

## 1 | History of Audience Theory

### SUMMARY

<b>1920s:</b> <b>'Hypodermic needle' model</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Audience as a uniform mass, passive and vulnerable to the effects of powerful media</li> <li>Eschews the notion of audience activity, agency and interpretation</li> </ul>
<b>1940s:</b> <b>Uses &amp; Gratification</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What people do with the media</li> <li>Individual audience numbers have agency</li> <li>Shift from all-powerful media to audience agency</li> </ul>
<b>1960s:</b> <b>Literary Criticism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on meanings embedded in media texts using semiotics (textual analysis)</li> <li>Text as privileged site of meaning and analysis (not the audience)</li> </ul>
<b>1980s:</b> <b>Cultural studies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rebuke the 'hypodermic needle' model of media effects research</li> <li>Audience is not a passive, vulnerable mass; but actively interpret and use the media</li> </ul>

**What is an audience?** Scope, perspective, timescale

Historic definition – “the action of hearing” – transformed over time, from physically being there to listen in the amphitheatre to digital broadcasts. ‘audiencing’; ‘audiences’

**Mediated audience** – they are displaced in space or time (don't have to be right there) from the original media text

### Media Effect Theories

'Hypodermic needle' model (1920-30s)

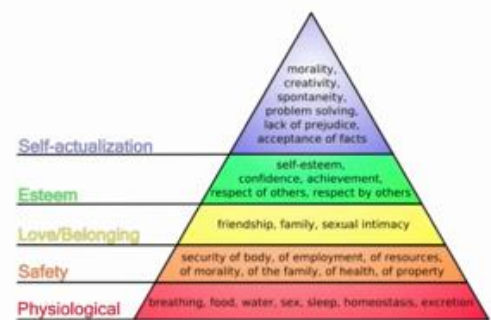
- Mathematical model of communication
- Audience construed as **passive**, no self-thought – Media injects ideas into the brains of a passive audience
- Model no longer in used – impoverished theory as it lacks factors such as personal experience, culture

Two Step theory of Mass Communication (Katz & Lazarsfeld)

- “Ideas often flow from radio and print to **opinion leaders**, and from these to the less active sections of the population” e.g. celebrities to fans or wider public
- Klout score** – social media analytics, popularity, ranks ‘influence’ in social media
- 'The million follower fallacy' (Avnit, 2009)** – the number of followers does not indicate influence of user

Uses & Gratifications model

- The audience **actively** seeks media that meets their needs
- Audiences are selective, involved, or using communications
- Social media – predicting motivations behind Facebook self-disclosure: passing time, exhibitionism, companionship etc.
- Some criticisms of the model:
  - Difficult to establish an equal variable to measure
  - Foreground psychological factors, and background socio-cultural factors



Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs

Reception Theory

- Active interpretation by the audience
- Encoding/decoding models (Hall, 1980)**
  - Social positioning influences how media texts are interpreted by different groups
  - One media text can have several different ‘readings’
  - 3 ways of ‘decoding’ a text – reading positions: dominant (all), negotiated (some), oppositional
- David Morley's Nationwide audience study** – how socioeconomic background impacts on reading position

### 3 | *Imagined audiences and context collapse*

#### Context collapse

- The indeterminacy of establishing a range of communicative dimensions involved in enacting our identities and engaging with each other
  - What kind of identity to project to my audience if I don't know who my audience is
  - Does that matter/affect the kind of media text I'm producing?
- Vlogging practices – particular example

#### Context collapse and the webcam

- “The problem facing the would-be vlogger frozen in front of the webcam is the problem of too many possible generalized others. The webcam forces the vlogger to imagine a virtually infinite number of possible others, potential futures, and different contexts each of which bare different perspectives and judgments on his or her self.” (Wesch, 2009, p.23)
- “Generalised other” – imagined co-presence or third person latent in any communicative exchange
- Vlogged in the private sphere of their bedroom, but broadcasted/uploaded to the public

