

**FACTORS INFLUENCING
MEDIA CONSUMPTION
A Survey of the Literature**

Christine D. Urban

Program on Information Resources Policy

Harvard University

Center for Information
Policy Research

Cambridge, Massachusetts

A publication of the Program on Information Resources Policy.

FACTORS INFLUENCING MEDIA CONSUMPTION: A SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE
Christine D. Urban
September 1981, P-81-5.

The Program on Information Resources Policy is jointly sponsored by
Harvard University and the Center for Information Policy Research.

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Executive Director, Postal and Allied Arenas: John F. McLaughlin
Executive Director, Media and Allied Arenas: Benjamin M. Compaine
Executive Director, International and Allied Arenas: Oswald H. Ganley

Project Director: Benjamin M. Compaine

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Information Resources Policy, Harvard University, 200 Aiken, Cambridge,
MA 02138. (617)495-4114. Printed in the United States of America.

Printing 5 4 3 2 1

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Center for Information Policy Research

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United Telecommunications, Inc.
Voice of America
Warner Amex Cable Communications Inc.
The Washington Post Company
Western Union

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks are due the following persons who reviewed and commented critically on previous drafts of this study. Neither these persons nor the Program on Information Resources Policy are responsible for nor necessarily in agreement with the views expressed. Nor should anyone but myself be held accountable for errors of fact or interpretation.

James L. Bauer

Anthony G. Oettinger

Leo Bogart

Robert D. Ross

John C. LeGates

John Rothman

Philip Meyer

Jules Tewlow

I also greatly appreciate the efforts of Ruth Whaley, who did much of the hard digging as my research assistant on this project.

Christine D. Urban

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Executive Summary	ii
1. Introduction	1
Objectives and Structure of the Paper	2
Limitations	4
2. Research on the Factors Influencing Media Consumption . .	6
Perspectives on the Research	6
Individual Influences on Media Behavior	7
Interpersonal Influences on Media Behavior	17
Situational Influences on Media Behavior	19
Media-Related Influences on Media Behavior	24
3. Research on the Uses and Gratifications of the Media . .	39
Perspective on the Research	39
Uses and Gratifications for the Individual	40
Uses and Gratifications for Society	50
4. Summary and Conclusions	62
Summary of the Research	62
Drawbacks of the Existing Research	65
Research on New Media Formats	67
Areas of Future Research	69
Conclusion	76
5. Notes	78
6. Reference Bibliography	81

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- A key component for evaluating the media environment of the future is the understanding of consumer behavior toward media: how consumers perceive, select, and use media, and then become "attached" to the media throughout the various circumstances of their private and social lives.

- This paper reviews the existing literature on consumer behavior toward traditional mass media and raises some of the questions which must be addressed as part of an assessment of the possible directions of a new media environment. It provides a theoretical and empirical background for further research on the key market questions that must be explored. These fall into four areas:

- 1) What values will the new media bring to consumers?
- 2) Who will use the new media? How will they be used?
- 3) Are the new media to be "added to" or "substituted for" the existing media processes?
- 4) What are the boundaries of the new media environment that are measurable and projectable?

- The survey of the literature first examines factors which influence media consumption. It then summarizes research on the uses and gratifications of media for the individual and society.

- The research makes clear that media behavior is a dynamic process involving individual, interpersonal, situation and media-related factors. Determining the relative power of each of these is a complex task.

- A multiplicity of situational and interpersonal elements filter the pure effect of what the receiver and the medium bring to the equation.

They affect individuals' perceptions of the media, their use of the media, and even their definition of the value of the media.

- Taken together, all of the elements of media/individual behavior generate a type of matrix which characterizes the individual-medium interaction. Both participants bring a priori characteristics and needs, and the continuing interaction of these is patterned and molded by perception, choice and use. By itself, the literature on factors which influence media consumption offers explanations of the what, but not the why of consumers' use.

- Uses and gratifications research begins with a relatively simple supply-and-demand view of media behavior and evolves into a more dynamic outlook which concentrates on the actions and reactions of all three elements of the interaction: the individual, the medium, and society.

- In some of the later research, the media are presented as an instrument which society can use as a change agent. This expansion of the theoretical perspective allows us for the first time in the literature to consider the influence of decisions made by public policy officials and managers of media businesses.

- With today's widening diversity of available media content and formats and the accompanying pressure to develop policies regarding them, we find the need for a theoretical framework that considers both individuals and the media as active, decision-making partners. It must also allow for a wide diversity in the reasons and rationale underlying those decisions.

- Among the drawbacks to the existing research are: 1) limitations of extrapolating research done using traditional media definitions of newspaper, television, etc., to new, less well-defined media entities such as viewdata, teletext, video disc; 2) the static nature of most of the

work--few studies examined changes over time; 3) concentration of studies on users of media, mostly ignoring non-users; 4) the little attention paid to empirically determining the overall salience of media behavior itself; 5) most important, the lack of attention given to research on individuals' behavior toward the media format itself. That is, research must differentiate between behavior toward the input, the output, the process, the "editing" function and the storage of information through different formats.

● Among the areas identified for further research are: 1) What new functions and uses of media will arise from new media processes and formats? 2) How will the new media systems influence each other and the social environment which supports them? 3) How will new media formats affect society and individuals? 4) What are the key strategic business and government policy decisions that can directly or indirectly affect consumer acceptance, purchase and use of new media formats?

● It seems appropriate for policy makers to begin investigating the given market "resources" of present perceptions and behavior and then chart the optimum course to the emerging environment based on reasonable expectations of probable, rather than possible, consumer acceptance.

INTRODUCTION

The pace of technological and market change in new media processes and formats is increasing. Experiments (or market introductions) of so-called new media are already in the works, and the speed of further development can be expected to increase in the near term. Among the outcomes of this activity is the confrontation of consumers with a wide array of new media alternatives, under such labels as viewdata, teletext, video discs, pay TV, cable TV, MDS, electronic information services, etc. Some industry observers note that no major technological breakthroughs are necessary to implement even the most sophisticated of the proposed systems. Therefore, it is a propitious time for research that will help define the strategic guidelines for this new media marketplace.

A key component for evaluating the media environment of the future is the understanding of consumer behavior toward media: how consumers perceive, select, and use media, and become "attached" to the media throughout the various circumstances of their private and social lives. Some work done in recent years has explored the technological capabilities of new media formats, but the technological capabilities of a system are not sufficient data for estimating market acceptance or use. Technology is a necessary, but not sufficient, component of the future media environment--which will involve not only new equipment, but new costs to the consumer, new skills and experiences, new differential advantages and (perhaps) a new importance of the media in his or her life. Technologically-based projections tell us only what is possible, not what is probable in a future competitive marketplace.

The strongest and most reliable base for predictions of the structure and character of the new media environment is that of consumer behavior. Today, the consumer's use of the mass media is a relatively patterned and explicable behavior, which can permit managers of media properties to track their "products" performance in the marketplace and understand consumer choice patterns of content or format. For predicting the new media environment, these consumer data may provide a baseline on which hypotheses about new media formats' marketability and potential market position can be built. In fact, given an increasingly crowded media marketplace, a clear understanding of the structure of consumer media selection and use is essential to anticipating consumer reaction to proposed media products, and reducing uncertainty on the part of those firms who intend to participate in this marketplace. To investigate consumer reaction only after the introduction of the new system is almost too late, leading not only to faulty entry strategies for the businesses involved, but also perhaps precluding the later collection of generalizable benchmark data. Research on the probable market reaction to new media formats and processes will reduce the likelihood of corporate policy makers going down paths in the marketplace that lead nowhere except to the draining of financial and human resources. It will help public policy planners better determine the appropriate context for their roles in the dynamic media environment.

Objectives and Structure of the Paper

This paper reviews the existing literature on consumer behavior toward the traditional mass media, and raises some of the demand-side questions which must be addressed as part of an assessment of the possible

directions of a new media environment. The paper integrates a wide range of communications research relevant to this subject, summarizes the major influences on media consumption, and analyzes the state of knowledge that is now available to help private and public policy makers discern the structure of the future media market(s).

In addition, this paper provides a theoretical and empirical background for further research on the key market questions that must be explored. In general, these market questions fall into four areas:

1. What values will the new media bring to consumers?
(What purposes will they serve, or serve better?
Which will be most important?)
2. Who will use the new media? How will they be used?
(Is there a specific rate of diffusion that can be
expected? What penetration pattern is reasonable?)
3. Are the new media to be "added to" or "substituted for" the
existing media processes?
(What will be the nature of the competition for consumers'
time, money, attention and loyalty, etc.?)
4. What are the parameters of the new media environment that are
measurable and projectable?
(Which of the new processes will significantly influence
demand and behavior? Is content or format the key to
predicting use and market success?)

Overall, the paper provides a base of information that aids in further research and decision-making regarding the "fit" of the new media formats (individually and in aggregate) into the consumer market they are entering.

The survey of the literature is in two sections: the first outlines factors which influence media consumption (i.e., the individual, interpersonal, situational and media-related influences on behavior), and the second summarizes research on the uses and gratifications of media for the individual and for society. Organized in ascending order, the least-

complex variables are discussed first. This structure leads the reader not only through a reasonable conceptual development of the field, but generally through a historical one as well. The currently held generalizations of media are dependent, in large degree, not only on empirical work of the last ten years, but on the theoretical evolution within the field of communications research itself.

Limitations

Two caveats are appropriate. First, the research summarized in this paper does not differentiate among media content (i.e., the information provided), media processes (the creation, gathering, handling, storing and transmission of the information), or media formats (the form in which the content is made available to the user, or is handled by the processor)¹, as these terms are defined by the Program on Information Resources Policy. When use of the new terms does not violate or overstate the intent of the original research being discussed, they will be used.

Second, this paper is not meant to be an exhaustive review of each of the areas of research discussed--nor is its purpose to catalogue the numerous empirical works measuring levels of usage (by hours, issues read, etc.) of the present media. It excludes from analysis the following topics: 1) the use of advertising messages by media consumers, 2) the non-consumer uses of media in business or art, 3) the uses of point-to-point conduits (such as the telephone and telegraph), and 4) the effects of media content on individual consumers or receivers. This survey of the literature is intended to suggest hypotheses to be tested in further consumer-based research, and to highlight findings that could be extended

as projectable hypotheses. Most importantly, however, this paper identifies some of the crucial controllable and uncontrollable dimensions of the potential media environment: the key factors which, in the aggregate, motivate and shape consumers' use of the mass media.

RESEARCH ON THE FACTORS INFLUENCING MEDIA CONSUMPTION

The media function in varied ways, and each [sic] also fits differentially into the lives of the social classes. There are (sometimes sharp) class preferences among the newspapers available in a community, in evaluating magazines, in selecting television shows, in listening to the radio, in how newspapers are read, in receipt and meaning of direct mail ... in the total volume of materials to which people are exposed to and to which they attend in one or another of the media.²

Perspectives on the Research

Social science is replete with studies which attempt to explain and predict behavior by analyzing an individual's demographic, psychological or social characteristics. Communications research follows this tradition, and for the past 40 years has investigated these hypothetical cause-and-effect relationships between who the individual is and how he or she behaves toward the mass media.

This section of the paper highlights the key findings about factors found to influence the volume and type of media consumption by individuals. It examines not only the individual characteristics that have been studied, but also summarizes research on the interpersonal factors, situational factors, and the characteristics of the media themselves which influence behavior.

Individual Influences on Media Behavior

Three general clusters of traits have been isolated and defined as individual influences: demographics, psychological factors and predispositions. As contrasted with the situational, interpersonal and media-related influences on media behavior, these factors relate only to one individual and his or her media use, most often are not analyzed singly but in clusters (such as "lifestyle" or "social class"), and are regularly cast as predictors of media use or behavior patterns, rather than seen as interacting with that behavior.

Demographics. Although there are a great number of studies which concentrate on identifying the influences of single demographics (age, income, sex, etc.) on media behavior, few succeed in explaining large proportions of behavioral difference using demographic factors alone. Of course, there is a large body of research which validates the obvious: e.g., that men tend to read more sports magazines than women, or that non-working women watch more daytime soap operas than men. Beyond this, a number of general hypotheses appear.

