



Media Use & News Avoidance

Media Use, Course A
Summer Term 25
Dr. Isabella Gonçalves

AGENDA

- Uses & Gratification
- Instrumental/Information Utility
- Cognitive Dissonance
- Mood Management Theory

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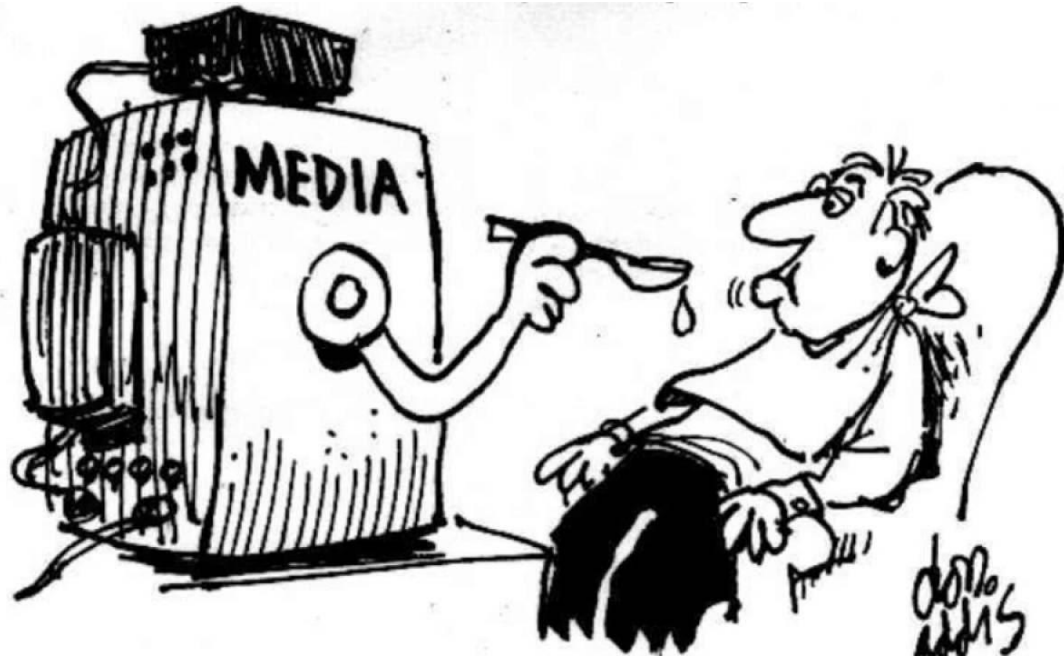
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Uses & Gratification Approach

- Gratifications/Functions that media provide their audiences
- Active Audiences perspective
- Idea that media use is purposeful and satisfies specific needs.



Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and Gratifications Research. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(4).
<https://doi.org/doi/10.1086/268109>



Rather than
“what the media
does to people” its
“what people do
to the media.”



Some elements of this approach

- The audience is conceived as active
- Need gratification and media choice lies in the audience member
- The media compete with other sources of need satisfaction
- People are regarded as sufficiently self-aware
- Audience orientations are explored on their own terms. Media is disregarded as an independent variable causing an effect on attitudes and behavior.

Early Studies (1942 – 1949)

- First: **statements about media function** were elicited from the respondents
- Second: they shared a qualitative approach in their attempt **to group gratification statements** into labelled categories
- Limitations: Such studies did not explore the links between gratifications and psychological or sociological origins. In addition, they failed to capture interrelationships among various media functions quantitatively or conceptually



Statements Elicited

Later Studies

- (1) the social and psychological origins of
- (2) needs, which generate
- (3) expectations of
- (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to
- (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in
- (6) need gratifications and
- (7) other consequences



Suggested Path of Investigation

“Alternatively, students of uses and gratifications could try to work backwards, as it were, from gratifications to needs.

In the informational field, for example, the surveillance function may be traced to a desire for security or the satisfaction of curiosity and the exploratory drive” (Katz et al., 1973, p. 513)

