Newspapers in the Age of Internet and Changing Gratification Paradigms

Melwyn S Pinto

Research Scholar, Dept. of Journalism and Mass Communication, Kuvempu University, Shivamogga, Karnataka, India

Prof. D S Poornananda

Professor and Chairman, Dept. of Journalism and Mass Communication, Kuvempu University, Shivamogga, Karnataka, India

Abstract

Newspapers as a print medium have evolved over the years and with the emergence of the Internet, they are being transported to the digital medium. With the ongoing shift of newspaper from print platform to the digital one, if the gratification paradigms experienced by the audience remain the same is the issue dealt in this article. While, the dominant gratifications of newspaper reading in the pre as well as post Internet era have remained more or less the same, the gratifications of the 'digital print' medium are set to evolve differently in the days to come.

Keywords

Newspapers, internet, gratification paradigms

Introduction

It is by now quite established that the dependence on newspapers as a primary source of news and information is declining. And there are definite signs of further decline in the near future especially in the West. According to Paper Cuts, a website that tracks the US press, over 166 major newspapers have either completely shut down, or closed print edition and moved only to online edition since 2008 (Paper Cuts, 2012). *Newsweek*, the second largest circulated weekly in USA closed its print edition in January 2013. In that year, more than half of adults in Britain were accessing news content online (Sweney, 2013). Such a trend may manifest years later in the rest of the world especially in India where the growth path of print media remains unaffected. Yet, a serious concern exists as there is a steady growth in Internet users along with a notable decline in the average time spent on print media (Kumar & Sarma, 2015).

Correspondence: Email: melwynsj@jesuits.net

The Internet as a platform for news delivery created challenges and opportunities for the newspaper industry. In an effort to cater to their present and prospective readers, major newspapers throughout the world have launched online versions of their editions. For the net users, the online versions of newspapers are easily accessible, less expensive and provide them latest updates on the unfolding events and issue. Are there any differences in uses of the two forms of newspapers? What are the reasons that drive people to read print editions and online versions of newspapers? Answer to these fundamental questions can be obtained from the Uses and Gratification (U&G) research carried out across decades   including the decades of the Internet.

Study objectives and method

The present study seeks to identify and compare the gratifications sought by readers of newspapers before and after the emergence of the Internet. To realise these objectives, an analysis of studies on the newspaper gratifications was carried out to identify the gratification typologies before and after the emergence of the Internet. The differences in gratification paradigms in the two time periods and the audience behaviour in using the newspaper in the age of the Internet were examined.

Uses and gratification theory

The uses and gratification approach, a sub-tradition of media effects research, was developed to study the gratifications that attract and hold audiences to different media and their diverse contents that satisfy their social and psychological needs (Cantril, 1942). Since the 1940s, researchers have developed a number of constructs to assess the gratifications users seek and obtain from various media and their content. Also, the relationships between the gratifications and the socio-psychological variables of media users have been investigated. Notwithstanding its shortcomings such as media users' self-reports in assessing gratification typologies, uses and gratification research has proved valuable in assessing audience needs and in highlighting those needs as a source of challenge to media producers to 'cater more richly'(Katz et al., 1973-'74).

The uses and gratification theory is ingrained in the active audience conception in which the focus is on what people *do* with the media, and not what media do *to* people. What people *do* with the media depends on their needs and motivations that drive them to select some from a competing plethora of media and their content. The motivations in combinations with one another produce certain patterns of media gratifications based on needs. While gratifications are the perceived fulfillment of a need through an activity, such as media use (Palmgreen, 1984), the needs are "the combined product of psychological dispositions, sociological factors, and environmental conditions" (Katz, Gurevitch, & Haas, 1973, pp. 516-517).

The uses and gratification conception has its roots in the studies of 1940s that delineated audience's media use. The precursors to the emergence of uses and gratifications as a theory were a few important studies conducted in the 1940s in the US by Herta Herzog and Bernard Berelson.

Herzog, Austrian American communication researcher, pioneered the field of gratification research through her study titled 'Professor Quiz: A Gratification Study.' The study identified four gratifications: competitive self-esteem; diversified information/education; self-rating; and sporting appeal (1940).

