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SCHOLARSHIP

FRANK HUYSMANS

MEDIA USE AND THE TEMPORAL ORGANISATION OF DAILY LIFE IN HOUSEHOLDS

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION, UNIVERSITY OF NIJMEGEN, 2001

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This study focuses on media use in the primary social environment of the household. It is concerned with the relationships between the timetables of household members. The use people make of mass media is one among many daily activities. The planning of these activities is not an entirely individual undertaking but involves agreement with other persons. Whereas earlier research has shed light on media use in the context of other daily activities, and media use in the social context of the household, the combination of “activity context” and “social context” has hitherto attracted little attention. The aim of the present study, as formulated in the first chapter, is to provide a measurement instrument — i.e., a combination of a theoretical framework and a research strategy — for research into media use and the temporal organisation of daily life in households. Two broad research questions are posed: (1) How can the link between media use and the temporal organisation of daily life in households be conceptualised starting from theories about the temporal organisation of social life? (2) What methods of observation and analysis can be combined, bearing in mind the theoretical framework yet to be developed, in order to investigate media use in the context of the temporal organisation of daily life in households?

In chapters 2-4, a theoretical framework is developed starting from an action theoretical approach, which is combined with system theoretical conceptions of “time” and “household.” In chapter 2, households are tentatively described as social units consisting of interrelated social actions. Time enters the stage here, as action theory maintains that the interrelatedness of actions rests in their meaningful connection with preceding and ensuing actions. The connection between the concepts of action and time gives rise to a more thorough theoretical analysis. Chapter 3 therefore deals with the conceptualisation of the relationship between “time” and “action” in action theory (Alfred Schütz, George Herbert Mead) and systems theory (Niklas Luhmann). The concepts of “psychic time” (“stream of consciousness”) and “social time” are discussed and their interconnection is described following Luhmann’s theory. In chapter 4, the general framework for the temporal organisation of daily life is applied to the special case of media use in households. Households are conceived as social systems and household members as psychic systems. The temporal organisation of daily life derives from the mutual observation between systems. The mass media system, like the household, can be conceived as a social system in Luhmann’s sense, having temporal characteristics in its operating and observing. Between households on the one hand and the media system on the other, a mutual observing takes place in which social time plays an important role. Households partly arrange their timetables to the temporal characteristics of the media system (e.g., to the program schedules of radio and

television stations). The media system arranges its schedules in such a way as to be able to reach a large audience. Mediated messages give rise to household communication about the media use of the household members at specific times of day.

The theoretical framework outlined raises many questions for research, including methodological ones. In the remainder of the study, two broad hypotheses derived from the theory are tested. The first hypothesis expresses the assumption that communication in the household leads to either convergence or divergence in the activities of the household members. The second hypothesis stresses the structural value that a situation has. Chapter 5 discusses the connection between the theoretical framework and empirical research. The theory underlines the role played by social and psychic structures of expectation as well as social and psychic (self-) attributions in shaping the "course of the day" of household members, and draws special attention to the multiplicity of perspectives in the household. This being the case, questions arise as to how the theory might be operationalised. These questions are discussed both in a theoretical sense (in terms of Luhmanns "operative epistemology") and in a practical sense. The outcome of our considerations is conducting a time use study among households in a middle-sized Dutch town, in which all household members from the age of 10 are included. Using appropriate statistical techniques, both hypotheses can be tested, albeit only as far as the psychic self-attributions are concerned.

In the first section of chapter 6, the time use study is evaluated methodologically, with a predominantly positive outcome. Next, the first hypothesis is tested, using data of a similar study in Sweden in addition to the Dutch data. It is investigated whether the amounts of free time, and whether or not using the media on weekdays and weekend days, is in part determined by the social context of the household. Multilevel analyses give rise to somewhat inconclusive results. In a further step, the first hypothesis is tested with regard to television and VCR use. Overall, there appears to be a convergence between household members' viewing activities, in somewhat varying degrees for the time of the evening (early — middle — late) and day of the week (weekday — weekend day). Using the same data sets, the second hypothesis is tested for couples' television and VCR use. With log frequency and logit analyses, it is tested whether partners exert an influence on each other's television use in the transition from one situation to the next. If controlled for their own behaviour in the preceding time interval, the viewing behaviour of men and women is dependent on that of their partners in the preceding interval.