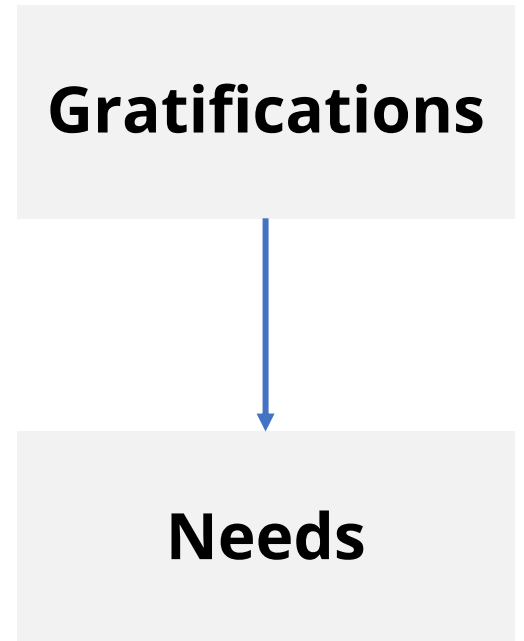
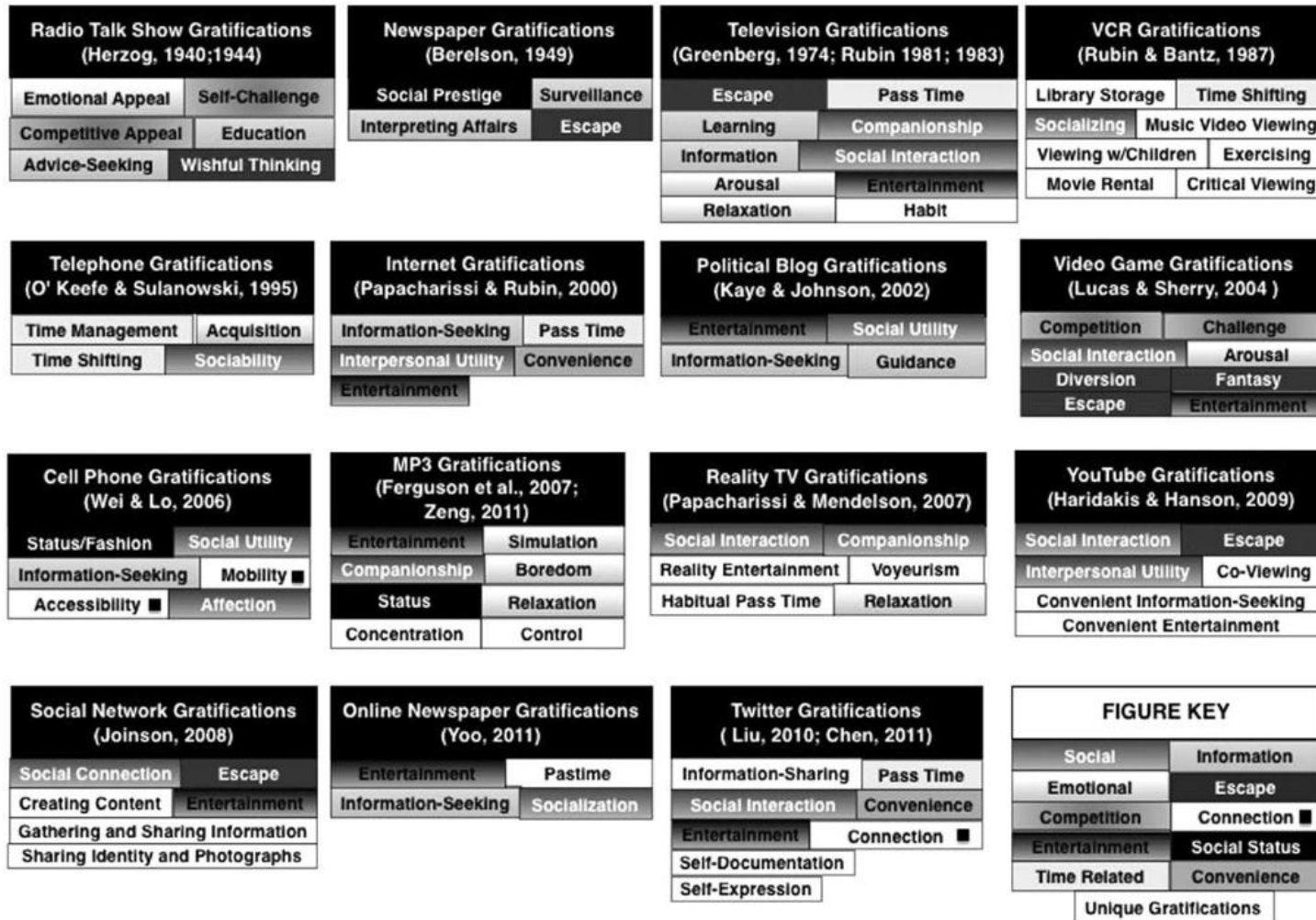


Figure 1
Gratifications Obtained from New Media (1940–2011)