In her subsequent study, 'What Do We Really Know About Daytime Serial Listeners', Herzog (1944) sought to identify the motivations of housewives for listening to radio soap operas suggesting a conscious selection process on the part of the listener. Her analysis showed that women's personal characteristics motivated them to listen to daytime serials. And the gratifications they derived from the serials were: 'emotional release', 'remodeling one's misery', and for 'making adjustments' when faced with problems. Herzog also found that more the problems these women faced, more was the time they spent listening to radio serials.

Yet another pioneering uses and gratification study was conducted by Berelson (1949) in mid 1945, when newspaper delivery men went on strike in New York City depriving the city dwellers of their newspapers. The study titled 'What Missing the Newspaper Means', showed that the absence of newspapers had handicapped half of the readers in some way as they were reading newspapers to satisfy several gratifications such as 'for information about and interpretation of public event', 'a tool for daily living', 'for respite from boredom', 'for social prestige', and 'for social contact'.

Most of the early studies besides being descriptive and simple in analytical procedures were qualitative exploration of audience members' perceptions of their experiences, motivations, and connections with various types of media content. Studies conducted in the 1960s strived to develop media use typologies and identify the factors responsible for different patterns of consumption and gratifications.

The uses and gratification perspective became more systematic and formalised in its approach in the 1970s. Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch provided a first systematic outline of the components of the uses and gratifications research. They noted that uses and gratifications research seeks to understand "(i) the social and psychological origins of (ii) needs, which generate (iii) expectations of (iv) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (v) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (vi) need gratifications and (vii) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones" (1974, p 20).

Since then, uses and gratification researchers have systematically investigated the uses of newspapers, television, and internet, the new medium.

Uses and gratification of newspapers before internet

In 1985, unions of two Philadelphia newspapers went on strike. Elliot and Rosenberg seized the opportunity and conducted a study on the lines of the one by Berelson (1949) when newspaper delivery men went on strike in New York City in 1945. In their study, Elliot and Rosenberg (1987) explored the "relationship between newspaper gratifications sought and media use during and after the newspaper strike" (p. 679). Based on their findings, they came to the conclusion that "media gratifications are primarily the result of the social situation and background factors and may depend more on habit than on internalised need states" (p. 687). The study however showed that when it comes to surveillance/contact dimension of newspaper use, people tend to associate "gratifications received from one medium with the use of another medium" (p. 687). In other words, surveillance/contact is a definitive media use which people tend to satisfy through media, not necessarily only through newspapers. Thus, they noted, "the safest interpretation, we think, is that gratifications obtained are related to habitual behaviors" (p. 687). This finding is a somewhat different from that of Berelson's study (1949), in that Berelson's study specifically stated that newspaper users were handicapped as they could not satisfy their gratifications due to the newspapers' strike. While the context of Elliot and Roseberg was somewhat modern with the rise of several other mass media, Berelson's context in the 1940s had fewer alternatives for people to satisfy their media gratifications.

A study conducted in Hawaii (Blood, Keir & Namjun, 1983) concluded that 'duty to be informed' item was the best predictor of newspaper readership. Also, the strong uses of newspaper were 'read to understand', 'read to keep up', 'use in daily living', 'fun to read' and 'read to relax' in that order. The study also discovered that "(As) respondents' endorsement of the index (citizen duty to be informed) increases the relationship between newspaper readership and diversion/entertainment weakens" (p. 51).

As detected in the early studies, subsequent researches showed surveillance to be the strongest gratifying need for which people read newspapers (O' Keefe & Spentnagel, 1973; Lometti, Reeves, & Bybee, 1977). From the study of Towers (1985), it emerged that surveillance and diversion were the two major reasons for the use of newspapers. Interaction was another factor, but less significant. Towers' study also indicated to significant difference in the use of newspapers by readers on weekdays and Sundays. While regular subscribers used newspapers mostly for surveillance on Sundays, others searched for entertainment and leisure factors as newspapers lay greater emphasis on these two aspects on Sundays.

