



Introducing Communication Theory: Analysis and Application

Fourth Edition

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Uses and Gratifications Theory

Chapter Overview

- UGT at a Glance
- Introduction
- Stages in Uses and Gratifications Research
- Assumptions of UGT
- The Active Audience
- Media Effects
- Uses and Gratifications and the New Media
- Integration and Critique

UGT at a Glance

- People choose media to satisfy needs
- Media has a limited effect because of user control
- People are self-aware
- “What do people do with media?”

Introduction

- Early mass communication theories used
 - Mass society thinking
 - “Limited effects” theories
- UGT shifted the focus toward
 - Audience members’ roles in the mass communication process
 - People’s tendency to actively seek out specific media for specific gratifications

Stages in U&G Research

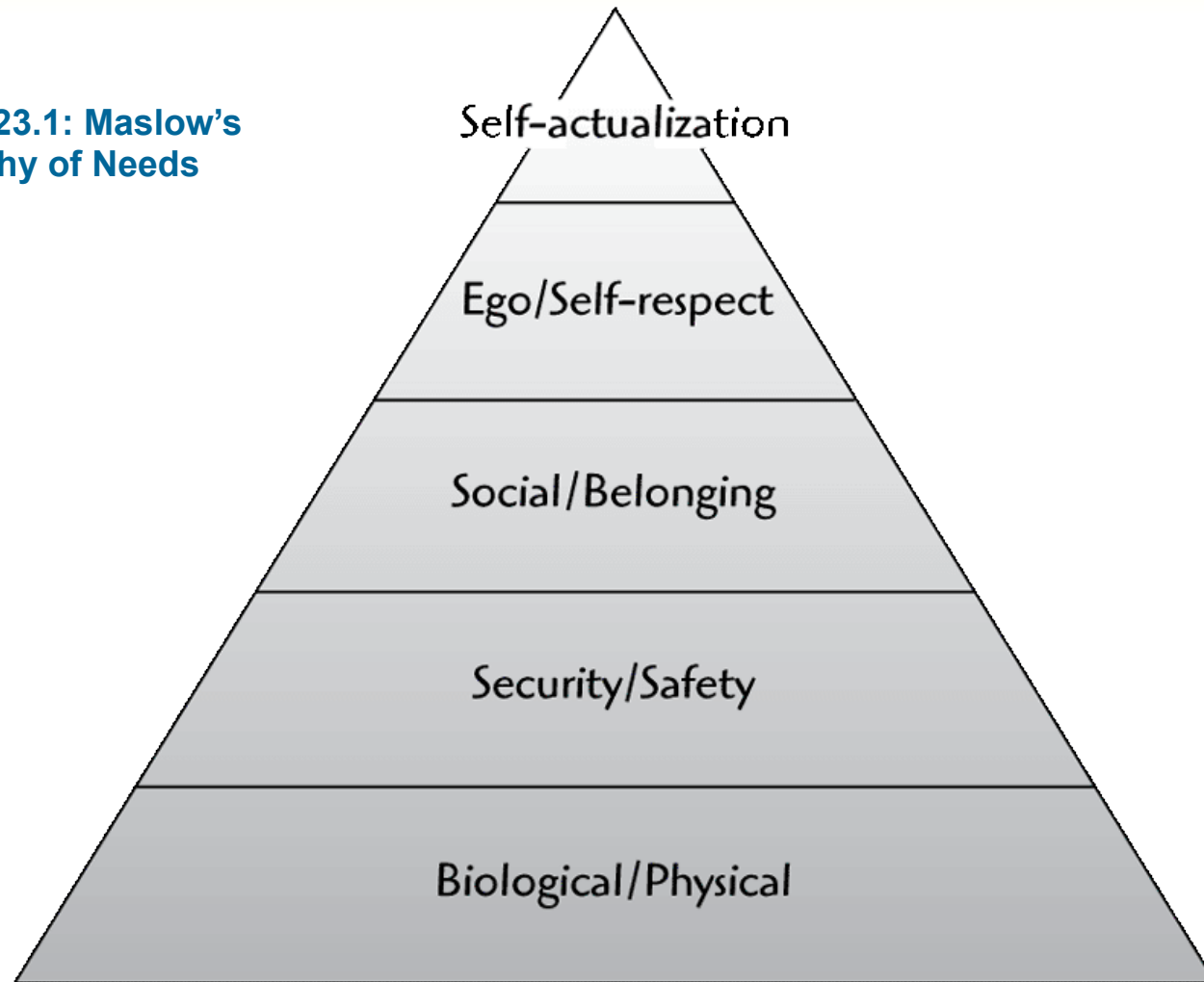
Stage One

Extending the Needs and Motivation Theory (Maslow, 1998)