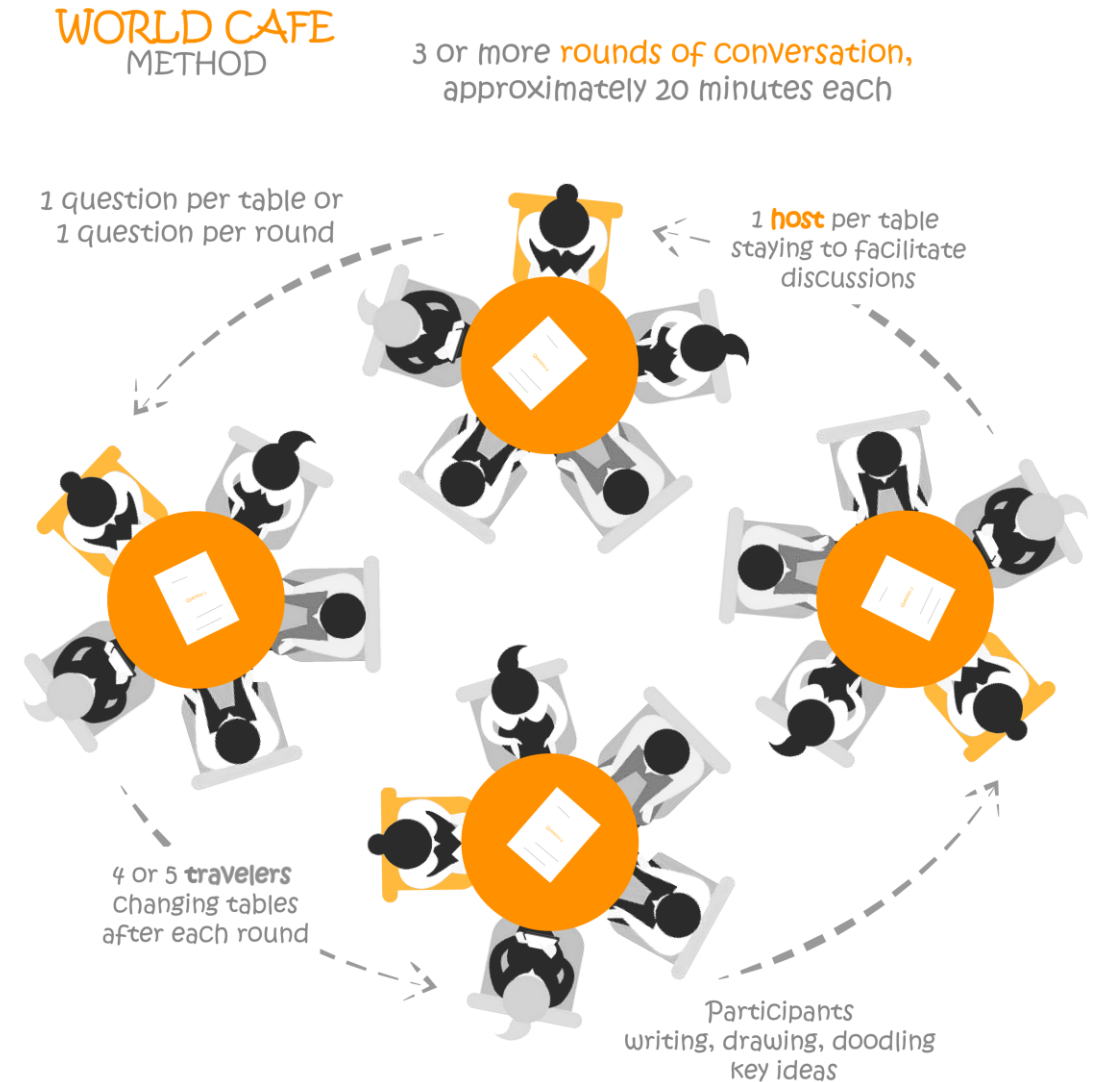
Sundar, S. S., & Limperos, A. M. (2013). Uses and Grats 2.0: New Gratifications for New Media. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 57(4), 504–525.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2013.845827>

World Café

Round 1: Personal Media Use & Motivations

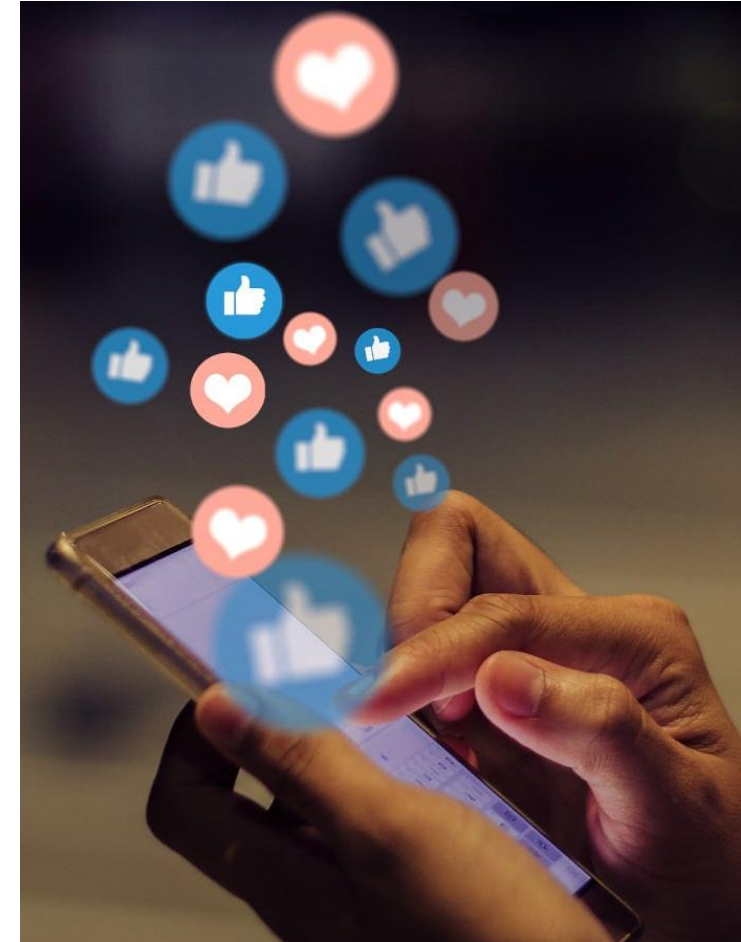
Round 2: Grouping Gratifications

Round 3: Match Gratifications with classic U&G categories



Future paths of research

- Overlap in gratifications typologies even in newer studies with newer media.
- However, more nuanced gratifications are emerging.
- Such gratifications are in line with the affordances of new communication platforms (Gibson, 1977; 1986)
- U&G researchers should adopt an affordance-based framework for identifying gratifications sought and obtained from media



