

Uses & Gratification Theory - Social Media

Uses and gratification theory is one of many communications theories that help to explain human's relationship with mass media. The main idea is that people turn to media to assist them in fulfilling certain needs that used to be filled by just talk to other people. Specifically there are five distinct categories of needs fulfilled by media: cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and tension-free needs. These categories are a little complicated so it might help to go through them in detail.

Cognitive needs: People use media sources both analog and digital to learn about news and to stay updated with current issues. They also watch media to educate themselves about specific topics. For example my parents may watch the news on TV to stay updated but I may check out Twitter to read the most recent trending articles to do the same. Educational programming like The Discovery Channel or National Geographic can teach us about the environment and other places around the earth.

Affective needs: This is really the aspect of watching media that aids us in connecting emotionally with content and helps us form an emotional response from the media. Our affective needs can also simply be for entertainment. For example soap operas and series television like Game Of Thrones really draw in their viewers emotionally and become a source of entertainment for people (duh).

Personal Integrative: Consuming media assists humans in creating and solidifying identity traits believe it or not. We view characters with traits that appeal to us as role models and our behaviors start to mimic theirs. I love Superman and watching him do good deeds and help people makes me want to do so, etc.

Social Integrative: This is really very different since the advent of digital media. When media was entirely analog on TV there wasn't a way to connect with other people who were also watching TV at the same time. Digital media has obviously changed this in that our generation is constantly connected all the time with other people via our devices and various social medias. Our human need to feel socially connected pushes us to want to use these medias more and more.

Tension-free: This can also be called escapism, and means that humans need to escape from the tensions of everyday life sometimes, and turning to media to assist them is a good way to do so. Whether the media is a TV show about running through the jungle, or a video game about medieval realms, or maybe even a Travel Channel show about the Caribbean. When we consume these medias we feel as though we've escaped into a new place and these helps us recharge before going back to our normal lives.

So how can brands use our new-age digital medias to their full advantage? Let's take a brand like Mountain Dew and see how they fit into the uses and gratification model. Would they be best suited to put money into a Twitter marketing campaign or a facebook campaign?

On the cognitive side Facebook is probably better for conveying large amounts of information because Twitter is limited to 140 characters per single message. But as a brand looking to advertise consumers are "trained" to not pay attention to ads. So having a limited characters set may be an advantage to Mountain Dew because they can get their message out short and sweet. Lets check out a twitter and Facebook post from them and see which is more effective.

<https://twitter.com/MountainDew/status/647399434867732480>

So in the above Tweet Mountain Dew is able to use only 140 characters to convey a lot of info to users: They are holding a contest partnered with Amazon; the prize is exclusive #PS4 rewards (connects PS4 brand); Contest hashtag is #BeTheBatman; and they connect with the new #ArkhamKnight Batman movie coming out soon. So Twitter is an effective way to get a lot of information out to users, but you can see that it only has 14 reposts and 26 favorites. Not a lot of interaction for a major brand.

Mountain Dew Facebook Post

This is nearly the same ad as the Twitter post but formatted differently. There aren't hashtags to connect to co sponsored brands like PS4, but there is a large visually stimulating picture that links to Amazon, who is the main sponsor. But the most important factor about Facebook ads is that consumers can actually interact with Mountain Dew by commenting on the post as an equal party, and Mountain Dew can reply back as if it was just another user on the site. This helps appeal to consumers' affective needs by allowing a personal connection with the brand. I would feel good about myself if Mountain Dew commented back to my post!

Social media can't directly help consumer's need to personally integrate in the sense that it isn't a human role model. They could build on traditional add campaigns and use actors to create an identity for their brand that people can connect with, then use social media to promote. For example Old Spice does this very well. Their "[Old Spice Man](#)" is a guy that most men look up to because he is seen as the epitome of manly and he smells good, etc. So if Mountain Dew wanted to create a more robust connection with their consumers they might consider creating a campaign with a "star" person as the identity. They can use social medias to promote this figure and gain more consumer interest.

Social integration of their brand is what Mountain Dew already strives to do. This means getting consumers to purchase their product and then tweet about it, or Instagram a picture of their Dew sweating in the summer sun, or even recommend a new flavor to a friend via social media. The most powerful advertising is done through word of mouth and with social media this can be done with very low effort. [Instagram](#) is actually a great site for escapism because on Insta users love posting pics with an exotic or adventurous visual aesthetic. This makes the brand in the picture appear to be more interesting than it actually is, but thats what gets consumers to buy it.

Overall uses and gratification theory can be applied to branding in many ways. Some platforms are better than others depending on their features. If a brand wants to market via social media the best way would be to research all the different platforms and see which will allow them to connect with their consumers most effectively.