Similar results have been arrived at in studies conducted different countries. A cross-national study conducted by Lee (1988) among students of the US and Korea found that in general students in both the countries used newspapers for interaction-utility, information seeking, and diversion, though Korean students showed greater information seeking satisfaction than Americans. Therefore, Lee

avers, "gratifications sought factors of the two countries are highly similar, although not completely identical" (p. 156).

An overview of the studies above would suggest that while the gratification paradigms of newspapers have somewhat remained constant, audience now have greater alternatives to satisfy similar gratifications. Surveillance comes across as the most dominant media gratification that people seek from newspapers.

Gratification paradigms in the post internet era

Embedding is the processing of hiding one image in the form of another. The entry of the Internet in the 1990s as a medium with the inbuilt advantages of easy access, affordability and diversity had the potential to overshadow the print medium of newspapers. The threat was real. Many newspapers began to lose their readers in the 1990s onwards especially in the US. However, much before the rise of the Internet, Chaffe and Choe (1981) had averred that the decline of newspapers and newspaper readership was not merely due to the rise of newer media. Other reasons affecting newspaper reading were individuals' structural constraints (disadvantaged location); transitional constraints (personal life-cycle changes); and self-constraints (interests) (pp. 202-203). In an effort to explain how 'society has influenced the media' (p. 314), De Fleur (1996) had rightly noted that "the development of additional media during the several decades of the 20th century has provided functional alternatives within the cultural system, which are making modest inroads in the degree to which the society satisfies its collective needs for communication content through the "consumption of newspapers"" (p. 320).

De Fleur further argued that it is not just the medium and the technology that are responsible for its rise or decline, but also the socio-cultural traits which keep on evolving as times change. However, he submits to the fact that even the character of a particular medium itself can be its raison d'être. For example, "while newspapers required three quarters of a century to become a household item, television reached virtual saturation in a matter of just a decade" (p. 324).

Many scholars through empirical studies have examined the supplementary and displacement or substitution effects of the Internet on the use of traditional media of newspapers and television. The supplementary role of the Internet has been dealt in detail by Althaus and Tewksbury (2000). Their study showed that the use of WWW for surveillance supplemented rather than substituted the use of traditional news media in a networked community. They also noted that while WWW may be complimentary to traditional media for surveillance, it is a serious competitor to traditional media in meeting entertainment needs. That is because most respondents used it primarily for entertainment and secondarily for news. Nguyen and Western (2006) have emphatically noted that online news and information usage reinforce traditional media usage. Flanagin and Metzger (2000) had found that the Internet information was perceived to be as credible as television and radio, but less credible than newspaper.

Scholars have also detected the displacement effect of the Internet on television media. In 2001, Dimmick, Chen and Zhan (2009) conducted a unique study through a telephone survey with 211 respondents in Columbus, Ohio to find out the displacement effect of the Internet on traditional media. The study used the theoretical framework of uses and gratifications and niche theory. The results clearly indicated that the Internet had a competitive displacement effect on traditional media in the daily news domain with the largest displacements occurring for television and newspapers. More specifically, their study revealed that "displacement effect is largest for television, with 33.7% of all respondents reporting that they used broadcast television for news less often after they started using the Internet for news, whereas 28% reported using newspapers less" (p. 26). The outcome of the study showed that the Internet did affect the use of mostly television and newspapers.

According to media substitution theory - whenever a new medium emerges - it can alter the audience' use patterns of the older media. For example, a study by Kaye and Johnson (2003) indicated that the exodus of people from traditional media has been faster among those Internet users whose media patterns have changed. What it suggests is that for such audiences, there is no increase in the use of traditional media any longer.

With reference to substitution theory, the study by Choi and Haque (2002) found that the significant downslide in the use of older media such as television, radio, newspapers as well as communication with family members was observed only in the case of heavy users of the Internet.

A review of studies conducted following the dawn of the Internet era in the 1990s has showed that 'surveillance' continued to be the strongest gratifying needs (Vincent & Basil, 1997; Diddi & La Rose, 2006; Ayyad, 2011). Calder and Malthouse (2004) in their study found that newspapers as a medium were high on experiences such as 'regular part of my day', 'shows me diversity', and 'something to talk about'. The researchers conclude that such "experiences represent the strengths of the medium" (p. 129).