Examples of suggested gratifications

(Sundar & Limperos, 2013)

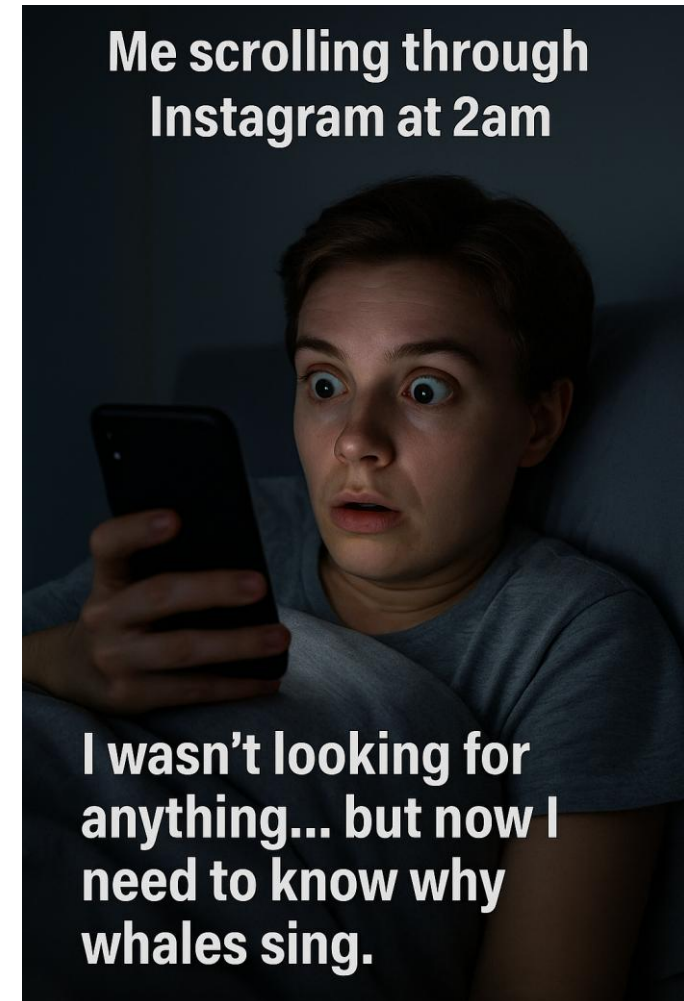
- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Realism• Coolness• Novelty• Being there• Agency• Community-Building | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bandwagon• Filtering/Tailoring• Ownness• Interaction• Activity• Responsiveness | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dynamic Control• Browsing/Variety-Seeking• Scaffolding/Navigation Aids• Play/Fun |
|--|---|---|

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Information Utility

- Early research (1960s) rarely focused on utility in media use.
- Atkin (1973) offered a detailed theory of informational utility: the usefulness of information for meeting personal needs.
- The informational utility model was developed for general news



Knobloch-Westerwick, S. (2014). Information utility model and related research. *In Choice and preference in media use: Advances in selective exposure theory and research* (pp. 158–182). Taylor & Francis Group.

The two forms of information processing:

Information Receptivity:

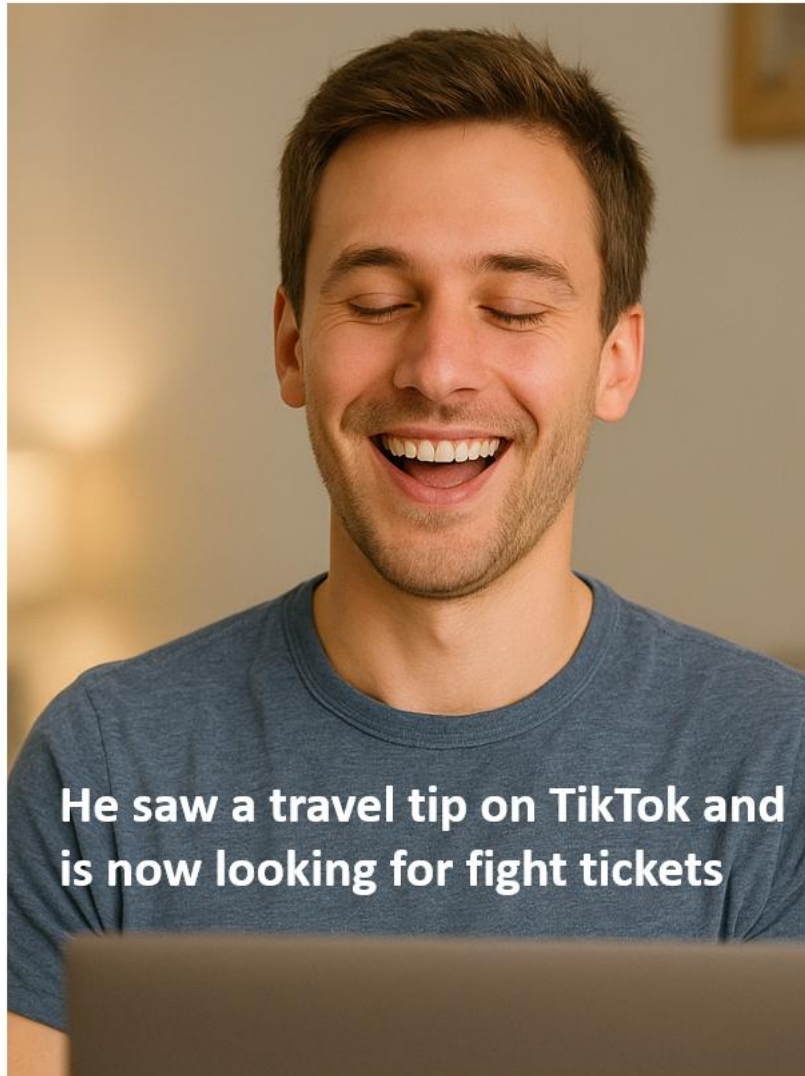
- Passive, occurs during routine media use.
- Openness to forming questions when encountering relevant cues.
- Leads to attention if the cue creates *cognitive uncertainty*.