In the final chapter, a critical appraisal is given of what the study has yielded in terms of the problem formulation. In a broader perspective, conclusions are then drawn with regard to: the integrative potential of the theoretical framework; what the action theoretical approach can gain by considering alternative systems theoretical conceptualisations; and the research methods used. Finally, some directions are sketched for future research on media use in the social context of the household, as well as for the study of the temporal organisation of daily life.

VIC COSTELLO

INTERACTIVITY AND THE "CYBER-FAN": AN EXPLORATION OF AUDIENCE INVOLVEMENT WITHIN THE ELECTRONIC FAN CULTURE OF THE INTERNET

COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION, UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE, 1999

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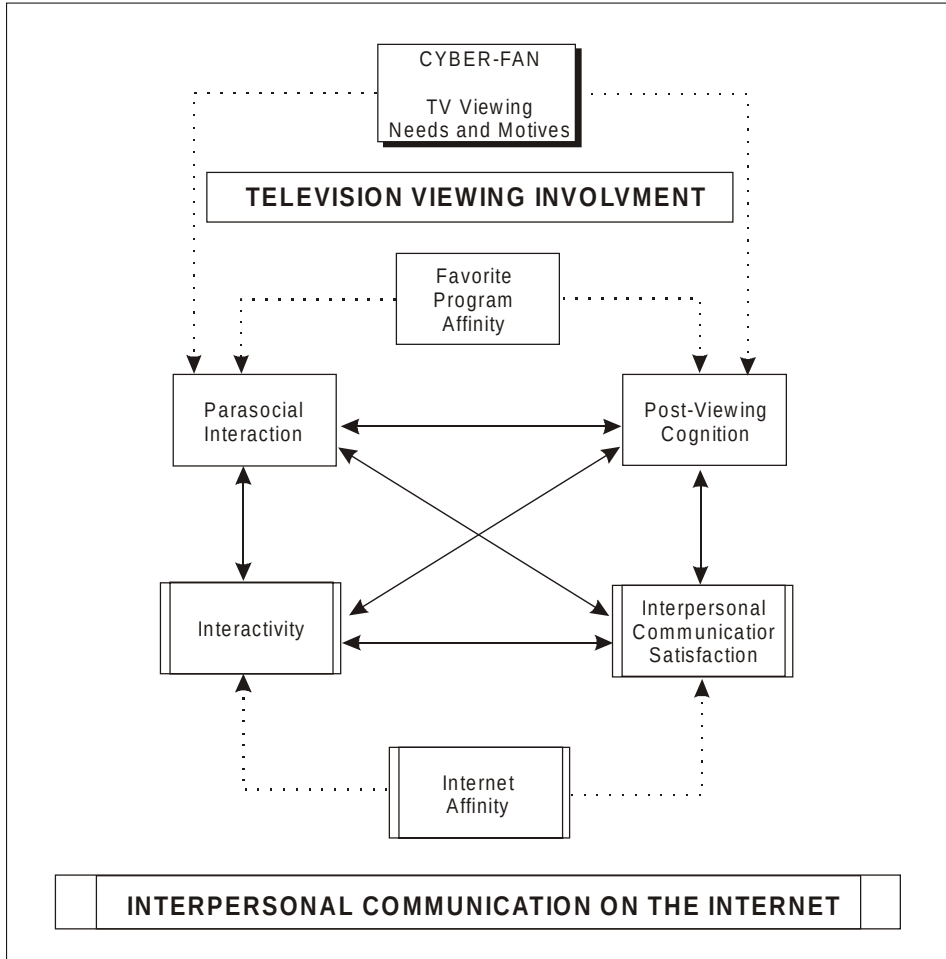
The goal of this study was to gain an understanding of how television fans are using the resources of the Internet to supplement the viewing of their favourite television programs. The term cyber-fan was used to distinguish traditional television fans from the rather savvy and innovative segment of the television fan population who routinely use the Internet to extend their personal involvement with their favourite television shows.