Koçak and Kaya (n.d.) in their study conducted in a university in Turkey discovered that the students found newspaper to be a credible and reliable medium. The factor analysis of four items suggested that students used newspapers mostly for relaxation and entertainment. They also used them for information and to gratify their personal interests. Further, other uses of newspapers were to update their knowledge of current events and issues, and to learn about other people's opinion. The study by Flavian and Gurrea (2007) identified four major motivations for reading newspapers: search for specific information, search for updated news, leisure-entertainment, and habit.

The results of these studies amply indicate that the onset of the Internet has not reduced the use of newspaper and television. For surveillance needs, most

people continue to prefer newspapers and television than the Web. However, those who use the Web extensively tend to use it also for surveillance needs (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000). This seems quite natural, considering the fact that they spend more time on the Web than other media.

In India, there have been a few significant studies in this field. Kohli-Khandekar, in her seminal work *The India Media Business* (2013), holds that India is one of those countries where the readership of newspapers is on the rise (p. 1). This has been possible mainly due to the rise in literacy, among other reasons. She affirms that newspapers in India are used by readers for surveillance and entertainment.

Hasan and Sharma (2011) in their study among Indian homemakers found that women use print media mostly for news and information. The second most important use for them was entertainment which included movies and sports. The third important gratification they sought was 'passing time'.

In India, the Internet is yet to pose a threat to newspapers. This point has been well made by Bamezai et al. (2011):

> "Newspapers in the age of information have become such an integral part of people's life that there can be no threat in the near future. Even in the Hindi belt newspapers will hold the sway since the personal computers are limited to 6 to 8 percentage of the population and if these were to grow to 15–20 percent, it could make a significant difference only after a decade or two to challenge the print media "but not at the cost of each other" (p. 118).

What they suggest is that the affinity people in India have for the newspaper has not yet declined, partly because the Internet penetration is low and partly because newspaper reading is part of the daily routine for people as they wake up.

What emerges from these studies is that the gratifications readers sought from reading newspapers are not very different from the experience of people in the West. However, unlike in the West, print media in India is years away from shifting its base to the online realm.

An overview of uses and gratifications studies in the post Internet era and earlier suggests that people's gratification needs from reading news and views from the newspapers have evolved across time. One thing common to both these periods in terms of gratification paradigms is that newspapers are preferred to gratify the surveillance needs. This has remained quite constant over the years, despite the decline of the medium as such. With the coming of the Internet though, there is a tendency to consume information in bits and pieces, with less preference for deeper

and extensive reading (Bauerlein, 2005). Accordingly, readers seem satisfied mostly with just updating themselves with current events.

Further, from these studies it emerges that the dominant gratifications people seek from newspapers both in the pre and post Internet era have more or less remained similar, though their rank order may have shifted. The most dominant gratifications that the readers seek from the newspapers are surveillance, entertainment and relaxation. However, the emergence of other media, especially the Internet, has severely affected newspaper as a medium and also altered people's dominant uses of it. Even as studies have shown that the decline of newspapers as a medium began much before the emergence of the Internet, one cannot deny the fact that the Internet by its very nature tends to attract audience more than any other medium. As the Internet becomes more widespread in the coming years, the time spent on it by the audience will also increase and correspondingly, the time devoted to other media, especially newspaper, will decrease, a trend being observed already (Kumar and Sarma, 2015). When gratifications sought from a particular medium are satisfied by a newer medium, consumers are very likely to migrate to that medium quite easily.

Conclusion

The emergence of the Internet has definitely changed the way people perceive and consume different media. To that extent, the gratifications sought by people also have evolved considerably. Several of the studies reviewed above show that the traditional media tend to be substituted with the Internet, as it is likely to satisfy audiences' gratifications of traditional media. A survey in the US also showed that nearly 31 per cent of the people had deserted a news outlet, as it "no longer provides the news and information they had grown accustomed to" (Pew Research, 2013). With the rise of digital media, today the audience has better options to pick and choose the news content they desire to explore.

Pew Research for 2012 said that 39 per cent of those surveyed had consumed news online or from their cell phones. The survey also said that those who consumed news through digital means rose to over 50 per cent (Pew Research, 2012). Social network is playing another key role in consumption of news as 50 per cent of users were sharing news on their social network page (Pew Research, 2014).