Information Search:

- Active and intentional.
- Purposeful effort to find information that satisfies curiosity, reduces uncertainty, or solves problems.

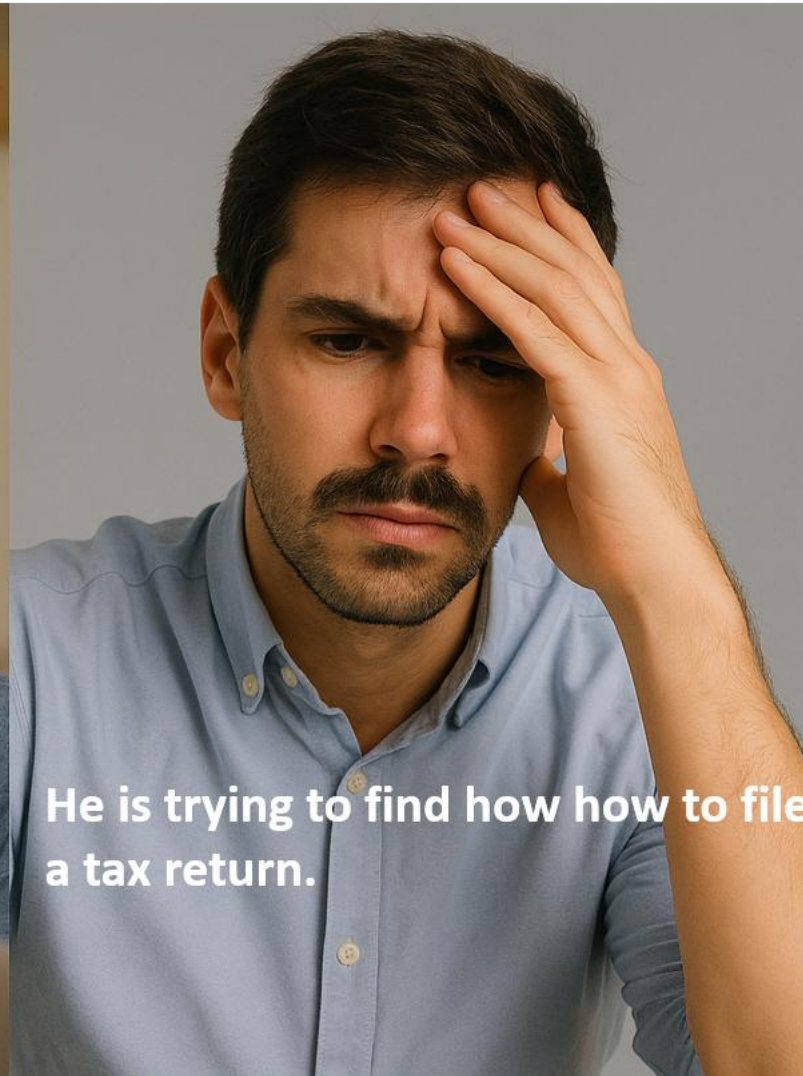
Knobloch-Westerwick, S. (2014). Information utility model and related research. *In Choice and preference in media use: Advances in selective exposure theory and research* (pp. 158–182). Taylor & Francis Group.

Information Receptivity:



He saw a travel tip on TikTok and is now looking for flight tickets

Information Search:



He is trying to find how how to file a tax return.

Information and Uncertainty: two important concepts

- Information = Something the receiver doesn't already know
- Focus on **extrinsic uncertainties**:
Uncertainties tied to environmental & psychological problems

Motivations to reduce uncertainty:



