



THEORY & RESEARCH

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MEDIA AUDIENCE: THE PAST

- Thinking back to ancient times ...
 - Original audience was localized in one place/time.
 - Performances were live; communication was directly to the audience.
 - Audience was relatively small and potentially interactive (with itself and performers).

MEDIA AUDIENCE: THE PAST

- The reading public ...
 - Followed the works of particular authors or topics.
 - Followed particular periodical magazines and newspapers.
- Technology and societal changes redefine audience.
 - Defining audience by preferences and social-economic standing.

THE 'MASS' AUDIENCE

- First experienced in cinema.
- Large and widely dispersed.
- Experience similar things (movies) but at different times.
- Can only interact with small segment of total audience.
- Difficult — if not impossible — to interact with creators of content.

AUDIENCE AS MARKET

- An aggregate of actual or potential consumers.
- Boundaries based primarily on economic criteria.
- No necessary internal relationships between members of a given market.
- No social or normative relations with the source of communication/content.
- No consciousness of membership or identity as an audience.
- No basis for continuity.
- Research is interested only in size and individual behaviors.

DUALITY OF THE AUDIENCE

- Audiences originate either in people/society or in media/content.
- Audiences can be created by media (new channel/show/etc.)

DUALITY OF THE AUDIENCE

➤ Society as source

- **Pre-existing social group (macro):** Existing community, membership, commitment to cause.
- **Personal need/gratification (micro):** Individual purpose or need.

➤ Media as source

- **Content/fan culture (macro):** Group forms in loyalty/interest of author/director/type of content.
- **Channel/medium (micro):** Individual loyalty to particular media source, consumers of media product and customers for advertisers.

**Does the media manipulate the audience ...
or does the audience manipulate the media?**

IMPLICATIONS OF NEW MEDIA

- *(Remember: This article was written in 1994!)*
- Revolution in possibilities for broadcasting as a result of cable/satellite technology.
- Rapid development of new ways of recording, storage and retrieval.
- Interactive use of media via computers.
- Increased internationalization of both transmission and reception.

Without a mass medium, there is no audience ... only chance similarities of patterns of media use.

Who receives what?

THREE RESEARCH TRADITIONS

STRUCTURAL TRADITION

- Goal is descriptive of audience in terms of composition and relation to social structure of population as a whole.
- Size and reach ... and social composition.
- Demographics, content preferences, opinions, responses.
- Main method: Sample survey

BEHAVIORIST TRADITION

- Goal is to establish effects of media messages on individual behavior, opinions, attitudes, values.
- Examples:
 - Payne Fund studies: effects of film on youth
 - Portrayals of violence in media
- Audience is “active participant” in communication process.
- Uses and gratifications theory

SOCIAL-CULTURAL TRADITION

- Emphasized the study of audiences as sets of people with unique (though often shared) experiences and ‘in charge’ of their own lives.
- Differential decoding: Messages interpreted different ways by different people with different backgrounds.
- Media should be “read” through the perceptions of its audience.
- Ethnographic studies

AUDIENCE STRUCTURE

AUDIENCE STRUCTURE: MEDIA SIDE

- **Potential audience:** All those who are able to be reached
- **Paying audience:** Purchasers of media, subscribers
- **Audience reached:** Those who actually consume
- **Density of circulation/reach:** Proportion of given population who are reached
- **Cumulative audience:** Number/proportion of potential audience reached over given period of time.
- **Internal audience:** Degree of attention to particular sections/types of content

AUDIENCE STRUCTURE: 'PEOPLE' SIDE

- **Media use:** How much a particular form of content is consumed (“heavy user,” “light user”) over time
- Often described in time budgets

AUDIENCE STRUCTURE & COMPOSITION

- Age (life-cycle) influences availability and content choice.
- Social class position (income) governs pattern of media use.
- Higher education and professional work responsibility may lead to different content choices.
- Gender and locality can also influence media decisions.

Do audiences create demand or respond to what is offered?

What influences choice of content ... and what factors of content and presentation help to draw and keep audience attention?