With such developments, newspapers need to evolve. Going online with interactive and multimedia features seems to be an alternate option available to traditional print media. And many newspapers and other print media have already taken the cue quite seriously.

While some newspapers/magazines such as *Newsweek* in the US have closed the print version and have fully gone online, others are giving greater attention to their online version. According to one estimate, till 2013 in the US around 450 of the over 1380 newspapers had gone for the paywall option, namely

they were charging the readers who were coming online to read the newspapers (Pew Research, 2013). And the study also showed that the trend had worked and in several cases, especially in the case of *New York Times*, it had yielded profits as (its) "circulation revenue now exceeds its advertising revenue, a sea change from the traditional revenue split of as much as 80% advertising dollars to 20% circulation dollars" (Ibid).

In India, print media are yet to face challenges from the Internet. However, most major newspapers and magazines have launched their online versions and considerable efforts are being put in to make the online versions elegant and reader friendly. This trend suggests that those in the print media business are quite certain of the fact that sooner than later print as a medium will decline even in India and more and more people will consume news online.

For the moment though, a healthy blend of both print and online versions of the print medium in the Indian scenario seems quite feasible, even as owners are not able to extract any revenue from the digital version (Chandrashekhar, 2013).

However, print media in India need to devise ways in which the online digital realm of their medium becomes a viable solution in the wake of the impending readership decline. This does not seem to be as simple and easy as it sounds. But, they can take cue from their western counterparts who have been successful in transforming the digital version of the print medium profitable.

Even as this trend becomes normal in the coming years, one question will continue to hold its sway: will the reading experience of the so called 'online print medium' (if it can be called so) be the same as its original print counterpart? In-depth studies and research in this field could lead one to answers that could be decisive in further strengthening the revival of print in the digital media.

References

Althaus, S. L., & Tewksbury, D. (2000). Patterns of Internet and traditional news media use in a networked community. *Political Communication*, *17,* 21-45.

Ayyad, K. (2011). Internet usage Vs traditional media usage among university students in the United Arab Emirates. *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research*, *4* (1), 41-61.

Bamezai, F., Kesharvani, P., & Yumnam, B. (2011). Impact of internet on changing patterns of newspaper access and news-reading habits in India. *Media Asia, 38* (2), 110-121.

Bauerlein, M. (2015). Reading at risk. *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association, 38* (1), 101-106.

Berelson, B. (1949). What "missing the newspaper" means. In P. F. Lazarsfeld & F. N. Stanton (Eds.). *Communications Research, 1948-1949* (pp. 111-128). New York: Harper & Brothers.

Blood, R. W., Keir, G. J., & Namjun, K. (1983). Newspaper use and gratification in Hawaii. *Newspaper Research Journal, 4* (44), 43-52.

Calder, B. J., & Malthouse, E. C. (2004). Qualitative media measures: Newspaper experiences. *International Journal on Media Management, 6* (1-2), 123-130.

Cantril, H. (1942). Professor quiz: A gratifications study. In P. F. Lazarsfeld & F. Stanton (Eds.), *Radio research 1941* (pp. 34–45). New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce.

Chaffe, S. H., & Choe, S. Y. (1981). Newspaper reading in longitudinal perspective: Beyond structural constraints. *Journalism Quarterly, 58,* 201-211.

Chandrashekhar, C. P. (2013). The business of news in the Internet age. *Social Scientist, 41*(5/6), 25-39.

Choi, Y. J., & Haque, M. (2002). Internet use and motivations of Koreans. *Asian Journal of Communication, 12*(1), 126-140.

DeFleur, M. L. (1966). Mass communication and social change. *Social Forces, 44*(3), 314-326.

Diddi, A., & La Rose, R. (2006). Getting hooked on news: Uses and gratifications and the formation of news habits among college students in an Internet environment. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *50*(2), 193-210.

Dimmick, J., Chen, Y., & Li, Zhan. (2009). Competition between the Internet and traditional news media: The gratification-opportunities niche dimension. *Journal of Media Economics, 17*(1), 19-33.