Cognitive



Affective



Behavioral



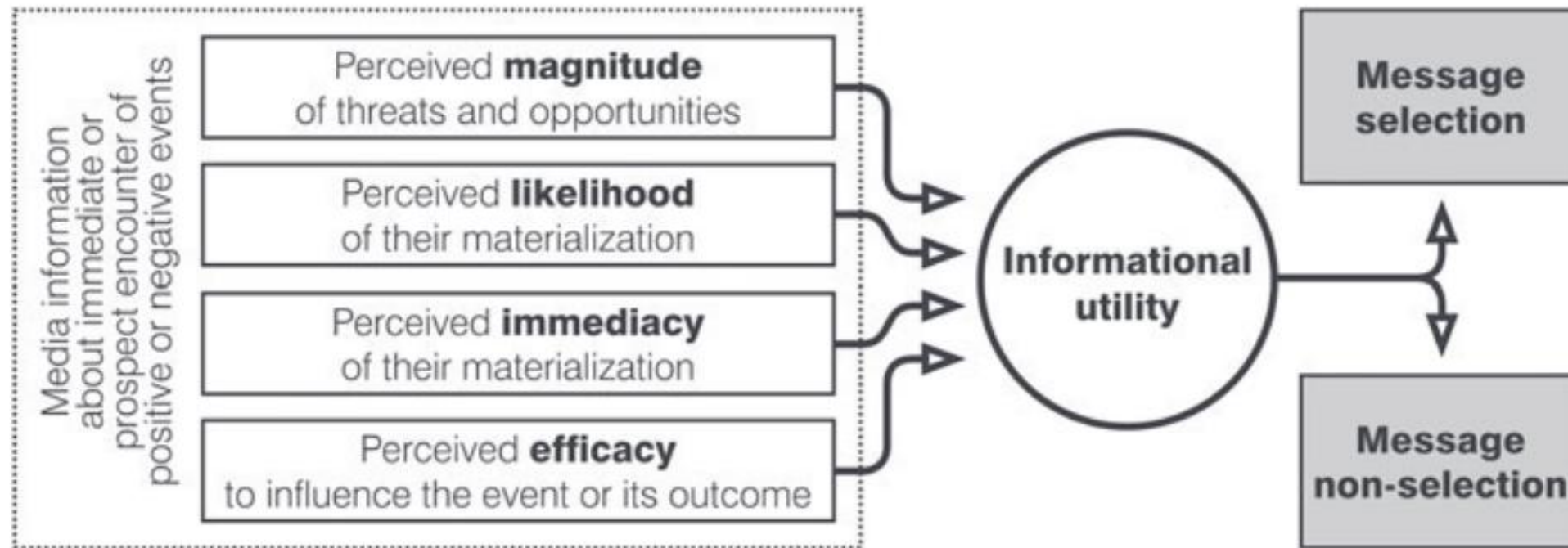
Defensive

Utility & Message Selection

- Individuals choose messages when reward is larger than the cost
- Media is used to monitor changes and form expectations
- Exposure is shaped by threats and incentives

Knobloch-Westerwick, S. (2014). Information utility model and related research. *In Choice and preference in media use: Advances in selective exposure theory and research* (pp. 158–182). Taylor & Francis Group.

Utility & Message Selection



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Cognitive Dissonance

- Selective exposure is a widespread feature of mass media use and plays a key role in shaping media effects. (Klapper, 1960; Lazarsfeld et al., 1944).
- According to the theory of cognitive dissonance, individuals try to avoid information that makes them feel uncomfortable by going against what they already believe or decided before (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014, p. 130).



Cognitive Dissonance and Polcomm

Earlier studies of Lazarsfeld et al. (1944, 1948) showed that media users selected primarily content supporting their already favored political party.