First, most researchers find that greater-than-average readership of newspapers and magazines is associated not only with higher levels of income, education, occupation and perceived social status, but, more importantly, with what can be called a "sense of community." Variables which define this sense include length of residence in a community or neighborhood, the degree of urbanization, home ownership, employment, and participation in local social and political affairs.³

These studies (228, 249, 272, 108, 321, 338) are consistent in their findings: the stronger an individual's "ties" to a local community, the greater is his or her use of media (especially print) that reflect, in some way, that community of interest. In one sense, these findings are as obvious as those which suggest strong sex differences or age differences in content preference. Community ties are, after all, a type of clearly predictable influence on content preference: whether it is the local news of a geographic community or articles in a magazine designed for individuals in a community of shared interest, such as photography or horse breeding. The media not only hold these groups together, but often function as a leader within the community itself (217).

Studies on the influence of age and race find some explanatory patterns, but not as reliably as have the studies isolating the "sense of community." Some research on age as a predictive variable suggests that TV usage peaks in the adolescent and young adult years, and then tails off (16, 42, 188). One study (10) disagrees with these findings. Print usage is just the opposite: the overall amount of reading increases with age (298, 350), although content preferences may change (e.g., older individuals might also have a greater "sense of community" as discussed previously).

The preponderance of data, however, suggests that social class and community ties are the two clusters of variables that show most promise for predicting media behavior. This has stimulated communications researchers to seriously investigate the social class and its influence, focusing on social stratification (which measures the relationships between people) rather than isolated demographics (which are measures of individual characteristics).

Social class and stratification. Early research on the influence of social class on media behavior outlines the major effects that social class has on media use--including the range of choices, the use of the medium itself, and the ability for the individual to "order" and "implement" communication (240). Regarding overall communications "style," the research finds that the middle class is most familiar with elements of social structure, and is also most facile with explaining its media behavior by social rather than personal reasons.

A few general effects of social class on media use are noted. The first is simply in volume and type of media consumed. Research finds that higher social classes not only read more printed materials than do lower classes (1, 71, 276, 275, 272), but are more likely to attach credibility to information from printed sources. Lower socioeconomic classes, especially among blacks in that category, are more likely to believe oral communications from people, the radio or television than written communications (1, 276). (It is suggested, however, that these differences may reflect geography and social position rather than an inherent class-motivated behavior (82). It is also possible that the simple literacy proportions that could affect a racially-balanced national sample would tend to produce these results.) One summary of the effect of class differences on the volume and type of media consumed concludes:

Social stratification in a subtle way defines the degree of control an individual can have over the media of communication. The individual in the various social roles of the lower socioeconomic strata is relegated to passive role of a media consumer. Although only a small minority of persons from the higher strata have actual control over the mass media, the majority feel an active identification with media content

because much of it is created and stated in terms of a middle-class value system and lifestyle.⁴

A second influence of class on media use is in content preferences, i.e., literature, political analysis, gossip columns, etc. Because of problems in classifying "types" of content, studies researching the relationship of class to content preferences are difficult to generalize. A number of studies, however, do find similar patterns of preference--albeit, general ones.

In brief, studies find that higher socioeconomic classes are more likely than average to read, and more likely to prefer "serious" materials such as literary, travel, news-oriented and public affairs content. Lower socioeconomic classes are more likely than others to enjoy the comics, soap operas, confessions magazines, and other "escapist" content (1, 186, 276, 262). These findings can be explained by a functional perspective on the information needs of the middle and upper classes, or by arguing the traditional point of view that there are more "passive" media consumers who tend to prefer content that is less difficult, less varied, and more likely to directly affect their own lives than that selected by more "active" media consumers.

Overall, social class and stratification measures contribute significant results to the study of media behavior, not only suggesting a clear "patterning" of demographics that can reasonably explain volume, format and content choices, but also linking easily into the uses and gratifications of research work to be discussed later. Social class variables are suggested as a true "universal" measure as well. Cross-national studies on media usage (163, 262, 285, 350) find them both methodologically

and theoretically powerful in validating U.S. results in other countries, especially in the more industrialized, media-rich societies. Although the list of demographics which make up social class (and other clustered profile measures) usually account for only about one-quarter of the total variance in media behavior (136), they are most useful as reliable benchmarks on which to build more complex psychological and sociological variables.

Psychological characteristics. If there is any a priori set of variables that would be expected to significantly contribute to explaining media behavior, it is the set of individual psychological dimensions. Both psychological variables that would affect an individual's motivation to consume media and content, and to understand and use the information for his own purposes are included in this set.

Some of the psychological influences studied can be easily related to an individual's social class standing and the personality traits that would correspond to his or her relative power within the social community. For instance, a number of studies note the positive relationship between high degrees of media consumption and leadership and self-confidence (168, 120), innovativeness and risk-taking (168, 144), and other-directedness (349, 36, 46). Other researchers question this, noting that:

the social character of an individual may possibly affect perception of a medium or ... vehicle but not to any degree in which there will be a significant or meaningful variation in the extent of exposure or preferential feeling.... No one medium or ... vehicle is singularly oriented to the interests and values of one social character type that differential patterns of mass media selection could occur.⁵

There are also measurable differences in the types of content preferred by varying personality types (6). For example:

Inner-Directed subjects appeared to prefer and be exposed to classical ... music ... more often read Time magazine and the editorial, syndicated columns.... Other-directed students ... tended to prefer the sports sections and local news ... rock and roll and popular music ... and (TV) dramatic fare.⁶

Differences in preference for different types of content (in radio) can be attributed to the individual's "mental set," which is shaped by both psychological and demographic elements. Content preference is also related to anxiety (26), anomie or rootlessness (44), and a host of other, less-specific psychological states, such as perceptions of modernity, creativity, and social expectations (230, 149).

Other workers in this area describe psychological characteristics of heavy and light TV viewers. Heavy TV viewers, for instance, not only seem to have lower self-esteem, but also have more conservative and "peace-oriented" values. Light TV viewers had a significantly higher self-esteem, and values that were more oriented to "imagination" and "true friendship" (57). Often, the heavy TV viewer (more than 30 hours a week) is characterized as passive (19), with stimulation coming from the TV set with the viewer contributing little.

Often these types of people watch for hours on end. They expect immediate gratification in terms of entertainment value. Hence the immediate and obvious are most appreciated. Those who adopt this viewpoint are often people with few inner resources that would lead them to cultivate other 'outside' interests and activities.⁷

Finally, there is research which finds a relationship between media usage and psychological traits of "community membership," similar to and

corroborating the demographically-defined community link. These studies link media use to an individual's degree of socialization (152, 155, 100) and extent of political activity (22, 61).

These and other studies that investigate the relationships between media behavior and learning ability, social adjustment or personality development open a complex arena for study and speculation. No theory is yet conclusive; it remains to be determined whether any of these psychological states are the cause for, the effect of, or simply coincidental with differing media behaviors.

Lifestyle. Just as social class was described as a combination of salient demographic variables, the concept of lifestyle defines an individual's particular "manner of living" by combining and clustering his or her psychological, demographic and behavioral traits. "Lifestyle" offers the communications researcher a powerful (though more complex) predictor of media behavior, because it is a relatively consistent and predictable measure of social behavior (66). Also, because media are so closely linked not only to an individual's self-image, but his projected "social self," lifestyle studies have proved a fruitful method of investigating media choices and use since the early 1970s.

Lifestyle patterns distinguish audience segments both for individual media (305, 247, 299, 88, 300, 284, 295, 260) and for the heaviness or lightness of media use in general (102, 284, 98, 75, 221, 72). Such studies fall into two general categories: those attempting to use lifestyle measures to segment the audience of a specific medium, and those seeking overall dimensions of lifestyle's effectiveness as a predictor of media use.

The first of these two research objectives is somewhat successful. The audiences of particular magazines, newspapers and some television shows are found to be characterized by between three to nine lifestyle segments--often, but not always, differentiated by their content or media preferences. For the purposes of this paper, the latter objective (to isolate overall dimensions) is more interesting, since the findings of these studies are generalizable across the complex of interrelated media "mix" decisions that individuals make.

In general, these studies conclude that: 1) lifestyle is a telling and useful variable for predicting media preference and use; 2) lifestyle can not only measure differences between users and non-users, but suggests a system of "reasons" for use or non-use; 3) the previously discussed active/passive and inner-directed/other- (or community) directed dichotomies are valid; and 4) lifestyle is the best link for the explanation of how media use affects media perception and behavior. (In addition, cross-national tests of the methodology and perspective of lifestyle analysis suggest that it could be used to study media behaviors in a "culture-free" manner.)

Although lifestyle measures include (in some applications) demographic variables, they have significant independent power for prediction (182). Separately, the non-demographic variables either outperform or equal the ability of the demographic variables to predict media behavior (126, 72).

The most important of the lifestyle research conclusions concerns the cluster of traits which influences heavy and light media use among individuals. Research suggests that heavy media users, for instance, differ

from light users in their shopping behavior--shopping more often beyond the local retail area, using more convenience outlets, etc. (97, 75)--and their orientation, being more home-oriented (284), and conservative in their values and expressed attitudes (284, 98). These characteristics tend to be predictive of an individual's volume of media use, rather than his or her choice of content. Also, because lifestyle is a behavioral concept that is most intimately related to the present environment, it is most important to distinguish between lifestyle influences on media behavior that are dependent on external conditions (e.g., the availability of cheap energy for heavy media-users' extended shopping), and those lifestyle influences that are more stable because they are grounded in basic demographic or social realities (e.g., the greater media use by outgoing, community-oriented lifestyle segments).

Information seeking. An important outgrowth of both demographic and lifestyle studies on media consumption levels is that which defines the "information seekers," a cosmopolitan elite which transcends national boundaries. This is not a large group (estimates range between 3 percent and 5 percent of the populations), but it is an influential one. The information seeker is described as an upper-class individual who makes a greater use of print media than the average individual, who relies more on broadcast media (342). The information sought is either personal (for the fulfillment of self-defined needs and desires) or social (for the maintenance of social "place" and/or status as an opinion leader). In subsequent cross-cultural studies (348, 63, 287, 258), researchers conclude that the information seeker is a more "rational" and critical consumer of

goods and services, has a strong interest in public affairs, and is a conservative individual who thinks that his or her purchases and actions have elements of social risk connected to them, perhaps because they would be used by others to evaluate the individual.

Earlier studies on the relation of media usage to information seeking were done in the 1960s (346, 205). Some show differences between the information-seeking group and others with regard to the perceptions of innovation, and in one study not substantiated by other work (63), a high degree of innovativeness is associated with this segment. The original definition of the "cosmopolitan" is integrated with direct measures of this segment's social and physical mobility, finding that the information seekers are cosmopolitans who sought new information and experiences through travel as well as through the media (292).

There are strong similarities between a number of these "information-seeker" characteristics and the characteristics attributed to the heavy-consumption "media imperative" groups defined by a study for the Magazine Publishers Association (322, 324). These "media imperative" groups are defined by their relatively higher usage of one medium over another (television over magazines, for instance), and the study suggests that these groups not only behave toward the available media formats differently, but that they are demographically different as well. One could conclude that the information seekers are not only predisposed toward heavy media consumption, but would probably use the media for both financial and consummatory purposes. (This distinction is discussed in detail in the section on uses and gratifications research.)

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There are strong similarities between a number of these "information-seeker" characteristics and the characteristics attributed to the heavy-consumption "media imperative" groups defined by a study for the Magazine Publishers Association (322, 324). These "media imperative" groups are defined by their relatively higher usage of one medium over another (television over magazines, for instance), and the study suggests that these groups not only behave toward the available media formats differently, but that they are demographically different as well. One could conclude that the information seekers are not only predisposed toward heavy media consumption, but would probably use the media for both financial and consummatory purposes. (This distinction is discussed in detail in the section on uses and gratifications research.)

Overall, then, the individual influences on media behavior range from the easily measured demographic variables through the more complex but richer lifestyle measures. Although variable sets that describe individual predispositions are somewhat arbitrarily differentiated, this whole stream of research suggests that these basic measures are both meaningful and relevant keys to the understanding of media behavior.

