A Systematic Literature Review of Uses and Gratifications of Media During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Uses and gratification theory has five basic assumptions to answer how the media is used to meet audience needs. The COVID-19 pandemic required the public, especially the audience, to have distance difficulties when communicating. Communication media is an alternative to meet the satisfaction and needs of communication. This research synthesizes nine journal articles identified as the main data sources using a systematic literature review. The study results show that the five basic uses and gratification theory assumptions can be found in the service and satisfaction of media needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Audiences use communication media during the COVID-19 pandemic with various goals, conditions, and influences. Communication media is also a means of conveying accurate information and is the main choice as a means of communication. It is hoped that this research can be used as an additional reference in research related to the use of the theory of use and gravity, as well as research related to the use of media during the Covid-19 pandemic, and can help agencies associated with the handling of Covid-19, media owners and media users as a whole general.

Keywords: Uses and Gratification Theory, Covid-19, Pandemic, Communication Media, Social Media.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic that has hit the world since the end of 2019 has forced people to switch to a digital environment (Hendro Aryo Putro & Nofita, 2023). Social distancing orders have disrupted many sectors, including media, at the start (Andriani, 2020). Communication media is vital in disseminating information amid the COVID-19 pandemic (Akbar, 2021). Digital media is the choice for Generation Z and other groups to share information and socialize (Suwana et al., 2020). Teaching and learning activities are also required to switch to digital media (Asnan et al., 2022). The use of social media in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic was higher than the use of television for entertainment motives (Rochyadi-Reetz et al., 2020). Social-media is also used to fulfill needs such as employment information (Sitompul et al., 2021). The dissemination of information during COVID-19 did not escape the spread of fake news using social media (Chotijah et al., 2023).

From now on, the uses and gratifications theory, abbreviated as UGT, tries to understand that audiences will consume messages from the media for various needs, and the effects of the transmissions provided will differ for each audience (Griffin et al., 2018). Like media use during the COVID-19 lockdown, UGT's five basic assumptions can provide an overview of how audiences use media. Since 1959, uses and gratification theory has been one of mass communication inquiry's most widely used research perspectives (Bryant & Beth Oliver, 2009). Uses and gratifications theory (UGT) tries to understand that audiences will consume messages from the media for various needs, and the effects of the messages provided will differ for each audience (Griffin et al., 2018). This theory considers that the audience using media is goal-oriented, active, and discriminatory. Audiences are considered to know their needs and know and be responsible for media choices that can meet their needs (Bryant & Beth Oliver, 2009). Since 1959, uses and gratification theory has been one of mass communication inquiry's most widely used research perspectives (Bryant & Beth Oliver, 2009). Uses and gratifications theory (UGT) tries to understand that audiences will consume

messages from the media for various needs, and the effects of the messages provided will be different for each audience (Griffin et al., 2018). This theory considers that the audience using media is goal-oriented, active, and discriminatory. Audiences are considered to know their needs and know and be responsible for media choices that can meet their needs (Bryant & Beth Oliver, 2009).

UGT is a theoretical framework widely used to understand why people use specific media. Variations in motives for media use during lockdown in various regions during the COVID-19 pandemic are influenced by the behavior of different audiences and will result in other services. Therefore, this research aims to conduct a systematic literature review of the uses and gratifications theory regarding the use and fulfillment of media needs during the COVID-19 pandemic by synthesizing the journal articles that have been identified.

Literature Review

UGT theory focuses on motives for media use and factors that influence motives and outcomes of media-related behavior (Rubin, 2009). Audience-centered UGT assumes that people are goal-oriented media users who are well aware of their motivations for using media and the needs they seek to satisfy (Bryant & Beth Oliver, 2009). In other words, a person's gratification motive can predict how they use media, how they are influenced by it, and the reasons for continuing to use certain media (Rubin, 2009). UGT has a central mechanism for satisfying the audience's needs and has five basic assumptions. The five basic assumptions of UGT (Griffin et al., 2018), that are: 1)