Rubin and Windahl's uses and dependency model was adapted (see Figure 1) to illustrate the relationships between six communication involvement variables associated with traditional television-viewing and interpersonal communication activity via the Internet. This integrative model of communication activity suggested the following six hypotheses for testing: (H1) Interactivity will be positively associated with Parasocial Interaction. (H2) Interactivity will be positively associated with Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction of on-line discussions. (H3) Parasocial Interaction will be positively associated with Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction of on-line discussions. (H4) Post-Viewing cognition will be positively associated with Interactivity. (H5) Post-Viewing cognition will be positively associated with Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction of on-line discussions. (H6) Parasocial Interaction will be positively associated with Post-Viewing Cognition. The study also investigated the relationship between instrumental television viewing motives and psychological and cognitive involvement variables. Specifically, the study predicted that, (H7) instrumental viewing motives would be positively associated with the cyber-fan's affinity for their favourite television programs, parasocial interaction, and post-viewing cognition.

Finally, this study explored the unique contributions of web page authors and their potential role as opinion leaders within the on-line fan culture of the Internet. The last hypothesis predicted that, (H8) Web page authors of television fan pages would demonstrate a greater desire for interactivity than cyber-fans who have not created a web site for their favourite television program(s).

An on-line survey instrument was produced and posted to the Internet during the three and a half-week period from October 13 to November 3, 1999. Invitations to participate in the survey were sent via e-mail to 806 authors of television fan pages and posted to 60 Usenet newsgroups associated with current episodic, network and syndicated television programs. Forty-seven web page authors posted a link to the survey on their personal fan page. A link was also posted to the UltimateTV.com site for a period of one week.

Figure 1: An Integrative Model of Cyber-Fan Involvement (adapted from Rubin and Windahl)



The survey generated 3,041 respondents. The majority of the respondents were female (64.5 %, $N=1922$). Over half of the respondents (51.5 %) indicated linking to the survey via a newsgroup posting; 25.6 % linked to the survey from a television fan page; 14.5 % linked to the survey from a personal e-mail message; and 8.9% came to the survey instrument through some other means.

The integrative model of cyber-fan involvement received strong support from the statistical analysis. Statistically significant and positive associations were identified between interactivity and parasocial interaction ($r=.339$, $p<.01$), interactivity and interpersonal communication satisfaction ($r=.750$, $p<.01$), post-viewing cognition and interactivity ($r=.331$, $p<.01$), post-viewing cognition and interpersonal communication satisfaction ($r=.312$, $p<.01$), parasocial interaction and interpersonal communication satisfaction ($r=.357$, $p<.01$), and parasocial interaction and post-viewing cognition ($r=.692$, $p<.01$).

Cyber-fans were found to be largely instrumental in their use of television. The analysis found mild to moderate associations between several of the instrumental television viewing motives and one or more of the three television viewing involvement measures. Pleasure and relaxation were the two strongest motives among cyber-fans for watching television. The data suggest that the motives for watching television are not necessarily the same mechanisms driving cyber-fans to the Internet. The on-line communication activity of the cyber-fan was empirically unrelated to each of the seven television viewing motives.

Authors of television fan pages were found to be more interactive in their on-line interpersonal communication with others than subjects who had not created their own personal fan site. Several significant differences between the male and female segments of the sample population were identified. Females were found to be more interactive in their on-line interpersonal communication activity than males. Females also demonstrated a higher degree of involvement with their favourite television programs than did their male counter-parts. In addition, the study produced a great deal of exploratory data on television and Internet use by cyber-fans for extending their involvement with their favourite television programs.

The eighth hypothesis successfully predicted that the authors of television fan pages are more interactive in their on-line communication than cyber-fans who had never produced a television fan page. In addition, the analysis found that web page authors have a greater affinity for their favourite television programs and consistently scored higher on each of the activity measures than their non-publishing counterparts. Web page authors were also found to have a greater affinity for the Internet in general and were much more interested in seeking out people for online discussions about their favourite television program than those who do not have a personal web site. The stark contrast between the authors and non-authors in this study is encouraging. Web page authors may very well be the new opinion leaders of cyberspace.

In conclusion, this study discovered a very active segment of the television audience that is using the Internet as an extension of their involvement with their favourite television programs. No doubt, television fans have always found ways to acquire information about their favourite programs and television celebrities. Fan clubs and magazines have been around since the early days of television. But never before has a single medium been able to provide such a diverse venue of opportunity for supplementing the television viewing experience and building social networks around television fandom. The Internet offers researchers an opportunity to observe these social networks in action and to study both the interaction of people as well as the interaction of media and content in the new communication age. The Internet also provides an avenue of access that was not previously possible. And if the current study is any indication, cyber-fans appear to be very willing to participate in on-line survey research.