Interpersonal Influences on Media Behavior

Because media are social, as well as individual products, use is influenced by both individual and social factors. An individual's use of media (or information in general) is motivated, to some degree, by what he or she has learned or been told about their quality, their social acceptability and their cost (in time, money, energy or required attention). Another important aspect of interpersonal influence is the "shared experience" of certain types of media (such as television or cinema) which encourages individuals, in some cases, to talk about the content they have shared. Both the socialization and shared experience factors are considered to be highly predictive influences on present and future media consumption patterns, but are also difficult to measure.

Another type of interpersonal influence, however, is well-researched and flows directly from the individual influences previously discussed. Just as there is hypothesized to be an "information-seeking" segment, researchers also suggest an "information-mediating" segment of society, opinion leaders having influence over the choices (media-related and otherwise) of others. As a key interpersonal effect on media behavior, this concept is explored in more detail.

Opinion leadership. The original work in this area hypothesized that opinion leaders share a set of characteristics, including

the personification of values (who one is) ...
competence (what one knows) ... [and] strategic
social location (whom one knows) ... divid[ed]
into whom one knows within a group and 'outside'.⁸

These elements--in addition to the interest, experience, intent and accessibility to information that reinforces the opinion leader's knowledge--are necessary conditions before the opinion leader can "legitimize" (74) and transmit information to his or her peer group or information-dependents.

Opinion leaders mediate the individual's selection and use of the mass media by being

more generally exposed to the mass media, and
more specifically exposed to the content most
closely associated with their leadership.
Presumably, this increased exposure then
becomes a component--witting or unwitting--of
the influence which such influentials transmit
to others.⁹

Just as the mass media fulfill individual needs for social prestige (32, 208) and information, so opinion leaders seem to use the mass media to maintain their own status, and to support their own opinions with the weight of the derived information. Because opinion leaders also seem to exhibit a greater propensity to communicate than the average individual, this process of information transfer is conceptualized in the "two-step flow" of information--from media sources through opinion leaders to the rest of the public.

Other studies of opinion leaders suggest that they have a strong network of personal contacts and acquaintances (208), a tendency toward

either local opinion leadership or "cosmopolitan" opinion leadership--differing in the scope and complexity of their role (161, 208, 26) "specialty" defined by social context or topic of interest (216), and a willingness to communicate their knowledge (26). Of course, the opinion leader's media usage and selections are quite specific within his or her "specialty."

In addition, however, one survey of the literature on opinion leadership reports that most studies show opinion leaders and innovators having a higher-than-average level of exposure to the mass media. Other research (161) again validates these findings, although one study found that opinion leaders were more likely to have greater exposure only in media which related to their areas of influence. Cross-national studies in a similar vein seem to bear out this distinction (258, 287).

Although the groups of innovators and opinion leaders are observed to coincide on occasion (the "dual-role change agent") (74), they are most often not the same group of individuals. Likewise, the characteristics which define opinion leaders are not often the generalized traits that identify innovators. The opinion leader as an interpersonal influence on others' media behavior is far more important in mediating people's choices among the present media formats and types of content; the innovator would be a more significant influence in their decisions to buy or use new media formats or types of contents.

Situational Influences on Media Behavior

Media consumption draws not only on an individual's monetary budget, but also on his or her time budget. The traditional media are also very

time-sensitive products--dependent on both absolute numbers of minutes and hours available for media use, and on the appropriate "allocation" of these minutes and hours between the fixed-time format media (such as broadcast) and those which allow consumers to control the time of use, such as print.

Studies in the recently developed field of consumer time-budgeting are a key to the understanding of situational influences on media behavior. This research area contains two types of work: research on the meaning and perceptions of time, and empirical studies on patterns of individuals' time allocation. Although concentrating on media usage only as one part of the broader agenda of activities for an individual or household, the work contains strong suggestions that the situational elements in which media are consumed--the physical surroundings, social surroundings, temporal perspective and task definition--can explain a significant proportion of the variance in behavior (78). This situational context can be defined as

all those factors particular to a time and place of observation which do not follow from a knowledge of personal (intra-individual) and stimulus (choice alternative) attributes, and which have a demonstrable and systematic effect on current behavior.¹⁰

The first step in studying the situational effects on any behavior is to appreciate the consumer's point of view: how he or she defines these elements (especially time), and which of them are controllable. Perceptions of time seem to affect not only the perceived time supply and the pressure for accomplishment within a time period, but the willingness to delay gratification in making relative activity choices (303). A highly active person who perceives time to be a commodity in short supply, for instance, would be less likely to simply "goof-off" in his or her leisure time, and more likely to plan leisure activities that will begin and end on

a certain schedule. Conversely, a similarly active individual who sees time as more of a "flow" from one activity into another, is less likely to schedule or plan his time, but will adapt to its availability and make decisions as they are demanded. These differences in the perceptions of time may be related to differences between lifestyle groups (304).

Gratifications are also important in directing time decisions (47). The use of time is not just an individual "tool" but an indicator of social change (347, 293). Time is finite. It cannot be stored and is always spent or traded--thus it can provide a clearly measurable "touchstone" on which to evaluate individual and social behavior (153).

In examining overall patterns of time-budgeting, most researchers make their first clear distinction between leisure and non-leisure time. (Non-leisure time is usually, but not always, defined as working, sleeping, commuting and self-care.) Leisure has been defined as consisting of

relatively self-determined active experience that falls into one's economically free-time roles, that is seen as leisure by the participants, that is psychologically pleasant in anticipation and recollection, that potentially covers the whole range of commitment and intensity, that contains characteristic norms and constraints and that provides opportunity for recreation, personal growth and service to others.¹¹

More focused definitions and codifications of leisure are found in other studies (23, 147, 27). The common factor in all seems to be the definition of leisure as unstructured, discretionary time as opposed to the biologically or socially determined allocations for sleep, work and personal care.

There is a remarkable similarity in the overall measures that a variety of studies make regarding this basic time distinction: almost all

report that leisure-time activities (as traditionally defined) consume about five hours a day with some differences noted between men and women (37, 290, 291, 340).

A number of studies concentrate some part of their investigation on outlining the gross time allocations to the media as a whole or to specific media, often categorizing "watching television" as a separate activity, but lumping newspaper, magazine and sometime book use into a total measure of "reading." As such, not only do these data overlook differing motivations, but print media findings are difficult to disaggregate. In most of these studies, media usage is defined as a leisure-time activity. Although the previously-cited definition is broad enough to include many of the uses and gratifications attributed to the media, it must be remembered that the existing literature all but ignores media use that is non-discretionary: either because it is work-related or "demanded" by the individual's social position.

Most studies find a surprisingly similar amount of television watching by individuals each day. With a variety of methods, different researchers at different times find an average of 128 minutes per day spent watching television (291, 192, 231). (Nielsen [309] summarizes the television numbers as 360 minutes per day spent in the average household.)

Time spent with print media ranges in these studies between three and eight hours a week (or 25 to 68 minutes per day). As a proportion of total available leisure time, then, television watching accounts for approximately 43 percent of leisure time per day, and the print media consume between 8 percent and 22 percent of available time. No attempt is made in these studies to calculate the difference in the amount of information which can be consumed per minute in reading vs. watching or listening.

An important underlying perspective in much of this research holds that media use (especially of radio and television) is a physically and mentally passive activity. This assumption could be accepted, especially when the results of one study note that, when asked what they would do with an extra two hours per day, over 30 percent of the respondents noted that they would spend them in indoor activities, rest or media use (290). This self-defined "passive" set of activities lends credence to the traditional "broadcast as passive medium"/"print as active medium" point of view, but it must be remembered that work on individual influences on media behavior and uses and gratifications of media use has offered a more complex categorization than this simple dichotomy. Individual differences may invalidate these generalizations: some individuals may feel, for instance, that reading is a relatively passive, relaxing activity. Different contents promote or require different levels of activity, and the very volume of media consumption can affect changes in the stability, intensity and involvement of the individual's media behavior (294).

Media not only consume time, but they can also economize it. A different type of media behavior uses the mass media as a way to "purchase" either more leisure time, or to improve monetary effectiveness.

Besides time, there are other situational variables that influence media behavior: the presence or absence of other people (121), the place of consumption--in-home or out-of-home (330)--the day, week or season of the year as a "frame" for the individual's perception of time spent with the media (especially broadcast) vs. all of the related competitors for the time (122, 9, 113). These and other factors, either socially or

individually defined, create the environment in which the mass media are chosen and used. There are problems in the current state of research on situational variables, including questions regarding the reliability and validity of analytic procedures (294, 47, 257) used in previous research. Also, there is at question whether time and situation are truly independent factors, or highly correlated with lifestyle and/or product attributes (29). In any case, the research on situational factors which influence media behavior seems to be moving in the right direction--exploring some of the basic patterns and motivations for time spent on the media. Future research in this area should concentrate on empirical and theoretical work that defines the relative "worth" of media behavior (worth measured as time spent, time saved, substitution for other information-seeking activities, etc.), and how that "worth" translates into direction for behavior and choice.

Media-Related Influences on Media Behavior

A still-undefined part of the equation is an understanding of how much time and money the media "earn" through the quality of their contents and formats. These media-related influences not only include content but also the individual's attitudes toward the content, especially its usefulness and credibility, and his or her selective perception patterns and involvement with the media.

These media influences are not left to chance (156). Decision-makers at mass media firms make choices regarding the content and format delivered, and often these decisions are made in light of the need for a

bigger or better-quality audience for their advertisers. By altering the controllable elements of content, format, price or distribution (265), managers attempt to influence audience selection among available media. A key uncontrollable, however, is the "mix" of media which individuals assemble to satisfy their own social and psychological needs. Because researchers have suggested that individuals consume different types and amounts of media based on their individual characteristics or interpersonal influences, we can assume that these are not, for the most part, random. It would also seem logical to suggest that instead of making independent decisions about each and every new television program or magazine, an individual evaluates media comparatively--judging the benefits of one format over another efficiently and, most often, correctly for his or her own needs.

How individuals make these judgments and assemble their "media mix" is directly affected by media-related factors. Some research finds that media selection (or the substitution of one medium for another) differs between the heavy and the light media user (82, 93, 79, 76). More insight into this decision-making process, however, is gained when the research concentrates on media-related variables rather than on audience characteristics. Because audiences for different media overlap, the media tend to complement, rather than compete with each other (181). Indeed:

Relationships among the media, despite fierce competition for advertising dollars and consumer attention, might be described, in biological terms, as symbiotic. They interact in complex ways which turn out in the long run to be mutually helpful. They use each other's material and talent; they invest in each other's stock; they benefit from each other's technological development.¹²

The consumer's perception and use of these symbiotic relationships is discussed, by anecdote, in an article on the effects of the newspaper strike in New York City during the week of August 19, 1978 (210). It is suggested that, because households using television (HUT) levels declined during the newspaper strike, people withdrew from both media.

Without newspapers, they not only didn't know what happened, but they ceased to ask. Any complementary roles among the media, then, serve not only its business aspects, but influence the public's expectations and involvement with the media as a whole.

Media content. One of the most universally accepted influences on media consumption is the content of the media: whether a specific program or article on a topic of interest to the individual, or a consistent editorial point of view expressed in a cluster of articles or programs. Most researchers recognize the impact of individuals' assessment of media content in making their media decisions; few have been able to isolate its effect.

In general, research defines three modes of media content preference: 1) the group of individuals who use only certain media formats; 2) those who use alternatives that are closely related to their preferences; and 3) those who use any available "common denominator" rather than not watch, listen or read at all. The last of these three groups is discussed in the section on the influence of media formats.

Media content is influential in guiding media selection not only because it can provide specific, needed information in an appropriate format, but because it profoundly affects the individual's attitudes toward

the medium itself. Content preference is sometimes, but not always, associated with interest.

Television reaches the largest and most heterogeneous audience of any form of communication in human history. Because it is more visual than cerebral, television can be comprehended (and easily assimilated) by [all].... It therefore attracts millions of viewers who are not interested in reading comparable material, or thinking about comparable content.¹³

Recent research, sponsored by the American Association of Advertising Agencies, notes that the vast majority of TV viewers misunderstand some part--between one-quarter and one-third--of what they see, regardless of the type of content. In addition, they suggest that viewers misunderstand facts as often as they misunderstand inferences (313b).