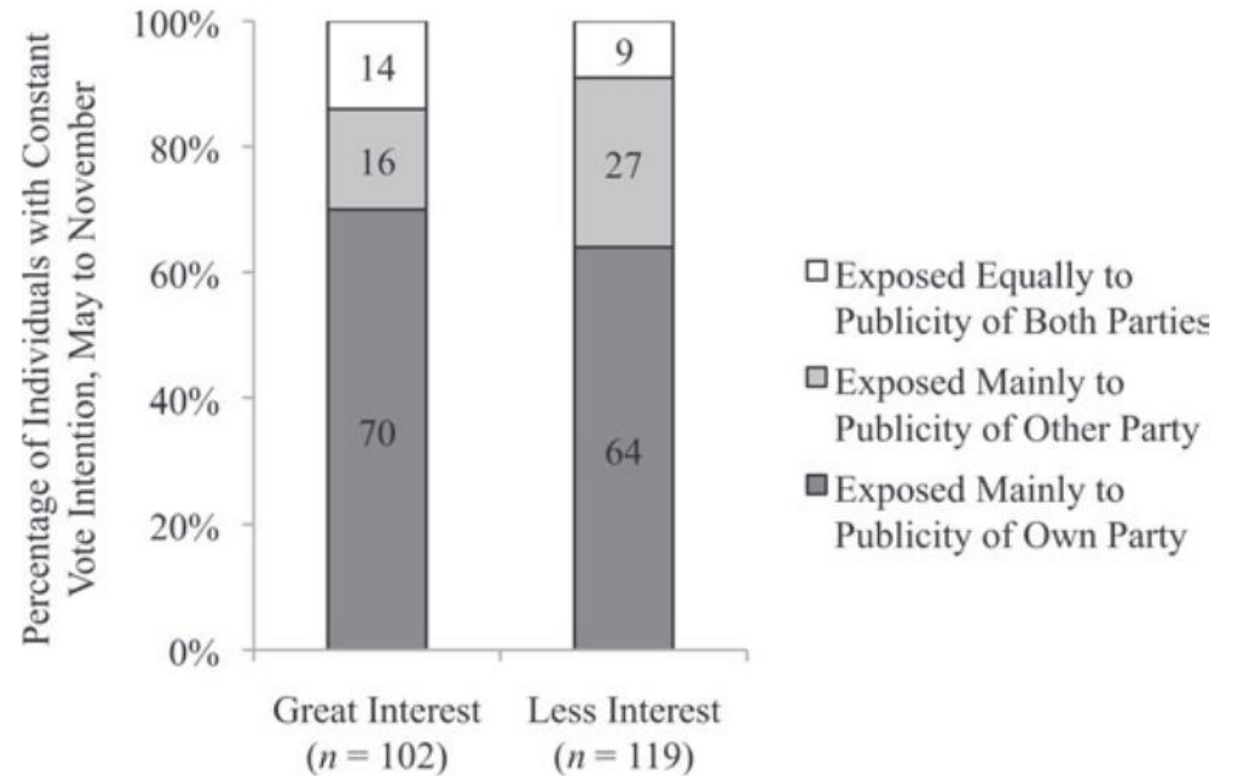


FIGURE 1 Confirmation Bias as Selective Exposure Phenomenon (graph adopted from Lazarsfeld et al., 1948, p. 90). From *The People's Choice. How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign* by Lazarsfeld, P. F., Berelson, B., & Gaudet, H.

Cognitive Dissonance and News Selection

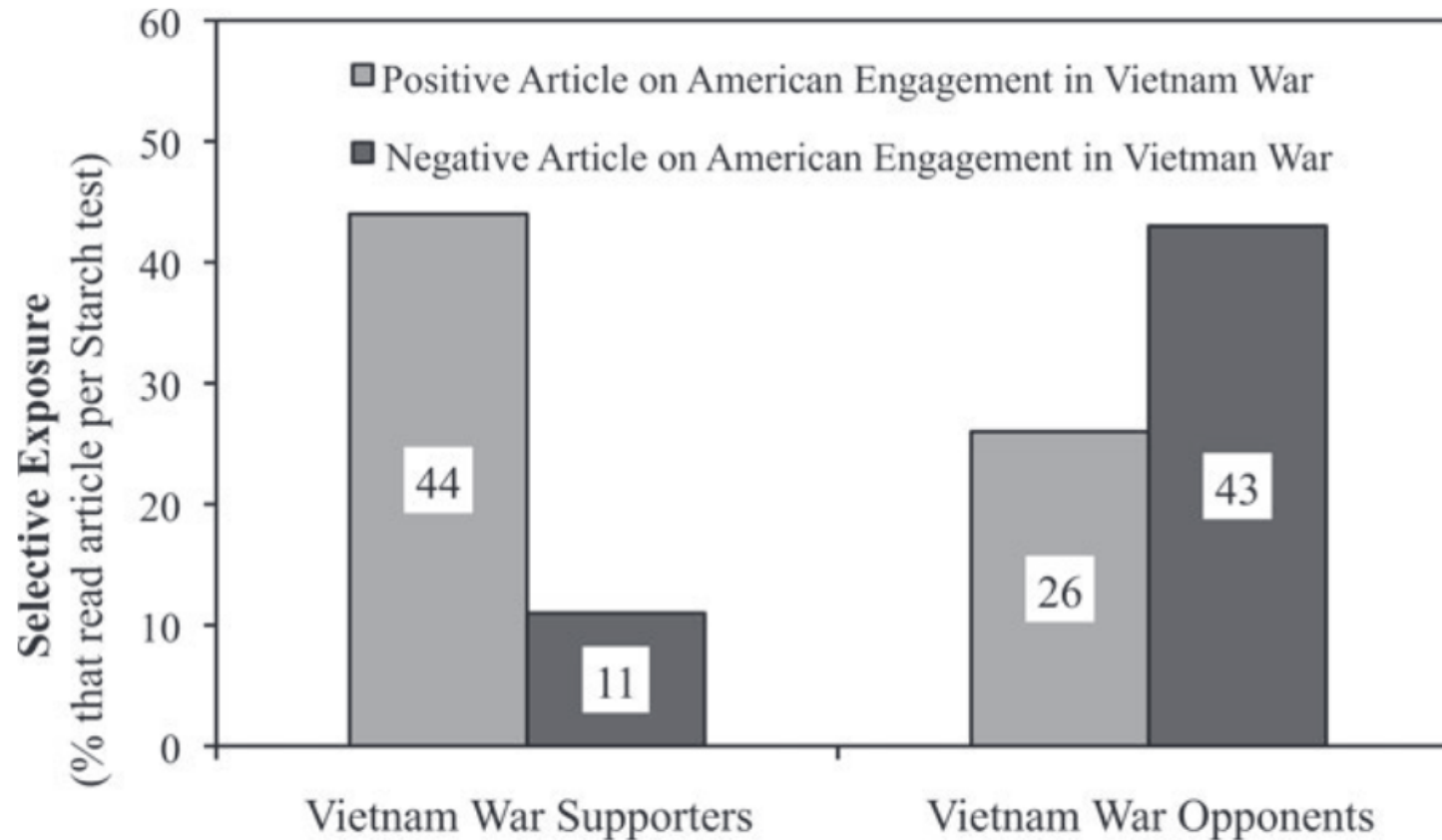


Figure 2: Selective Exposure to Articles About the American Engagement in the Vietnam War as a Function of Article Valence and Readers' Political Position (data adopted from Noelle-Neumann, 1973)

Discussion

How do you see people avoiding or selecting information to reduce discomfort or protect their beliefs? What examples can you think of from everyday life, media, or politics?