- People actively seek to satisfy a hierarchy of needs
- Once goals of one level are achieved, people are able to move to the next level

Stages in U&G Research

Figure 23.1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Stages in U&G Research

Stage One, continued

- Fraction of selection (Schramm, 1954)
Expectation of Reward
Effort Required
- Classifications of reasons people engage in different media behavior (Herzog, 1944)

Stages in U&G Research

Stage Two

- Typologies representing reasons for media use
 - Rubin, 1981
 - Blumler & McQuail, 1969
 - McQuail, Blumler, & Brown, 1972
 - Katz, Gurevitch, & Hass, 1973

Stages in U&G Research

Table 23.1 Uses and Gratifications Typologies

RESEARCHER	REASONS FOR MEDIA USE
Rubin (1981)	Passing time Companionship Excitement Escape Enjoyment Social interaction Relaxation Obtaining information Learning about a specific content
McQuail et al. (1972)	Diversion Personal relationships Personal identity Surveillance
Katz et al. (1973)	Connection with others Separation from others

Stages in U&G Research

Stage Three

- Linking specific reasons for media use with variables
 - Faber, 2000
 - Greene & Krcmar, 2005
 - Haridakis & Rubin, 2005
 - Rubin, 1994
 - Rubin & Step, 2000

Stages in U&G Research

Reasons for acceptance

- Limited effects researchers
- Failure of limited effects paradigm
- Desirability and achievement of specific media effects
- Lack of research on those outside of the dominant paradigm

Assumptions of UGT

- The audience is active and its media use is goal oriented
- The initiative in linking need gratification to a specific media choice rests with the audience member
- The media compete with other sources for need satisfaction

Assumptions of UGT

- People have enough self-awareness of their own media use, interests, and motives to be able to provide researchers with an accurate picture of that use
- Value judgments of media content can only be assessed by the audience

Assumptions of UGT

- Ways to classify audience needs and gratifications
 - Diversion
 - Personal relationships
 - Personal identity
 - Surveillance

Assumptions of UGT

- Methodologies used in uses and gratifications studies include
 - Interviews
 - Direct observation
 - Surveys

The Active Audience

- Types of audience activity associated with media consumption
 - Utility
 - Intentionality
 - Selectivity
 - Imperviousness

The Active Audience

- Activity: What the media consumer does
- Activeness: The audience's freedom and autonomy in the mass communication situation

Media Effects

- How could researchers maintain limited effects concepts with so much evidence of media influence?
- Uses and effects model (Windahl, 1981)
- Media and gratifications are intertwined with the world

Media Effects

- Ways social situations and media are intertwined (Katz et al., 1974)
 - Media eases tensions in social situations
 - Media provides information about problems addressed in social situations
 - The media satisfies certain needs impoverished by social situations
 - Media can reinforce specific values elicited by social situations
 - Familiarity with media may be required to maintain membership in social groups

Media Effects

- Questions to ask to reject “vulgar gratificationism” (Katz et al., 1974)

Are the mass media instrumental in:

- Creating this social situation?
- Making the satisfaction of this situation’s needs so crucial?
- Making the media seem the most effective means to gratify our needs?

Uses and Gratifications and the New Media

- Cellular phone
(Leung and Ran Wei, 2000)
- Video game playing (Sherry et al., 2001)
- The Internet (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000;
Kaye & Johnson, 2004; LaRose & Eastin,
2004; Dimmick, Chen, & Li, 2004)

Integration

- Communication tradition
 - Socio-cultural
- Communication context
 - Mass/media
- Approach to knowing
 - Positivistic/empirical

Evaluating UGT

- Logical Consistency
 - Lack of theoretical coherence
- Utility
 - Active audience may be questionable
 - Heurism
 - Research spans decades
 - Theory has framed many research studies