#### Imagined audience

- “Reduced verbal and nonverbal cues of audience members” (Litt, 2012: 331) – gestures etc.
- Unit of observation: Properties of the text (forms of address); Ask the author?; Philosophical theorising about generalised others
- **How do we change our communicative patterns based on how we imagine the audience?**
  - Example: if parents are on FB does that change what you post, and how you construe your text?
  - Example: Facebook (Private) vs. Instagram and Twitter (Public)
- “In the absence of certain knowledge about audience, participants take cues from social media environment to imagine the community” (Boyd, 2007: 131)
- “A tweet's actual readers differ from its producer's imagined audience” (Marwick and Boyd, 2010, p.117)
  - Three groups of audience: imagined, actual, users who retweet or reply to a tweet

#### Example: “Hey guys” Youtube

- Collective vocative ‘guys’ – signals interpersonal closeness with audience as if they are their close girlfriends that they would tell their secrets too
- Target audience: girls and women?
- Do different communities use different forms of address?
- Naming the imagined audience – varying forms of interpersonal closeness eg. tweeps vs. followers

#### Authenticity and audience

- Strategic audience and self-censorship
- Depends on the intended purpose of your twitter account?
- What does authenticity, identity, social conventions, genres mean when interacting via a communicative channel that allows visibility, indeterminacy, and new forms of sociality?

**WEEKLY READINGS & RESEARCHED JOURNAL ARTICLES**

**Litt, E. (2012).** Knock, Knock. Who's There? The Imagined Audience. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 56(3), 330-345.

- “Social media platforms by default ‘collapse’ contexts” as there is a large/diverse audience online as opposed to the actual limit groups that one normally interacts with face to face offline
- “The imagined audience is the mental conceptualisation of the people with whom we are communicating”
- We have to realise that imagined ≠ actual audience
- Target audience – are imagined audience just as influential as actual?
- **Role of social media in the development of people’s reputation and opportunities (p.335)**
  - Leads to questions of authenticity
  - Most people use social media platforms for **interpersonal communication** (p.339) e.g.
    - Maintain one’s identity
    - **Self-presentation**, impression management, **self-promote**
    - Maintain relationships, build social capital, date
    - Seek information about news/people/events
    - Coordinate events
    - Share projects, raise money and awareness
- **Broadcast tool** – imagined audience = ‘fan base’

**Marwick, A. & boyd, d., (2010).** I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New Media & Society* 13(1), 114-133.

- Technology complicates our metaphors of space and place – we may understand that the Twitter or Facebook audience is limitless, but we often act as if we are bounded
  - ‘@reply’ – lets the user target a conversation to or reference a particular user, but these tweets can be viewed by anyone through search.twitter.com, the public timeline, sender’s twitter page
  - Retweets/reposts – spread even further, but may lose reference to the original
- **‘digital intimacy’ – many tweets are phatic in nature – reinforcing connections and maintaining social bonds**
- **Consciously speaking to an audience is perceived as inauthentic**
  - This consciousness implies an ongoing front stage identity performance that balances the desire to maintain positive impressions with the need to seem true or authentic to others (p.124)
  - **Strategic use of Twitter to maintain followers, or to create and market a ‘personal brand’** (p.119)
  - Since authenticity is constituted by the audience, context collapse problematizes the individual’s ability to shift between these selves and come off as authentic or fake (p.124)
  - **‘Corporate speak’ is seen as less authentic than personal, ‘human’ revelations** (p.127)
- **Multiplicity** – different tweets to target different people
  - Rather than appealing simultaneously to multiple audiences, each mixed tweets with different target audiences to maintain their broad appeal
- **Micro-celebrity** – implies that all individuals have an audience that they can strategically maintain through ongoing communication and interaction
  - Establish a presence online – obtain and maintain attention
  - Strategies: Targeting tweets towards their perceived audience’s interest, balancing topic areas
- **Context collapse** – SNS flattens multiple audiences into one
- **Self-censorship** – parents, employers, significant others
  - Without the ability to vary information flow based on audience, participants could not risk a sensitive topic being viewed by the wrong person
  - You want to convey intelligence, professionalism, diversity
  - **Participants maintain a public-facing persona to manage impression with potential readers**
  - Context collapse creates an audience that is often imagined as its most sensitive members: parents, partners, bosses (p.125)
- **The ability to attract and command attention becomes a status symbol**