When an individual has need for a specific piece of information, however, he or she will seek out sources for that information. One study notes that interpersonal sources of information (personal experience, friends, neighbors, etc.) account for the predominant sources of sought information. Less than half of the respondents report that they would search for information in a newspaper, magazine or book as their first source (340b). Other results of this study intimate that certain types of individuals are more prone to search for information in certain sources: this supports, to some degree, the previously discussed influence of individual and interpersonal characteristics on media usage.

Content preferences and choices of individuals are found to relate to the psychological and lifestyle traits of the individual in the audience (193, 248, 182). Individuals choose programs as "product categories"--perceiving attributes which they expect to fill particular informational

or entertainment needs. The researchers who outline the functions of the media to individuals (166, 176, 138, 106, 318, 332) all conclude with a "matching" of the person's content needs and the medium's ability to gratify those needs. These studies reinforce the power of the individual's content preferences as an influence on consumer reading and viewing behavior.

Researchers relating audience loyalty to particular content types also conclude that it is not only the individual program or article that is evaluated by the consumer, but its relative strength (or "attractiveness") compared to competing types of content available at that time (100, 236, 274, 64).

Supporting the general view that individuals do not make singular, individual content decisions is a whole body of research that investigates the "patterning effect," especially of television show viewership. By correlating and reducing voluminous television program measures, researchers have been able to find different clusters of programs or viewers (169, 269, 212). Unfortunately, most of these findings characterize the viewer groups simply by the types of programs they choose (i.e., "soap opera addicts"), thus explaining little about the choice process of these individuals. These studies are criticized because they overlook the important situational elements of scheduling, time and the "network effect" (reflective of the network's strategy of "blocking" shows to discourage channel-switching).

Media format. The dichotomy between "active" and "passive" media use has been previously introduced, and it is as important an element in examining media-related influences as it is in examining situational influences.

For example:

Magazine readers are active in the sense that they must subscribe to or physically purchase the magazines in which they are interested. In addition ... many [publishers] attempt to target relatively small segments of the population.... Consequently, the audiences of many magazines are not only identifiable, but in many cases, unique. Television programs, on the other hand, especially those aired during prime time, usually attempt to reach large segments of the population. In addition, since TV requires little active commitment on the part of the viewer, audiences of the programs are not easily differentiated.¹⁴

Although this point of view is an over-generalization, it does suggest that one of the reasons that magazines have become increasingly specialized is because it is economically feasible with regard to how they are consumed. A consumer making an active choice of a magazine is presumed to be less subject to situational factors; a "passive" consumer is more dependent on the broad-based, generalized format and structure such as is built into a passively-consumed medium. Indeed, it is even suggested that special interest magazines are those in which the reader actively engages in the subjects written about or depicted in advertisements (e.g., photography, skiing, coin collecting), while general interest magazines, such as Life or Readers Digest, tend toward passive editorial material and advertising. Other studies support this assumption by noting that network schedules (344, 227), the quality of competition based on content, and even the popularity of the highest rated programs (129, 113) influence individuals' media choice and use. A key proponent of the "network effect" and "channel loyalty" arguments suggests that:

The percentage of the audience of any TV program who watch a given TV program on another day of the week is approximately equal to the rating of the latter program times a constant.¹⁵

Although this finding suggests that audience duplication is a significant factor, it is admitted that the inertial "pull of the box" only works when the set is on: it dissipates once the individual leaves the room. A general programming guideline from this perspective would be McPhee's Law of Double Jeopardy: "Things which are liked by relatively few people are not all that much liked by even people who do like them" (113). Although the validity of this "law" is debatable, it is difficult to overlook empirical evidence which consistently reaffirms that it is the situation (i.e., time of broadcast, network scheduling, magazine availability on the newsstand, etc.) that is as significant as content preference in a media selection decision.

In summary, we can hypothesize that consumer media behavior appears to be a function of situational and individual factors, as well as the content and format of the media. If, for instance, an individual watches television, his or her behavior seems more likely to be passive and guided by situational factors than if he or she had selected among the magazines on a newsstand. In this latter situation, content and individual factors would seem to be more powerful influences (and predictors) of that media decision. Therefore, to further our understanding of that most desirable (to the supplier) of consumer reactions to a medium--loyalty--our research must concentrate on the media-related influence that most closely matches the consumer's perceptions and behavior toward that medium, whether format or content.

Attitudes toward the media. Another media-related influence is the set of expectations and perceptions that individuals have of different media formats. Some researchers find groups of people who have clear

preferences for particular media formats (2), and others note that "heavy" media consumers are very often reading, viewing, and listening to a number of different ones (23). Sometimes use of one medium influences another; in a study of library usage, 28 percent of the respondents reported reading a book because of what they saw on TV (313c).

Even people's most general categorizations--their perceptions of media vs. broadcast media--can influence their overall behavior. Attitudes toward the media are affected by not only the individual's perceptions (based in experience or not), and the social character of the medium, but also the complementary behaviors and skills necessary to use the medium efficiently and enjoyably. There is, for instance, an element of skill necessary to use the print media to access news, where less is necessary to get news from television.

Is this why attitudes toward television have changed? Since its inception, TV has gained steadily in hours spent being used, with individuals' median viewing hours increasing from 2.17 hours per day in 1961 to 3.08 hours per day in 1978 (336, 337). With increased exposure, attitudes changed. A study in 1959 noted that newspapers and magazines were perceived as informative, while television and radio were seen as "show-business" (334). By the early 1970s, however, people perceived not only TV's dual role of entertainment and information (215, 195), but television began to surpass the printed media on preference dimensions such as "the most entertaining medium" (53, 218, 336), the medium with the most favorable "associations"--translated into "impact measures" (93), and even as an indispensable and reliable source of news (336, 337). Even though newspapers were still perceived as the "basic" news medium (337), television's audio-visual realism had changed people's attitudes toward its reportage of the news.

Many changes in TV, of course, have occurred in the past 20 years. Even with an improvement in transmission, a broader menu of programming and a greater number of stations, one could suggest that it was really television's becoming more and more a part of daily life that accounts for increasingly higher measures of positive perception. This, in addition to a self-acknowledged dependence on television for relaxation and as an opportunity to be with the family (53), may parallel television's improvements in content and format and its increased acceptance.

All of these findings would suggest that television's ubiquity within the home is the key factor which gradually fostered more positive attitudes of individuals about the medium, and therefore changed their behavior toward it. Given the concurrent trend which indicates that television has become the major, if not the sole source for most people's news (336, 337), it would appear that television will contribute to changes in individuals' definitions of acceptable delivery, "quality" and topics of news interest.

Attitudes toward the mass media seem to transcend the specific context: they grow at least in part out of the physical and social demands the media impose upon the audience.¹⁶

Credibility. For news consumption especially, a central element of an individual's perceptions and attitudes toward the media is credibility. Credibility of the medium is paramount, not only for the establishment of purchase pattern, but for stimulation of the all-important loyalty pattern. A 1979 Television Information Office publication (337) summarizing the findings of selected studies from 1959 to 1978 noted that TV has moved (in that time) from 29 percent of the sample saying it was the most believable medium to 47 percent believing this. Newspapers dropped from 32 percent to

23 percent, radio from 12 percent to 9 percent and magazines from 10 percent to 9 percent. Despite some natural questioning of any individual research study's findings, it would appear that TV today has attained a news credibility unknown 10 to 20 years ago.

It is important to remember that there seems to be little agreement on an overall measure of "media credibility," however. Researchers find that not only do different groups rate media differently (consonant with their goals), but furthermore, that they react to a message independent of their assessment of the source (274). Some research (345) found the same, and it examines the facets of credibility including: authenticity, objectivity, and dynamism (with additional measures of bias, accuracy and other sub-dimensions). Other studies expand this segmentation of the concept of credibility by suggesting that it depends also on the content being reported, or by suggesting that credibility is a relational term representing a broad judgment by users of the media source and its operational characteristics in the form of receiver perceptions (90, 271):

The closer the value system of the source is perceived to be to the value system of the receiver, the more trustworthy is the source in the judgment of the receiver.¹⁷

Credibility, then, as well as the other media-related variables has to be combined with and related to the individual and social influence variables in order for them to have meaning. The integration of these different consumer influences and judgments is discussed below.

Selective exposure. Selective exposure (the tendency of individuals to limit their exposures to communications which are consistent with already held interests and beliefs) and selective perception (the tendency to screen out of consciousness portions of all stimuli, including communications) are

often cited as important mediating variables in the behavior of individuals toward communications. These audience predispositions are studied in the broadest context--in order to explore the conditions of effectiveness for mass communications--as well as in the narrowest sense--to determine how the "indexing process" (255) within media content can affect an individual's judgment of the medium. Selective exposure, selective perception and their relative, selective retention, are described as the three concepts of audience control of the mass media communications process (8). Other researchers (285, 243) suggest that these controls are more important than functional or public ones.

Selective exposure is, of course, related to individual influences on media consumption such as social class, time-budgeting and psychological or cognitive style. These systematic biases in audience composition are similarly correlated with the uses and gratifications that audiences expect from the media (243). It is not enough, however, to believe that individuals will limit their exposure only to non-dissonant or immediately useful source of information. For instance, accepting the selective exposure hypotheses does not imply that a selective avoidance hypothesis is operational (203). People will not, as a general rule, avoid information sources that are novel--it is more likely that when consuming these kinds of media, they will moderate their attention to individual elements of the content, rather than rule out contact with the medium entirely.

Selective perception. Selective perception translates the concept of selective exposure to the content of a particular medium. After the individual perceives and understands the overriding style (or "paradigm") of the medium, he or she attempts to maintain cognitive consistency by being

selective in the choice of reading or viewing material (171). A study designed to determine the media characteristics that influence perception noted that receptiveness of an individual to a message "is directly and positively correlated with the number of types of media to which message recipients are exposed, the impact these media have, and the overt behavior induced by media exposure and contact."¹⁸ As such, selective perception becomes an important consideration in judging ratings and audience response to programs or editorial content (306, 110).

Selective perception may be viewed as a type of communications barrier (158), and it certainly is one that could influence the use of a medium, if not the choice of that medium itself. Selective perception is also linked to the types of "rewards" that can be expected from the media. These rewards

may be either the immediate pleasure reward of drive reduction or vicarious experience, or the delayed reality reward of ... general preparedness and information.¹⁹

Just as research identifies a link between the media people choose and the gratifications they expect from them, it also points out that there is a less objective influence at work. Individuals, whether expecting immediate or delayed rewards, look for content with which they can personally identify because

the ease of self-identification is powerfully influential on the probability that a reader will select the story.²⁰

Other studies define "media personalities" as a key factor in developing this identification with the medium (51). That is, the human personalities portrayed within the editorial or advertising content provide a "personal tie" that increases not only the interest in but the relevance of the

medium to its reader or viewer. For instance, people choose media personalities based on either actual or ideal self-perception (225); such figures have been termed "symbolic leaders" (170). Instead of typifying selective perception as avoidance or reduction of cognitive dissonance, then, it might be more useful to consider the positive effects of selective perception as individuals attempt to become more effective and involved media consumers, searching for relevant media personalities, information of immediate concern, or other stimulation from media content.

Involvement. The involvement of individuals with the media has been of significant concern to the advertising community and to media firms because it addresses such areas of interest as: 1) the regularity or frequency of reading patterns (85); 2) the effects of time on recall of advertising messages (201, 236); or 3) the differences (in involvement, commitment, etc.) between a magazine's original purchasers and its secondary readers (323). Some studies attempt to rank the different media by general involvement measures--which are defined as the degree of identification and imaginary interaction with the "persona" of the media (233). In these studies, the ranks seem to be influenced not only by the individual's perceptions and behavior, but by the power of the medium to impinge on the situational and individual elements and force the reader/viewer to "suspend disbelief" for the time of the encounter. In this light, one can see why movies are usually ranked as first on a scale of participation or intercourse with the individual, followed by television, radio, newspapers, magazines and books (89). These findings seem reasonable in light of studies finding that it is not only the editorial environment, but the

general situational environment that influences attention and comprehension of a TV commercial (266).