1. Audiences use media for specific purposes
   Audiences are active communicators, not passive recipients of messages or anything the media broadcasts. They have a role in selecting and determining the content of media programs. Audience communication behavior refers to the targets and goals based on the audience's motivation, goals, and personal needs.
2. The audience tries to fulfill their needs
   In principle, audiences are free to select the best media and programs so that they can use them to satisfy their needs. Audiences take the initiative in using media.
3. The media competes for the audience's time and attention
   Media is not the only one of many means that can satisfy audience needs. Media competes with other forms of communication in terms of choice, usefulness, and attention to satisfying consumer needs. Audiences can fulfill their needs without media, such as going on holiday, sports, dancing, fishing, etc. The Media will need to influence audiences who need initiative.
4. Different audiences will have other influences from the media.
   The same message from the media only sometimes influences everyone in the same way.
5. Audiences can convey motivation and use of media accurately.
   Individuals are considered knowledgeable enough to report interests and motives in certain situations. Audiences make conscious choices regarding the use of media they use.

In addition to these five basic assumptions, UGT focuses on the social and psychological origins of needs that generate expectations from mass media or other sources, leading to different media exposure patterns, resulting in satisfaction, conditions, and other consequences that may be largely unintended. UGT research focuses on audience motivation and consumption (Griffin et al., 2018). UGT sees communication's influence as socially and

psychologically limited and influenced by individual differences and choices (Rohmah, 2020).

Method

This research uses qualitative methods with systematic literature review analysis. This type of research study is observational and uses a meta-analysis research design. A literature review, defined by Grant & Booth (2009) is published material that provides the latest research that can cover various fields of study. Meanwhile, analysis is observing chronologically, conceptually, thematically, and so on (Grant & Booth, 2009). The purpose of a literature review is to provide a big picture of the main issues, select material that is appropriate to the research, summarize and compare the work of others, evaluate the work of others critically, identify gaps, and develop an understanding of theory and methods (Bruce, 1994). The meta-analysis method aims to determine the effect size, which is summarized by synthesizing data from several previous research studies (Çoğaltay & Karadag, 2015).

More specifically, this article uses a systematic literature review to answer the research questions that have been formulated. A *systematic literature review* is a systematic, comprehensive, and explicit method that can be used to identify, evaluate, and synthesize research conducted by researchers and practitioners (Fink, 2014). The PRISMA Flow Diagram Related to Journal Article Selection is used as a guide for systematic literature reviews, as in Figure 1.
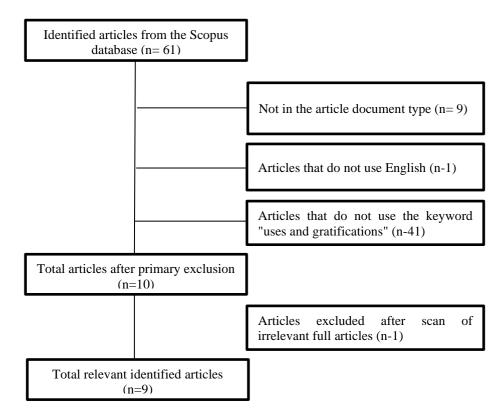
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│ Identified articles from the │
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                │              │ Articles that do not use the │
                │──────────────│ keyword "uses and            │
                │              │ gratifications" (n-41)       │
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│     exclusion (n=10)         │
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                │──────────────│ of irrelevant full articles  │
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Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram Related to Journal Article Selection

Result and Discussion

This research uses the 2020 Preferred Reporting Items Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) as a guide to assist this research in identifying, selecting, assessing, and synthesizing the studies found (Page et al., 2021). This article synthesizes research using the keywords "uses and gratification" and "COVID" in searching for journal articles in the Scopus database. The journal articles used were published from 2020 to 2022, and English was the main language of the articles. A total of nine journal articles that discussed the uses and gratifications theory related to COVID-19 were found. The following table contains journal articles that have been identified through the 2020 PRISMA guidelines. The identified journal articles are in Table 1.

