment of the media usage process itself (such as surfing or playing with technology). Two types of gratification have been distinguished by researchers: "process gratification" and "content gratification" (Stafford et al., 2004). Receiving specific messages is more

important and significant in content gratification, while participating and engaging in the "use process" is far more valuable in process gratification (Windahl, 2008). The Uses and Gratifications Theory has evolved to encompass various models of gratification, among which the cognitive and cultural models introduced by McQuail (1984) are particularly significant. Notably, the cognitive model closely aligns with the original formulation of the theory. However, it is impossible to overlook the artistic model. Whereas an individual's broad expectations and preoccupations are included in the cultural model of motivation, shared interests and curiosity are the basis of motivation in the cognitive model (Mehrad & Tajer, 2016). A comparative examination of these two models offers a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the Uses and Gratifications Theory. Moreover, it highlights that media use is not always driven by deliberate intent. For instance, a person may engage with a particular medium primarily due to a sense of belonging or dependency, as emphasized in the cultural model, without necessarily attending to or valuing the informational content it conveys, as outlined in the cognitive model (Windahl, 2008).

Gratification sought and gratification attained are the two parts of the uses and gratification paradigm. Ignoring the distinctions between these two elements—concept and applicability—leads to misunderstandings and incorrect interpretations of the results. Even while these two elements could be studied independently, doing so would improve and expand the results and interpretations. The smaller the gap between these two ideas, the more likely they are to assign greater value to a particular medium or communication channel. Additionally, a more pronounced gap may lead to feelings of dissatisfaction or a perceived sense of deception (Windahl, 2008). To assess this discrepancy, gap analysis models are employed, which measure the difference between the current state and the desired state of media engagement (Mehrad & Tajer, 2016).

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