Other studies are more specific in explicating the nature of media involvement. Experiments in Japan test the difference in the emotional impact and usefulness of information received through different modes of transmission. Not surprisingly, the researchers find that motion pictures with sound had more impact on these two measured dimensions than the writing alone, sound alone or writing plus sound modes (347b).

Perhaps the most non-traditional work done on media involvement involves a variety of research methods, including a measure of involvement which asks respondents to list or number the outside thoughts or "connections" that come to mind while reading or viewing the test material. This work concludes that involvement is independent of the "noting" behavior measured by Starch Scores,²¹ (174) and of the amount of exposure time. Hypothesizing that the left side of the brain "reads" and the right side "scans" images (173, 174), the researcher asserts that there are not only audience characteristic and content influences operating in the process of "involving" people with a medium, but that the media themselves may differ in the inherent levels of audience involvement that they can create.

Studies sponsored by the Magazine Publishers Association (324, 319) have continued to explore specific facets of media involvement, finding that it is influenced by the individual's receptivity (the "mental set" of past experience), the "engagement of mind" (the attention demanded by the particular media format), the editorial or program environment, and the actions that result from the communication. They conclude, not surprisingly given the source of the research, that print media are higher involvement media overall than are broadcast.

These findings on media involvement are key to this survey of the factors influencing media consumption, because they directly measure psychological, situational and media-related variables, and implicitly account for demographic, social and "process" variables--all of which have been discussed as significant factors that influence an individual's propensity toward media consumption, his or her choice patterns and behavior. An important caveat, however, is that these studies on involvement depend very heavily on the current definitions of print and broadcast format and content. As these elements change, the expected levels of involvement would also change, and not necessarily in the patterns one would expect from an extrapolation of previous results. What we now know about audience involvement with print media as opposed to broadcast media, for instance, does not provide much useful information as the key elements of each of the present systems become intertwined. If text is no longer restricted to a printed format, will it be any more or less "involving" on a video screen? Without understanding whether the presentation portion of the media's format (the text) or the physical portion of the media's format (the paper or screen) contributes most significantly to higher involvement, we can easily under- or over-estimate the impact of the new media technologies on consumers and their probable behavior patterns.

In order to truly understand the influences on media behavior, then, it is important to examine not only the prior influences, but the behavior itself: What are people looking for in the media, and how do they use them once the media and content choices have been made? The rich area of research on the uses and gratifications of media follows.

RESEARCH ON THE USES AND GRATIFICATIONS OF THE MEDIA

The study of the 'uses and gratifications' of mass communications ... proceeds from the assumption that the social and psychological attributes of individuals shape their use of the mass media rather than vice versa. This is the approach that asks the question, not 'What do the media do to people?' but, rather, 'What do people do with the media?'²²

Perspectives on the Research

Media research today still concentrates a good deal of attention on defining the kinds of reading, listening and viewing behaviors people exhibit. But the field goes further: it studies not only the patterns of behavior, but the value of the media behavior to the individual. Published work is replete with references to a broad range of consumer motivations for media consumption, from the profound ("to search for meaning") to the pragmatic ("to kill time"). This section of the paper highlights the important elements and theories that underlie research in the uses and gratifications of media behavior--the structure of perceived and expected rewards that are commonly associated with mass media use and involvement.

The earliest hints of interest in the purposes of media consumption were seen in communications research of the late 1940s and early 1950s, when there was a shift away from a concentration on message effects (early 1930s) and the social role of the--at the time, new--broadcast media. The focus shifted to audience members, who were highlighted both as a group and as individuals with particular social and psychological attributes, and therefore, needs.

By the 1960s, media research had met quantitative analysis. For the first time, differential patterns of media consumption could be efficiently analyzed, correlating newly-categorized hierarchies of uses and gratifications with both the individual's and the medium's characteristics. Research in the 1970s not only expanded the methodology for gratifications measurement, but began to link quantitative findings to theories of the communications process.

In brief, the research on uses and gratifications of media behavior for the past 40 years has passed through a number of clearly defined and historically logical phases. The structure of these theoretical developments in the field are discussed in two sections: first, the uses and gratifications of media behavior for the individual (the type of "goal-directed" media consumption), and second, the uses and gratifications for society (the roles of media that culminate in a stronger relationship between the individual and a variety of human groups).

Uses and Gratifications for the Individual

One of the earliest models in uses and gratifications research notes that the social and psychological origin of needs within the individual motivates media behavior, and leads to an expectation of gratifications from the media (56). This approach assumes that the audience is active and goal-directed (seeking information and content to satisfy felt needs) and therefore assumes that communications must be a social system that satisfies the audience's intentional search for information (242).

The social and psychological origins of needs which generate expectations of the mass media ... lead to differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in need gratifications and other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones.²³

Many researchers have attempted to list and codify these functions.

Most operated from the viewpoint that

media-related needs ... predate the emergence of the media and, properly, ought to be viewed within the wider range of human needs. As such, they have always been, and remain, satisfied in a variety of ways, most quite unrelated to the mass media.²⁴

These two quotes highlight the basic position of functional uses and gratifications research. It hypothesizes that all or most of mass media use is functional in character, presupposing that the media's main purpose is to help the individual fulfill his social needs and adjust to his social role (206). This "instrumentality" of the media (289) may be further divided into "specific instrumentality" (which helps the individual in current decision-making by providing information) and "general instrumentality" (which helps the individual collect information to be used in future social relations or decision making).

In any case, the functional approach places the dominant responsibility on the receiver. Because the act of communication is regarded as directed toward some goal and meaningful activity, the receiver is assumed to bring a priori expectations and knowledge to the event, and also to actively select and process the information he or she sought.

A prime example of this kind of research is the study of Israeli audiences which sets out a multifunctional analysis of audience needs (164). Aiming to study the gratifications which attracted and held individuals to

both their media format and content choices, the researchers classified 35 needs into five groups: 1) cognitive needs (information, knowledge, and understanding; 2) affective needs (positive emotional and aesthetic experiences); 3) personal integrative needs (credibility, stability and status); 4) group integrative needs (strengthened contacts with others and with the world); and 5) tension-release needs (to "weaken" contact with daily life or with oneself). In addition, the major media formats (video and print) were matched to specific needs, with TV and radio fulfilling mainly integration and release, and newspapers and magazines the others. Media were individually ranked with regard to their perceived helpfulness in satisfying these clusters of needs.

The key finding in this study, however, is that personal sources (friends, relatives, etc.), were more fulfilling than any media source for these needs. This conclusion was subsequently corroborated in other research (56). These researchers conclude that use of the media must be seen within the wider range of human needs, and that the media are not only interchangeable solutions to a person's search for need-fulfillment, but can also be substitutes for a more gratifying, personal solution. At this historical point in the development of research on uses and gratifications, the stage was set for a series of detailed studies which explored the range of "human needs" that the media could satisfy.

Functional studies. Studies which take the functionalist perspective on media consumption assume that individuals are using media to fulfill some a priori social or personal needs. The media are cast as

instruments, or facilitators, of individuals' search for information that aid in decision-making, define what is important ("agenda-setting") (70), maintain social contacts and contracts, and provide prestige. In this functional sense, the media are considered truly "extensions of man" which substitute for the more laborious or difficult interpersonal communications which they complement or preempt.

Studies of a single medium most often provide useful and valid findings. In general, a number of these studies concentrating on largely advertiser-supported print media (265, 177, 204, 188) and broadcast media (35, 15, 207, 114, 134, 278) find that the functions discovered either reinforce or slightly restructure the basic five categories of needs previously described. Most often these studies more finely differentiate the powers of the media to fulfill these needs. Print media, for instance, seem to excel at gratifying needs for current information and important events, for social "belonging," and for conversational topic development. Television not only provides information and membership in a social group, it additionally gives pleasure and escape from the day-to-day realities. Radio fulfills the same general needs, and is sometimes "personified" by the listener as a companion. It was only after these findings were well validated that the research focus turned from continued re-definitions of the needs to an exploration of the media as functional equivalents of each other.

Throughout all of the functionalist studies, the codification of needs has fallen into three basic categories (which collapse the original five): 1) media are sought after to provide information (or

education); 2) media are used for escape from daily reality; and 3) media fulfill people's needs to "belong" and "connect" to the social group. Because these three gratifications are well validated and basic to the research, we will explore each in more detail.

Media Gratification 1: Information. Information-oriented functions of the mass media are commonly cited, and easily understood. All media, and in particular current news-carrying media, offer the individual an opportunity for what has been termed "surveillance": a way to be immediately informed when critical information (wars, natural disasters) is imminent, as well as to be kept informed about "what's going on." These informational functions not only help in daily decision-making, but promote the development or reinforcement of useful attitudes and knowledge (204).

Other refinements in this area include work that details specific media functions (such as the use of magazines to promote discussion), the definition of areas of importance (e.g., the isolation and subsequent social emphasis placed on education after The New York Times highlighted it in a special section), and the enlargement of areas of interest for the individual (e.g., the multi-feature presentation of a TV show such as "60 Minutes") (237, 163). In addition, one theory of multi-image communications holds that media are used simultaneously for information "density" on topics of especial interest to an individual (20).

An important link between the functionalist work in uses and gratifications and the previously discussed work on factors influencing media consumption is the use of the media by information and opinion leaders. A few studies intimate that the role of the opinion leader depends, to a great extent, on his or her use of the mass media to reinforce that

self-definition. This hypothesis distinguishes between an individual's personal consumption of information to extend his own conception of the world, and the opinion leader's consumption of information as

a commodity for exchange, to be traded for further increments of prestige, by enabling him to act as an interpreter of national and international affairs.²⁵

The hypothesis is a key contribution to the study of media uses and gratifications. For the first time, this research begins to differentiate between the use of the media to fulfill an existing need, and the opinion leader's use of the media themselves--as a means to help him or her maintain a social role. Although not violating the functional perspective, this research opens the door to alternative theories which allow for the consumption of media for its own sake, rather than to fulfill any functional need.

Media-seeking vs. content-seeking. One important distinction is between media behavior that is determined by format choice and that which is determined by message choice (154). The former is called "media-seeking" behavior--the individual choosing to consume the medium without regard to its content--and the latter "content-seeking," which is typified by the individual searching for particular content (as in the strict functionalist perspective). This difference may become crucial in attempting to anticipate market acceptance of distribution of content via alternative channels--or media.

In fact, it has been suggested that the concept of media-seeking behavior can be expanded to see how individuals create a "communications repertoire" (276) which not only facilitates social interaction and role-creation within the group, but actually helps to define it. Reading the

"right" magazine or expressing knowledge about the "right" television shows, then, can be construed to be a strong social motivator--a gratification unrelated to content-seeking. Media-seeking, as opposed to content-seeking, is a more subtle and yet powerful gratification as the individual seeks to reinforce and build his "social self."

Media Gratification 2: Escape. Media are also hypothesized to offer psychological and social escape--a retreat from personal interaction (163). The media are here considered as a form of "substitute gratification," which people seek when depressed or alienated. Various studies support this contention (222, 49), although alienation was later defined as a dysfunctional aspect of media use. Much of the work on media's "escape" use centers on the types of people that are prone to alienation and the need for escape (163). Researchers note, however, that a simple theory of replacement is inadequate to explain the higher "escape" use of the media.

Media Gratification 3: Social Connection. Much research finds that media usage patterns differ according to the social groups with whom individuals associate themselves, particularly when the content of the media gives audiences information about where the people with whom they identify are going, and what they are doing, buying, or thinking (344, 229). The selective nature of media choice makes this a reasonable conclusion, since the behavior, aspirations, and evaluations of these social reference groups are significant to the individual. If, for instance, an individual wishes to perceive himself or herself as a member of the "jet set," it would be important to keep up with the purchases and travels of those leaders by

reading Town & Country or similar magazines that depict people and settings associated with that group. Similarly, depending on their reference groups, individuals are "expected" to be familiar with essential conversational and group-reinforcing information, whether this information consists of up-to-the-minute knowledge of a sports star's free-agent status, the latest exploits of a television series character, or the current writings of certain syndicated columnists.