Table 1. Identified Journal Articles

Object	Topic of Discussion	Author and Year
Student in Philippines	This study Using mixed methods with data collection using a questionnaire research instrument filled in by 1,003 students aged 18-29 years in the Philippines through a recruitment process on social media. The qualitative results of the research are that social media was used during COVID-19 to fulfill the need for autonomy, intimacy with family and friends, and self-identity. Meanwhile, quantitative results prove that identity social media account data is used and actively influences an individual's adult development.	(Cleofas et al., 2022)
Chinese Americans	This study Using mixed methods with data collection using a questionnaire research instrument filled in by 1,003 students aged 18-29 years in the Philippines through a recruitment process on social media. The qualitative results of the research show that social media was used during COVID-19 to fulfil the need for autonomy, intimacy with family and friends, and self-identity. Meanwhile, quantitative results prove that identity social media account data is used and actively influences an individual's adult development.	(Zhang, 2022)
Belgian Teenagers (12-18 years)	This research contextualizes the sexting behavior of 543 Belgian teenagers between romantic and non-romantic people. The results of this study show that as many as 40.9% of Belgian teenagers are involved in at least one type of sexting. These findings can be used to plan to face similar problems during the pandemic, now and in the future.	(Maes & Vandenbosch, 2022)
Users Of Virtual Reality Technology	This research discusses the impact of COVID-19 on the use and satisfaction of different Virtual Reality (VR) Technologies and device ownership by surveying 298 Amazon Mechanical Turk users	(Ball et al., 2021)

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Object	Topic of Discussion	Author and Year
	in 2020. The results show that the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced the increase in VR use for socialization, education, tourism, employment, and other activities.	
Fake news online in Malaysia	This research examines the motives for spreading fake news online during the COVID-19 pandemic and the time before there was a spike in the spread of fake news by conducting an online survey of 869 Malaysian respondents. The results show that the behavior of spreading fake news online is due to different motives, so it is necessary to plan the development of solutions to reduce the spread of fake news.	(Balakrishnan et al., 2021)
Individual motivation in using social media	Individuals' motives for using social media while living under 'social distancing' conditions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, where it is ordered to maintain physical distance from others. A total of 189 social media users in the UK. The results show that the respondents' motivation for using social media is to spend time and socialize	(Bowden-Green et al., 2021)
Facebook users during COVID-19	This research investigates the information-sharing behaviour of 540 Facebook users during COVID-19. The results of this study show that each behaviour positively affects the intention and actual use of sharing information about COVID-19.	(Malik et al., 2021)
Fake News Online in Nigeria	This research studied the spread of fake news through social media during the COVID-19 pandemic with a sample of 385 people in Nigeria. The analysis used Partial Least Squares (PLS) to determine the impact of six variables in the spread of fake news. The results show that spreading fake news on social media is not significant in motivation for entertainment.	(Apuke & Omar, 2021)
Media Communication users	This research discusses the use of communication media in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. It provides a portrait of the behaviour of communication media users worldwide in the months immediately following the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic.	(Igartua et al., 2020)

Source: Processed by the Author, 2023

The journal articles help answer how the five primary uses and gratification theory assumptions explain the fulfillment of needs and media use during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Audiences Use Media for Certain Purposes

User communication behavior, which includes the selection and use of communication media, has a purpose, is deliberately intended, and has its own motives (Bryant & Beth Oliver, 2009). Media users are individuals who are active in choosing media, content, and the behavior of these users has its own consequences for society and the social environment (Bryant & Beth Oliver, 2009).

Using the media during the pandemic is often used for entertainment purposes. Social media, in this case Facebook, is more often used for entertainment purposes than to obtain more serious and authentic information during the COVID-19 pandemic 19 (Malik et al., 2021). The use of virtual reality, as one of the newest communication media, is more often used for entertainment purposes than for telemedicine during the pandemic (Ball et al., 2021).

The Audience Tries to Meet Their Needs

Audiences become active participants who choose and use media with the aim of satisfying their expected needs and desires (Bryant & Beth Oliver, 2009). The motive for using media is not only to fulfill needs, but also to satisfy desires and needs such as seeking information to solve personal problems (Bryant & Beth Oliver, 2009).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, audiences used communication media to meet various needs. Ball et al., (2021) revealed that the most popular use of media, such as virtual reality, is to fulfill entertainment needs, such as playing games and watching films during the COVID-19 pandemic. Forty percent of Belgian teenagers turned to sexting to satisfy their sexual desire and need for intimacy during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown (Maes & Vandenbosch, 2022).