Elliot, W. R., & Rosenberg, W. L. (1987). The 1985 Philadelphia newspaper strike: A uses and gratifications study. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 64,* 679-687.

Flanagin, A. J., & Metzger, M. J. (2000). Perceptions of Internet information credibility. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, *77*, 515–540.

Flavian, C., & Gurrea, R. (2007). Duality of newspaper distribution channels: An analysis of readers' motivations. *International Review of Retail Distribution and Consumer Research, 17*(1), 63-78.

Hasan, S., & Sharma, A. (June, 2011). Print media utilization pattern among homemakers. *Global Media Journal – Indian Edition*, 1-17.

Herzog, H. (1940). Professor quiz: A gratification study. In P. F. Lazarsfeld (Ed.), *Radio and the printed page* (pp. 64-93). New York: Duell, Sloan & Peace.

Herzog, H. (1944). What do we really know about daytime serial listeners? In P. F. Lazarsfeld & F. Stanton (Eds.), *Radio research 1943-44,* (pp. 3-33). New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce.

Katz, E. (1959). Mass communication research and the study of popular culture: An editorial note on a possible future for this Journal. *Studies in Public Communication*, *2*, 1-6.

Katz, E., Blumler, J. G. & Gurevitch, M. (1973–1974): Uses and Gratifications Research. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, *4* (37), 509-23.

Katz, E., Gurevitch, M., & Haas, H. (1973). On the use of the mass media for important things. *American Sociological Review, 38,* 164-181.

Kaye, B., & Johnson, T. J. (2003). From here to obscurity? Media substitution theory and traditional media in an on-line world. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology, 54* (3), 260-273.

Koçak, A. V., & Kaya, A. Y. (n.d.). Information and more: Uses and gratifications of print newspapers among university students in Turkey. Retrieved November, 2013 from http://cim.anadolu.edu.tr/pdf/2004/1130855872.pdf

Kohli-Khandekar, V. (2013). *The Indian Media Business (*4th ed.). New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Kumar, S., & Sarma, V. V. S. (2015). Performance and Challenges of Newspapers in India: A Case Study on English versus Vernacular Dailies in India. In Twelfth AIMS International Conference on Management, 2-5 January, 2015, Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode, India.

Lee, S. (1998). A cross-national study of newspaper reading patterns in the United States and Korea: An analysis based on the uses and gratifications construct. *International Area Studies Review, 1*(2), 147-160.

Lometti, G. E., Reeves, B., & Bybee, C. R. (1977). Investigating the assumptions of uses and gratifications research. *Communication Research, 4,* 321-338.

Nguyen, A., & Western. M. (2006). The complementary relationship between the Internet and traditional mass media. *The case of online news and information, Information Research*, *11* (3), paper 259. Retrieved March 5, 2015, from http://informationr.net/ir/11/3/paper 259. htm

O'Keefe, G. J., & Spetnagel. H. T. (1973). Patterns of college students' use of selected news media. *Journalism Quarterly, 50,* 543-548.

Paper Cuts (2012). Retrieved March 2015, from http://newspaperlayoffs.com/

Pew Research (2012). The state of the news media report 2012. *Pew Research Centre Journalism & Media.* Retrieved April 2015, from http://www.stateofthemedia.org/2012/ overview-4/key-findings/

Pew Research (2013). The state of the news media report 2013. *Pew Research Centre Journalism & Media.* Retrieved April 2015, from http://www.stateofthemedia.org/2013/ overview-5/

Pew Research (2014). The state of the news media report 2014. *Pew Research Centre Journalism & Media.* Retrieved April 2015, from http://www.journalism.org/2014/03/26/state-of-the-news-media-2014-overview/

Sweney, M. (2013). More than half of Britons access news online. Retrieved April 2014, from http://www.theguardian.com/media/2013/aug/08/half-britons-access-news-online.

Towers, W. M. (1985). Weekday and Sunday readership seen through uses and gratifications. *Newspaper Research Journal, 6* (3), 20-32.

Vincent, R. C., & Basil, M. D. (1997). College students' news gratifications, media use, and current events knowledge. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *41*(3), 380-392.