Group pressure and guidance influences media selection (122), and because the media used within a social group reinforce the values and discourse of that group (28, 170), the individual recognizes and selects media that confirm and reinforce his or her membership.

Even excluding the professional and job-related group pressures on the individual's information acquisition, it appears that membership in most social groups depends on at least a minimally adequate familiarity with topics that are of interest to, or even define, that group.

Because people must have use of the media to gather information that they can internalize and share with their social groups, the individual's social role influences not only each media decision, but the total amount of media consumed (98, 183), and the frame of reference and the norms according to which messages are interpreted and evaluated (40).

What is noteworthy about the media's well-documented ability to gratify these "social integration" needs, however, is that media behavior can be motivated by "absent others." For instance, it is suggested that some public television viewing is motivated by a wish to be associated with the higher class of people who are believed to watch public television (36). Watching can reinforce a membership in this social group

which the individual will never meet face-to-face. Similarly, newspaper readership is not only "rational" (providing news and information), but "non-rational" (providing social contacts and prestige).

...we have hypothesized that reading has value per se in our society, value in which the newspaper shares as the most convenient suppliers of reading matter. In addition, the ... reading of the newspaper has become a ceremonial or ritualistic or near compulsive act for many people.²⁶

Besides the role that the media serve as a reinforcing device in social group membership, then, the media behavior may take on a life and meaning of its own. Moreover, the functions of media are essentially the same as the functions of reference groups (i.e., information, social utility and value expression) (185). Thus, we approach a definition of the media as referents themselves, rather than solely as vehicles for communication. Simply watching, listening or reading certain material is sufficient to establish an individual's self-perception as a member of some group. There is no need to physically contact other group members to share and/or reinforce the content received--being a member of a particular audience is enough. This may be a transient group (such as a visitor to a city who picks up a copy of a "What's Happening" magazine in his or her hotel room), as well as a more stable group.

These three basic gratifications that can be fulfilled by media consumption all assume: 1) that the receiver plays an active role in media-seeking or content-seeking to gratify his or her needs and desires; 2) that the media are only one means available for this use; and 3) that the media are convenient, available and diverse enough to provide the individual with a range of choice.

Latent functions and dysfunctions. These very assumptions have prompted some research on the natural dysfunctions that arise from such a goal-oriented system (166, 114, 41). One dysfunction of the mass media of special interest in today's environment is that of "information overload." Using the logic of functionalism, an increase in the total amount of information available would tend to cause a proportional increase in media consumption among goal-oriented individuals. The "overload" is, more precisely, a cause of dysfunction rather than a dysfunction itself. Researchers have suggested a number of potential hazards: information overload may interfere with the ability of the receiver to understand the message (239, 313b); it may "desensitize" or "narcotize" the individual (204, 41, 123); or even cause a retreat from mass communications and the physical surroundings that they mediate (i.e., the cities): "Whereas villagers thirst for gossip, city dwellers with more ample choices may crave privacy."²⁷

This theoretical "narcotization" effect would seem to be supported by empirical evidence of individuals' responses to the functions of advertising: advertising effectiveness is accelerated by the "novelty" factor, and heavy media users need 12 or more exposures to achieve only one-quarter the overall response rate that non-heavy users achieve after only six exposures (288). In addition, the previously cited findings which indicate that people misunderstand some proportions of both facts and inferences in television programming may be explicable by "overloading" (313b).

Overall, this research stream argues not for a rejection of the functionalist viewpoint, but for the determination of an optimal level of communication--a question that has been studied and re-studied in advertising research for many years. This leads to another facet of media use

and gratifications work that counterpointed a strict functionalist approach: social gratifications. The functionalist perspective extends a little into this area, by arguing that communications is a systematic interaction in which individuals adjust their "receptivity" as they meet or fail to meet their information, escape or integrative needs. Further, it is only the interaction of the individual's disposition and the social experience that contributes to his or her capacity to function in a socially acceptable manner (206). Thus the door is opened by the functionalists for consideration of a two-way rather than a one-way theory of mass media uses and gratifications: where functional need-gratification is a part of, but does not completely determine, the use of mass media by individuals.

Uses and Gratifications for Society

A very different point of view regarding the uses and gratifications of mass media is seen in the work concentrating on the roles of the media within society as a whole. In this research area, explanations and assumptions that rely on personal choice are avoided in favor of the collective features and gratifications of the media, the communication situation and the context of media use (206). Audience expectations for "rewards" are explained in light of the media's ability to interpret the customs, norms, and conventions of a social environment. Appropriate media behavior, then, is that which is a patterned social activity rather than an individual's "search" for particular need-gratification. Empirical studies in this area focus on: 1) the relationships among the individual, media and society; 2) the "meaning" of media use to support these relationships; and 3) the power of the media to present, interpret and mediate society to the individual.

This section will present four of the basic theories of the social uses and gratifications of mass media.

Media's Social Role 1: Representation. A basic role of the media is to present society to the individual, in uses and gratifications terms--to fulfill the individual's need to be kept attuned to the structure, workings and values of the larger social group. A key study taking this perspective formulates a complete and integrated basis for media's representation role, and the factors which influence the fulfillment of this role (13).

This "dependency theory" is a model of audience-media-society relationships. The media, in this model, exist as a subsystem of the larger social system to which the individual relates. All three are in dynamic states of dependency and interdependency.

This general societal system sets important limitations and boundaries on the media system and has considerable impact on its characteristics, information-delivery functions and operating procedures. The societal system also has enormous impact upon persons; it gives rise to mechanisms that inhibit arbitrary media influence, such as individual differences, membership in social categories, and participation in social relations. The societal system also operates to create needs within persons that facilitate media alteration effects, namely the needs to understand, act in, and escape in fantasy from one's world.²⁸

The key factors within this description that distinguish this point of view from that of the functionalists are: 1) that the media are not subject only to individual choice, but to a social regulatory system; 2) that there is a "feedback" loop among the three members of the relationship; 3) that the media themselves "create" needs within the person; and 4) that audience dependence on the media is not only individually motivated by

behavioral or cognitive needs but also can include media consumption for emotional needs that are not directly tied to information, escape or integrative functions. The theory also notes that the individual's dependence on a medium is greatest 1) when the media system serves many unique and central social functions; and 2) in periods of social stability. Although these findings run against the intuitive sense that would suggest that media dependence is greatest during periods of instability (according to the functionalist approach), they are reasonable given the perspectives espoused by the "dependency theory" of media roles. This hypothesis might explain, for instance, why surveys show increasing dependency on television in the 1970s over the 1960s. Not only has television broadened its range of content (and therefore the potential range of individual and social needs it can fulfill), but it has supplanted the roles of other media to provide not only entertainment but news (local, national and some investigative analysis), weather alerts, day-long children's programming, community access time and other content which contributes to a growing perception of TV as a "full-service" medium (a market position that some think was previously dominated by newspapers). With cable's growth, the consumer's tendency to perceive TV in this broader context can only be enhanced. This recognition of the media's "power" to institutionalize themselves is one that flows through a number of the studies to be discussed below.

Media's Social Role 2: Mediation. Besides simply presenting society to the individual, the media can actively mediate, or interpret, the social reality. The best example of this stream of research is the "reflective/projective" theory (190), which regards mass communications

as an "ambiguous mirror" in which each viewer sees not only a mirror of society and himself (a "projection"), but also receives a point of view with that presentation (a "perception"). These images of man and society are of common interest to a majority of the population, and the communicated information "reflects not a single image but a variety of images of society, as it is turned toward one or another sector or aspect of society."²⁹ Concentrating on broadcasting as the case example, this theory combines the functional approach with the social role approach, noting that broadcasting is a part of everyday life, needed and consumed universally (even addictively). Although admitting that some media (like specialized educational broadcasts) perform very specific instrumental roles, it suggests that:

When we understand broadcasting it appears that the mission for which it is best fitted is the creation of a common contemporary culture and a sense of national (and perhaps international) unity. This also appears to be the function which now most needs to be performed.³⁰

Compared to the dependency theory, the reflective/projective theory attributes a much more active role to the media (or, to the people involved in creating and managing the media). Whether the individual media consumer is cognizant of the media's interpretative and "editorial" role is not discussed, but neither is it conceptually excluded.

A much more specific mediational role for mass communications is found at the heart of the "two-step flow" theory (30). This theory positions the role of the mass media to a specific audience, the opinion leader, as follows:

... one of the functions of opinion leaders is to mediate between the mass media and other people in their groups. It is commonly assumed that individuals obtain their information from newspapers, radio, and other media.... The majority of people (however) acquired much of their information and many of their ideas through personal contacts with the opinion leaders in their groups. These latter individuals, in turn, exposed themselves relatively more than others to the mass media.³¹

Developed from a study of decision-making in the 1940 presidential campaign, the theory of the two-step flow of information from broadly-exposed influentials to their associates was a strong step forward in linking functional and social theories of mass communication. At the time it was published, it contrasted sharply to the "hypodermic" effect the previous researchers had assumed: a one-way concept of information flow. The two-step flow theory not only debunks that notion, but introduces two other telling assumptions into the uses and gratifications work done on mass media. First, the theory accepts that opinion leaders would seek out both content and media in order to fulfill their roles in the information process, but it also assumes that their associates would use opinion leaders as a mediating filter for mass communications. Second, the theory holds that this intermediary personal force helped to reify the mass media's informational power--it makes communications more effective. (This increased effectiveness is also found in the numerous studies of agricultural innovativeness that underlies the two-step concept) (26).

The key to this work's impact on the uses and gratifications field is that it introduces an active "filtering" element between the raw media content and the individual. Just as newspapers, radio, television and magazines interpret society, opinion leaders interpret the media. Later

giving way to a more complex theory of a multi-step flow (where different opinion leaders functioned under different conditions), the two-step flow concept pervades subsequent research on uses and gratifications. It is used to explain differences in the impact of mass media in stages of decision-making, in behavior-inducing messages, and in the gaining of acceptance (by society) for change (162). Put another way, "The mass media are the wholesalers, [while the] the peer groups [are] the retailers of the communications industry."³² As the media reflect, project and mediate society (in combination with their own second-stage filters--the opinion leaders), the two-step flow theory holds that the individual will become more and more removed from the direct influence of either medium or content on his life. Whether or not this theory of media influence remains viable as individuals become increasingly active in the selection, editing and retrieval of information carried through newer media formats still remains to be determined.

The Japanese have perhaps been the most active in human behavior research and the use of new media. The early results suggest that the key can be found in the audience's perceptions of the substitutability of the new for the traditional media. One study concludes that, among the Japanese sampled, the new media are seen as

a diversification and individualization of the mass media. Differing not at all from the mass media either in quality of communication or the number of recipients, the new media cannot help but be considered by the recipient to be identical to them.³³

Media's Social Role 3: Reinforcement. The strict functionalism of early uses and gratifications research stressed that the individual initiated the information search process. With further research beginning to complicate this one-way flow (suggesting that there are "filters" in the process), there developed a prevailing definition of a third role that media played: that of reinforcing the social reality.

This social reinforcement is both voluntarily and involuntarily "consumed" by the individual receiver. There are societal needs that are outside the normal definition of individually determined uses and gratifications: the need for society to reduce tension, resolve conflict, reinforce norms and values and maintain the social hierarchy and order (170, 165, 28). At best (with the positive dimension defined as one which serves not only the aggregate society but the individual's good as well), the reinforcing role of the mass media allows a person to "tie" himself or herself to a number of satisfying communities (40). As long as individuals can "connect" and "disconnect" themselves at will (278), the media can function for the individuals' benefit.

Dysfunction occurs when the repositated power of the socially controlled media overwhelm and disregard the individual's good, as the media could be then used to control not only messages and the "reflection" of reality, but also allow societal leaders greater capabilities for surveillance, restrictions of freedom and manipulation (43). (This latter possibility is especially probable if the power of the natural substitutes for the media--i.e., personal contact, experience, etc.-- could ever be diminished by either the technological pervasiveness or centralization of information that a highly developed media system might foster.)