The Media Competes for The Audience's Time and Attention

Interpersonal interactions, goals of getting attention, and satisfaction of needs become other forms of competition in the chosen communication (Bryant & Beth Oliver, 2009). This depends on how the media or other forms of communication satisfy needs, motives or desires, which vary based on the social and psychological circumstances of the individual so that there is a definite relationship between personal channels and mediated channels in the process (Bryant & Beth Oliver, 2009).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, distance restrictions in interpersonal interactions increased, increasing the amount of media used to facilitate this. Social interactivity is an important factor in purchasing and using VR during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ball et al., 2021).. Facebook as a social media is also often used to help carry out interpersonal interactions when regional restrictions are implemented (Malik et al., 2021).

Different Audiences Will Have Different Influences from the Media

Audience behavior in responding to the media and its messages is filtered through social psychological conditions (Bryant & Beth Oliver, 2009). The formation of expectations regarding media and its content is influenced by tendencies, environment, and interpersonal interactions (Bryant & Beth Oliver, 2009). Differences in social status also influence differences in the impact on audiences from the media. Female students who come from low-income families are more likely to use social media to satisfy the need for identity (Cleofas et al., 2022). Apart from that, gender also has different influences. Women are more likely to use social media for entertainment and social validation, which can be concerning as

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evidence has shown the detrimental effects of social media on young women's self-esteem and body image (Cleofas et al., 2022).

Regional differences influence differences in accessing information, such as in terms of internet networks (Igartua et al., 2020). In addition, tendencies towards certain ethnicities will influence the search for information according to the ethnicity of that audience. Chinese Americans may turn to ethnic news media for information and discussion spaces that cannot be offered, such as support or sympathy within the group when the spread of COVID-19 information is labeled as the coronavirus (Zhang, 2022).

The Audiences Can Convey Motivation and Use of Media Accurately

Audiences often have more influence, although not always, on media than vice versa in terms of mediating patterns and consequences of media use (Bryant & Beth Oliver, 2009). On the other hand, the media also influences the characteristics of each individual (Bryant & Beth Oliver, 2009). Facebook is used to get updates about people nearby, to reduce their anxiety, and to overcome their fear of isolation by sharing COVID-19-related information without much consideration for the quality of the information (Malik et al., 2021). On the other hand, the spread of fake news on social media during the Covid-19 pandemic is also influenced by culture and social structure. Although not absolute, Asian people, especially those in the Southeast Asia region, are considered to be more collective compared to more individualistic Westerners, which can explain respondents' tendency to spread fake news in the name of helping or assisting others (Balakrishnan et al., 2021). Apart from people from Southeast Asia, research by Apuke & Omar (2021) states that Nigerian audiences use social networks to maintain social relationships and share tips, cures and preventive measures for COVID-19, which causes this to lead to the circulation of unconfirmed news content and false.

Conclusion

The research results show that the five basic assumptions of the uses and gratification theory can be found in the use and satisfaction of media needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Audiences use communication media during the COVID-19 pandemic for various purposes, such as entertainment and to gather necessary information. *Entertainment* is a goal that needs to be fulfilled when using media during the Covid-19 pandemic. The need for desire, when the distance restriction process is implemented, can be sufficiently fulfilled through the communication media carried out. The spread of fake news related to COVID-19 occurs quite often when the public wants to help other people through the media. Communication media, such as social media, are the main answer and choice for interpersonal interaction when distance restrictions are imposed in various places. Social media also helps get more accurate information regarding the condition of relatives when the pandemic occurs. Differences in access to information and gender are quite important influences when making the media a place to get and provide information.

Theoretically, the results of this research can be used as an additional reference in research related to the use of uses and gravity theory and research related to media use during the COVID-19 pandemic, which will be carried out in the future. Practically, it can help agencies related to handling COVID-19, media owners and media users in general. Suggestions for future research are to use more databases and search engines in searching, identifying and synthesizing journal articles, as well as using more diverse keywords in relation to media use during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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