Media's Social Role 4: Change Agent. Over time, the media's roles of representation, mediation and reinforcement of a society to the individual become, by nature, institutionalized. This very process allows the media to perform the fourth role: that of a change agent influencing both society and the individual. Many would disagree that the mass media (either as businesses or social institutions) have this power, especially if one casts the change agent role in a very active, powerful sense. But none of the researchers in this field would argue too strenuously if the distinction were made between message effects and system effects. The latter, which suggests that the pervasiveness and sheer size of the mass media confer an active power upon the system, would probably be accepted by researchers who have studied the media of the last 15 to 20 years.

The simplest element of media's role as a social change agent is the individual's increasing dependency on the media--especially as their number and network grows. The telephone is a prime example of this. Because it is used as an "extension of self" (198), the telephone changes people's perceptions and use of time, distance and social relationships. Mayer points out that the power of such a system depends on its intelligibility, ease of access and degree of privacy, but once these conditions are met, there is an almost irreversible attachment to and dependency on the instrument (199). Similar dependencies and changes of attitude could be probable as individuals grow accustomed to using videotext systems (instead of talking to a travel agent or reading the classifieds in a printed newspaper, for example), home financial centers (instead of going over the bank statement or checking stock listings), and other new technologies.

Consummatory media behavior. The media can both create and then supply needs for quantities and particular types of entertainment and information. For example, consider this hypothesis on how television came to be successfully introduced in new societies:

Television did not make its appearance because it was needed. It appeared because it was invented, and it was technically possible to produce it. It then developed because it appeared to answer needs that were not typical only of the society where it was invented.³⁴

This position is a far cry from the early functionalist explanations of media consumption.

These new media-generated needs have been termed "consummatory media behavior":

When content of the mass media does not have a functional relationship to situations which involve people, they passively process (consume) media content as a means of filling available time.³⁵

This theory suggests that people consider the media inefficient sources of functional information, and is supported by empirical evidence that finds a relatively high degree of low involvement, consummatory media behavior.

There is no need to resort to theory of human needs other than perhaps to the pleasure principle which characterizes economic theory. There is also no need to use a latent function theory to explain media use, unless we also attempt to construct theories of the functions of golf, tennis, or drama to social systems. People use the mass media because they enjoy them.³⁶

Like the "play theory" of communications (54)--which defines play as an activity self-sufficient and not necessarily functionally or gainfully undertaken--the "consummatory media behavior" theory admits the existence

of functional motives but also includes non-motivated media behavior as well. Other researchers supporting this approach discuss the simple desire for variety (novelty-seeking) that is often operational in media use (116), or they intimate that consumers may derive sufficient satisfaction simply from the ownership and/or physical use of the supporting hardware--e.g., television sets, audio components, etc. (142). These and other modern research findings reject the seemingly "automatic" linkages made by earlier studies between pre-existing needs and media satisfactions (60, 253).

How do these conclusions regarding a "consummatory" type of media behavior relate to the media's social role as a change agent? At the most basic level, they attribute a self-directed power to the media that is quite different from previous theories which assume that the media were either controlled by the individual (who would make his or her needs known), or by society (to transmit messages and value-statements). The "consummatory" theory logically depends on a view of the media as businesses--able to direct and focus their content in their own self-interest. For the first time, then, the media are not reflecting, reinforcing or performing any passive role in information flow; they are active players in the process, with their own objectives and capabilities to act as a change agent. The functionalist perspective places the responsibility for media format selection on the individual; the consummatory outlook places the responsibility for attracting audiences on the medium itself.

Once the media's capabilities as a change agent have been established, the studies in this field can be efficiently summarized. The most conservative judgment of media's power to change concludes that, although mass media can function in the service of change (societally directed), they

most often mediate and contribute to a nexus of influential factors (170). The efficacy of the media in this role depends not only on the other change agents at work but especially on the particular communications situation and the nature of the change itself.

The major value of this approach is that it links the processes of change and effect with the previously discussed functions of the media for mediation and reinforcement. Further, it extends the theoretical discussion by correlating the discussion of media with research on audience persuasion and attitude change.

This concept has been amplified to distinguish between the changes that can be facilitated through print media and through broadcast (42). For example, television (in its present state of programming and market strategy) is especially adept at breaking down traditional conceptions of social division by creating and merging diverse social groups. By undermining the once-strong definitions of social "place," television has been able to blur social identities, flatten out social hierarchies, and create new "publics" by presenting previously secret information or stimulating widespread interest in a new idea or movement.

Whether socially-directed or self-directed, then, the media have an important role to play as change agents. The fact that these theories have developed long after the original functionalist, one-way approach was established is not surprising. The newer, integrative theories demanded the foundation of empirical research and thought that functionalism had provided. In addition, researchers who worked prior to the middle 1950s could hardly foresee the proliferation of media or the pervasive nature of today's broadcasting system.

The whole field of uses and gratifications research provides a bridge between the functional theories of behavior in psychology and sociology and the then-developing study of popular culture and its effect on the individual (163). Although some would argue that there is no direct link between early uses and gratifications work and the philosophical positions of functionalism (6), an examination of commonly-held ideas about mass media consumption in the 1940s vs. those of the 1970s would suggest otherwise. From the individually-determined, purposeful "search" for information to satisfy existing needs (165), it is a long way to the present systems theories of balance between the power of society, the individual and the media to control information.

The increased complexity and quantification of present-day theories is no guarantee of increased "correctness" of the conclusions. For example, the original five-part description of the uses and gratifications to be found in the mass media is enriched, but not necessarily made obsolete by subsequent research. What we can say for sure, however, is that the mass media do indeed provide uses and gratifications that satisfy a complex cluster of needs (societal, individual or otherwise), and that the understanding of these uses and gratifications is essential for explaining both the existence of mass media systems and their functions.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper has outlined the major findings of over 50 years of research on consumers' media use: how they behave and what influences that behavior. This section highlights: 1) what this body of research tells us (and doesn't tell us) about media selection and use; 2) what clues we can find in these "demand-side" factors for the probable consumer reactions to new media formats; and 3) what hypotheses can be drawn for future research.

SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH

The research review was divided into two areas: the first part, "Factors Influencing Media Consumption," discussed the patterns of media behavior. The second, "Uses and Gratifications of the Media," explored the purposes of media behavior.

Patterns of Media Behavior

This research makes clear that media behavior is a dynamic process involving individual, interpersonal, situational and media-related factors. Attempting to determine the relative power of each of these influences on a particular media choice or behavior, however, is a complex task.

In the most basic sense, both the individual and the medium contribute to the ultimate resolution of these decisions. The individual consumer brings a set of personal characteristics, perceptions and preferences--the medium brings a particular content (or contents) and a format which are weighted by the consumer against competing media choices.

We have learned, for instance, that demographic characteristics (such as age or social class) affect the volume of media consumed, as well as content

and format preferences. Psychological and lifestyle factors (such as cosmopolitanism or community ties) influence the motivation for media use, as well as the eventual application of media in the individual's personal and social life. If the research were to stop here, one could believe that to predict media choice, all that would be necessary would be to specify who the person was, and what media contents and formats were available to him or her.

A more realistic assessment, however, understands that media are social products as well as individual ones. We must consider the interpersonal and situational factors that influence media use: how much time is available, how people "share" and "negotiate" their media experiences with others, and how media use connects an individual with opinion leaders or other socially important reference groups. All of these situational and interpersonal elements filter the pure effect of what the receiver and the medium bring: they affect individuals' perceptions of the media, their use of the media, and even their definition of the value of the media. Instead of a simple gratification of needs, then, we must examine a complex network of interactions complicated by the ever-changing needs of the individual, and the similarly dynamic ability of the media to try to fulfill those needs. Also, when we evaluate the situational and interpersonal element, we see a richer role for the media in an individual's life--media choices are no longer simply "matched" to individual predispositions: the media are used as a social tool in an active, goal-directed sense.

The fourth and final category of influence on media behavior is composed of the media-related factors, including the range of contents, formats and combinations of media from which an individual can choose. Selective perception, selective exposure and the formation of media habits or loyalties aid

the individual in dealing with the constantly available range of choices, and consolidate the pattern of media behavior.

Taken together, all of these influences on consumer/media behavior generate a type of matrix which characterizes the individual-medium interaction: both the individual and the medium bring a priori characteristics and needs, and the continuing interaction of these is patterned and molded by perception, choice and use. No matter how complex this system, or how accurate the measurements of each factor, however, media use cannot be predicted from these a priori elements.

By itself, this part of the research literature offers explanations of the what, but not the why, of consumers' media use.

Uses and Gratifications of the Media

The literature to this point also assumes a functionalist perspective: it assumes that the media are relatively passive purveyors of desired content and/or format, and that individuals actively seek among the choices available.

Fundamental research in the uses and gratifications of media agrees with this point of view. It, too, classifies the media as an instrument which individuals use to satisfy media needs: the need to gather useful information, to escape the daily grind, or to "connect" socially. Satisfaction of these needs is very dependent on the physical and social situation, the decision-making style of each individual, and his or her history of involvement with the media.

Uses and gratifications research begins with a relatively simple supply-and-demand view of media behavior, and evolves into a more dynamic outlook which concentrates on the actions and reactions of all three members of the interaction: the individual, the medium and society. Latter research on

uses and gratifications introduces an interactionist perspective; more attention is paid to viewing the media and society as active, involved parties in the communications process--using each other to represent, mediate and reinforce existing cultural and social realities. In some of the later research, the media are even presented as an instrument which society can use as a change agent--very similar to their earlier presentation as an instrument by which an individual can fulfill personal goals.

This expansion of theoretical perspective allows us for the first time in the literature to consider the influence of decisions made by public policy officials and managers of media businesses. It also frees us from the narrow, functional definition of media needs, and allows us to explore simple "consummatory" media use--an individual reading, watching, or listening not to meet some deep-felt need, but simply to enjoy the experience.

With today's widening diversity of available media contents and formats, and with increasing pressure for guidelines on which to develop private and public policy decisions regarding the new media formats, the research's abandonment of strictly defined need-gratification of media use is propitious. To study the probable consumer reaction to new media formats, we need a theoretical framework that considers both individuals and the media as active, decision-making partners, and one which allows for a wide diversity in the reasons and rationale underlying those decisions.

DRAWBACKS OF THE EXISTING RESEARCH

There are, of course, still some gaps and problems in applying findings from the reviewed research to new media projections.

(1) Most basic of the problems is that of scope: the existing research in this field uses traditional definitions of the media (i.e., television,

radio, newspapers, etc.), the content, and fulfilled attributes of the communications interaction. These are not acceptable for extrapolation to the future media environment, because of the likely "blurring" of print and video distinctions of format, process and even content elements. In addition, consumers will bring new skills and facilities to the new media formats, and a range of new expectations and demands.

(2) The body of work tends, at most times, to be somewhat uni-dimensional. Initially studies were done at only one point in time--not examining the effects of changes over time, or the evolution of behavior patterns. As a result, no suggestions are given as to how to measure change in the media environment. Moreover, early studies tended to equate correlation with cause-and-effect relationships--not being sensitive to the complex interrelation of the individual and the media. Even though later studies were methodologically and analytically more accurate, few permit intensive, theoretical development.

(3) The studies concentrate (for understandable reason) on media users, mostly ignoring the media non-user, and the significant understanding that this behavior pattern could contribute. They also imply, in most cases, that a behavior is chosen, rather than "accepted." (Media behavior that is purely "consummatory" should be further explored.)

(4) Few studies concentrate on empirically determining the overall salience of media behavior itself. Gratification studies, for example (which could easily tend toward tautological arguments), need to be grounded in not only a listing of attributes, but a weighting of those attributes as well. It is not enough to look only at one media format vs. another in evaluating consumer choice behavior; the overall media consumption patterns must be

examined vis-à-vis other types of functionally satisfying and purely consummatory behavior as well.

(5) Most important for the application of empirical results to a study of the new media environment is the lack of attention given to research on the individual's source manipulation, or how people behave toward the media format itself. Research in this area should differentiate between behavior toward the input, the output, the process, the "editing" function, and the storage of information through different formats--how people perceive these functions and behave toward them. (It may be true that little has been done in this area because, up to this time, most media "equipment" has primarily been of singular purpose, but it still is possible to study what people do, and how they do it, regarding display and access and storage of information.)

In what format, for instance, is a particular type of message "better" in a given group of information consumers? Is the basic behavioral difference between media sets grounded in audio vs. visual presentation, or print vs. video? Is text on paper, for example, significantly different from text on a screen in influencing consumer choice or behavior? At what point does the media format bridge the gap between active and passive involvement? Finally, how important is the quality of transmission to the consumer and his or her selection of formats? These kinds of questions on source selection and manipulation are essential elements to the understanding of media behavior, and the projection of consumer reaction to changes in choice set and behavior given the new environment.

RESEARCH ON NEW MEDIA FORMATS

Some work is underway on the consumer behavior toward new media formats, but this work is just beginning to have impact on our understanding of the

future media environment. The research reviewed in this paper can be used to generate hypotheses about consumers' acceptance of and behavior toward new media formats, but very few projections can be made. Presently-held assumptions about the perception, selection, and use of the media are likely to be invalidated as consumer choices broaden, and the nature of competition within the media shifts.

Early Findings on New Media Consumer Behavior

Consumer attitudes and behavior regarding newer media services, such as viewdata and similar electronic services, have been measured with limited validity in very limited groups of trial users, or through purely hypothetical scenarios described to consumers. Of the latter variety, a series of surveys conducted between 1973 and 1979, mostly in California, found that consumers presented with a laundry list of potential services offered via telecommunications responded most favorably to entertainment, civic functions and skill instruction options, followed by education, banking, and government information (128a). Near the bottom of the preference list was shopping and working from the home.

A similar pilot study of uses of a hypothetical electronic newspaper found that schedules, calendars of events and news were the most popular items. Advertising was only two-thirds as popular (313a).

In Manitoba, Canada, a small number of people were introduced to a mock-up of a real viewdata system and given an opportunity to experiment with the system on their own. When offered the choice, this group preferred a flat-rate usage charge rather than one based on the amount of data viewed (340c).

Further data are being gathered by organizations such as Knight Ridder, American Telephone & Telegraph, Dow Jones, Canada's Department of Communications

and others as part of pilot projects involving electronic data bases for some use.

AREAS OF FUTURE RESEARCH

Research on the new media environment has begun, but there is a lot we do not know. This area of investigation will benefit most from research designed to integrate consumers' behavior toward new media formats with their present media perceptions and behavior, and establish benchmarks by which we can measure the development of new products and services.

There are four areas of investigation that are crucial to any projections of consumer behavior. As mentioned previously, the technological capabilities of the new formats give us some clues about their potential application, but only a solid base of consumer research can help us understand their probable use.

Area #1: What Functions Will New Media Formats Perform?

We can assume that, because the perceptions and expected gratifications of people's use of the present mass media are so closely interlinked, new formats will give rise to new functions and uses of media that should be examined in research on future behavior. Some of these questions include: How will individuals perceive and define the new media? What attributes will they grant to (or retract from) the new formats? What values will they perceive? How will the very volume of media format choices affect people?

This last question is one which is especially troubling, because although it is widely accepted that individuals will have more choice regarding information and entertainment sources, we cannot assume that they will use the same decision-making strategies they now employ. How will consumers respond

to the potential state of alternatives? Their capacities to absorb information are not limitless, and many of the new media formats may offer, in essence, "unedited" information--in which case the consumer will have to accept the editorial role in using the system.

Some of the roles and uses of the new media are pre-determined by the specific content or format involved, but others are not. The important element, in this area of the new research, centers on choice patterns and decision-making: How will consumers perceive and then accept what the new media are offering? For example, some new media formats will allow (or demand) different personal or social behavior patterns. The market acceptability of these features should be questioned. How the new media formats are marketed will affect their use just as much as their inherent technical capabilities; this must be a central element of any investigation of this new media behavior. Research is needed, however, that concentrates on the quality of an individual's interaction with new media formats, not simply the needs they can or will fulfill.

Area #2: What Will be the Changes in the Structure of the Media Environment?

Previous research has shown that the media are not just neutral carriers of messages, but that they bring with them a powerful environment--individually and in the aggregate. What impact will the new media systems have on each other (on their "market territories" and competition, their acceptable and profitable degrees of penetration, their own risk-taking and creativity), and on the social environment which supports them (and its values of information community definition, the social group, etc.)? What will be the nature of competition for audience and/or advertisers? How will the role of the existing media formats change?

Especially in the short term, the introduction of the new media processes will begin to influence (either for good or ill) the future relationships of these media with society and with the individual. (Even the simple definition of what is an "audience" for the new media is, as yet, undefined except in total relation to existing audience definitions and expectations.)

These two factors--the ubiquity and the social impact of the new media--are critical to explore. A third is perhaps even more crucial to any research on consumers' media behavior: the trend and facilitation of specialization.

The new media will offer more choices, which in general can be expected to fragment mass audiences into smaller groups that might be more demanding of their targeted media formats and messages. One question to ask is whether any or all of the traditional "mass" media can survive, and if so, what will happen to consumers' perceptions or behavior toward them? Another question relating to this regards the consumers' behavior toward the centralization of data, the specialization (and expanded choice) of messages, and all of the other changes that would seem to be on the horizon accompanying the new media environment. Will the very role and importance of the media be altered if they become more fragmented in their audience constitution? Likewise, will media's role in society change as their structure and "critical mass" change? These are strategic questions which will have an impact not only on the long-term market introduction and success of new media formats, but on their development as an industry.

Area #3: What Impacts Will New Media Formats Have on the Individual and Society?

Because the reinforcing and mediating role of media is so important, is it possible that with different media and different audiences, we would have a

different society? It would definitely require changes in the use of mass media for political and/or cultural transmission, not to mention the psychological void that might come about as the individual is no longer a daily member of a national "public."

The new media will be, as are the present media, social change agents. Research in this area must explore the dimensions of this role: Will the new media alter the definitions of what is a "community"? What is "reasonable" as communicable time and distance? The new media also speed up social trends (urbanization, illiteracy, cultural diffusion, economic alienation, etc.)--or, alternatively, slow them down. They may enlarge individual horizons or shut them. They may replace face-to-face communication, or increase its value. In any case, it is clear that the new media formats will have a significant impact on the structure and operations of society.

One potential area of controversy within this question revolves around the use of information to reinforce social stratification. One side would argue that technology can bring all of "culture" to each individual, reducing the distance and knowledge gap between individuals and social classes. Others would contend that although many will have access to the data, they won't be able to process or use them as effectively as the "knowledge elite," and they will be restricted in their creative use of the information because of decayed skills in reading, writing and conceptual thought, or potentially higher costs.

Although this potential impact of the new media is possible, it is not suggested as the primary direction of the first studies on consumers' acceptance and use of the new formats. It is important, however, to consider not only the advantages of the new media but their disadvantages--

whether these are discussed as above (in a societal context) or in an individual context. One potential dysfunction, for example, arises because of the new network: because the media report everything, and keep all lines of communication open, there is nowhere for the individual to hide. Will people, then, be expected to be aware of everything because they have access to it? Shared information which provides pervasive knowledge about others is a key characteristic of any village--"global" or otherwise.

For the individual, there are similarly striking redefinitions. The new media may change perceptions of time, of "sharing" information, and of shared experience within a community of individuals. Like a gigantic nervous system, each individual will not only be "wired" and interacting with the broad range of information sources, but will be expected to be sensitive to the priorities and costs of the information. A key area for analysis, then, is the consumers' ability (and willingness) to cope with the new capacities: 1) to develop trust in the systems; 2) to alter or modify their cognitive styles to deal with the rate and amount of transmission; and 3) to coordinate their daily behaviors to fit their informational sensitivities--or vice versa. These social and psychological impacts are essential for understanding not only short-term, but long-term future for new media behavior.

Area #4: How Will New Media Formats Be Used?

The aggregate effects of the new media on the individual are only one part of the equation. Consider also the key strategic business and public policy decisions that can directly affect consumer acceptance, purchase, and use of new media formats.

One of the key research areas to explore here is the question of consumer investment: Who will be likely to use new media formats? Are people

willing or able to make the necessary investments (time, money, skill acquisition, higher involvement, etc.) to use the new media formats and at what rate? The answer depends on the value of the media to each individual. First, let us examine the value of expanded choice.

Consumers might have to learn to deal with content and format surplus, which implies two important behavioral changes: selection "rules" and cost. The first is not a simple expansion of the concept of selective exposure or perception. The new media carry with them a different expectation of receiver involvement, and the need for new skills (physical and cognitive). Some of these might be acquired in school, some in the work place, others as part of aculturation. Acceptable interaction with the new systems demands experience with the equipment, the software, and both the range and process of selection. A new set of heuristics for the consumer must develop--interrelating the costs (of learning, monetary payment, and time) and the decision rules that will operate.

A second value of the new media relates to content choice, and is directly tied to consumers' preconceptions of the volume and depth of both message and format availability. What content, for instance, will be accessed, stored, and/or retrieved? Which formats will be used for access, storage and retrieval? With the potential for a larger and more refined "appetite" for both content and format choice, time use becomes important.

Media forms that demand high involvement or interaction require more consumer time. Unlike previous studies which tend to relegate media use to leisure time, the behavior toward new media formats will overreach this definition, and they may, in fact, be used as "time goods" with their capabilities for archiving, time switching (e.g., video taping a television program for later replay) and individual choice. Underlying these

assumptions, however, is a hypothesis that people must plan their time in order to manage it. How they will handle these changes in expected decision-making rules, involvement skills and time and household budget allocation is an important part of this research area. For example, while the technology may promote individual choices for video (rather than the family arguing over which TV show to watch), this can occur only if the household has several video tubes for connection to the cable disc or cassette machines, or remote data base.

Another part of the question must explore the individual's desires and abilities to "edit" the information he or she has accessed, stored or retrieved. Because a good deal of the "value" of mass media content today lies in its "packaging" or editing (which selects important material for a particular audience, checks its accuracy and presentation, and interprets it for the reader/viewer), it is essential to determine if this value will be demanded of the new media. Although much has been made of the individual's projected "freedom of choice," he or she may want less choice (information on demand) and more efficiency (information when expected). That consumers are willing to be their own editors, then, should not be taken for granted.

The new media formats will change people's relative sensitivities as well: the price/value relationship which affects their satisfactions, and the importance they place on price, availability, quality and the other attributes of a considered "purchase." How much behavioral change is it reasonable to expect of consumers, simply because new products will be available?

CONCLUSION

It would seem important (if not the most important of the research questions posed here) to clearly and accurately research the consumers' developing strategies for dealing with the new media formats and contents. Degrees of involvement, identification, possession, time use, monetary cost, and choice may be very different than they are today. Will people grasp the opportunities, grow to enjoy them, or reject them? The answer seems to depend, at least in part, on the strategy that consumers will use to evaluate the new media. Based on their perceived risks and rewards of the new purchase or use, consumers may simplify, optimize, or maximize each of these dimensions (and others) in making their decisions. The literature would seem to suggest that individuals will try to maintain relative homeostasis--stability--and will make changes gradually. Although this type of "optimizing" approach makes the most intuitive sense, it is quite possible that the "consummatory" behavior of content could spill over into a "consummatory" posture of the consumer toward new gadgets and devices. Because it is essential to define the probable consumer strategies (and possible, given the theoretical and empirical literature summarized in this paper which could generate the basis for a trade-off type of analysis), this last question is presented as the most important of the four suggested.

We are yet uncertain as to whether the changes from the media environment of today to that of tomorrow will be evolutionary or radical, paced or discontinuous. Regardless of the rate of change, the "market law" of reciprocity will probably be in effect; for example, as the media

demand more of people (more time, commitment, involvement, etc.), people will demand more of the media. For business strategists and public policy makers to avoid the myopia of either attempting to duplicate the present media marketplace, or being totally reactive to the increasing demands of consumers, it would seem appropriate to first investigate the given market "resources" of present perceptions and behavior, and then chart the optimum course to the emerging environment based on reasonable expectations of probable, rather than possible, consumer acceptance.

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