News

Social Media

Health Information

Consumer Decisions

Politics

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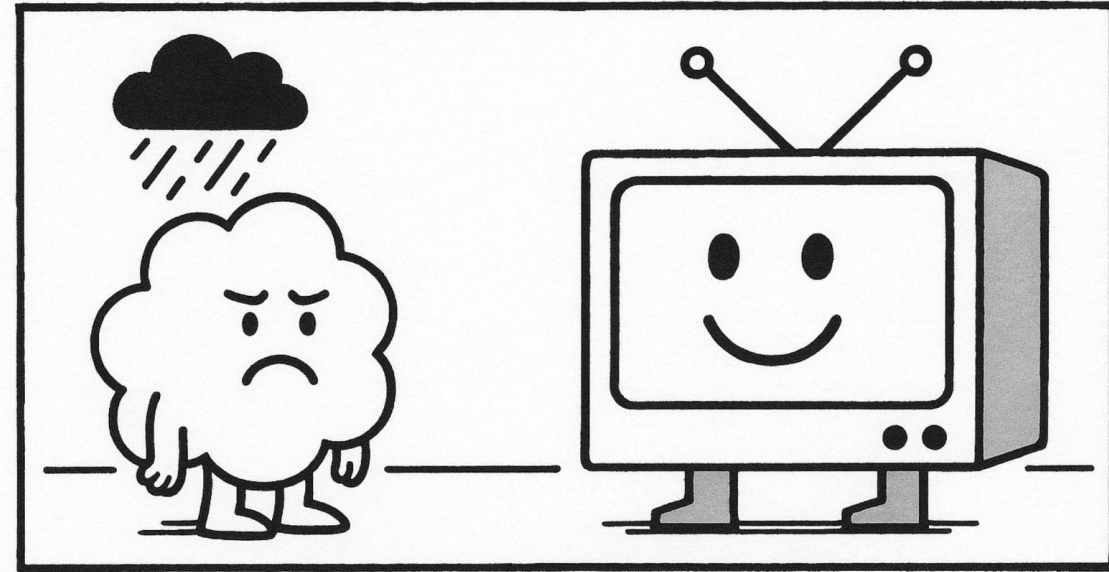
Discussion

Think about a time when you were feeling stressed, anxious, or overwhelmed.

- What kind of media content do you usually turn to in those moments?
- Is it a specific genre (e.g., comedy, drama, nature documentaries)?
- Do you prefer content that distracts you or matches your mood?
- Why do you think that type of content helps?

Mood Management Theory

- Selection of media stimuli is driven by hedonistic motivation.
- Selective exposure to media messages is a function of the current affective state of media users.
- Media selection follows the principle of mood optimization, rather than habits and gratification.



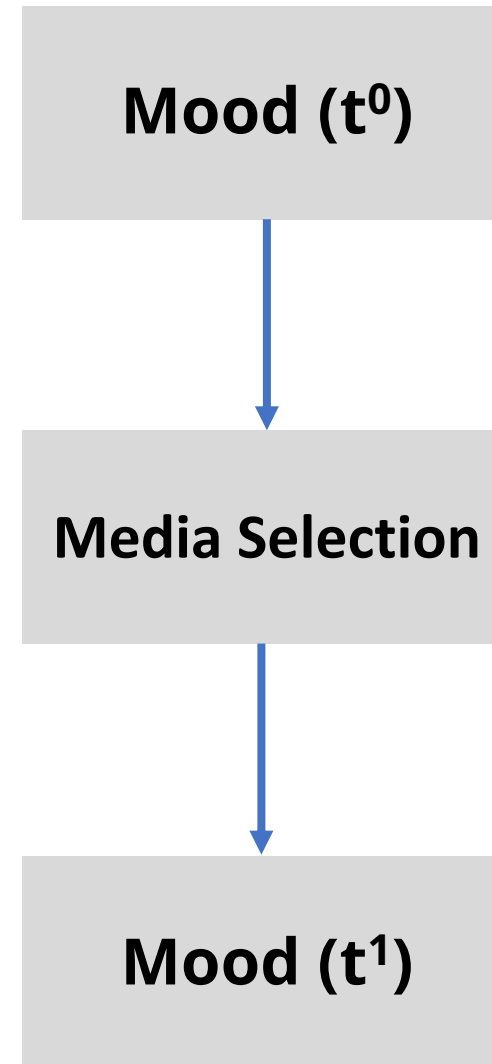
MOOD MANAGEMENT THEORY

Watching positive content helps to regulate one's mood

Reinecke, L. (2017). Mood management. In P. Rössler (Ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Media Effects* (pp. 1271-1284). Wiley-Blackwell.

Basic Assumptions

- Mood management theory assumes that media **users may but do not necessarily have to be cognizant of the motivational processes driving their selective exposure to media content.**
- It does not require the assumption of deliberate media choice.



Some Predictors

- **Excitatory Potential:** raises or lowers arousal (e.g., action vs. calm content)
- **Absorption Potential:** how much the content distracts us
- **Semantic Affinity:** similarity to current mood
- **Hedonic Valence:** emotional tone (positive or negative)



Some Hypotheses



Individuals with **negative mood** prefer:

- High absorption
- Low semantic affinity
- Positive valence



Individuals with **positive mood** prefer:

- Low absorption potential (Low distraction)
- Higher semantic affinity match

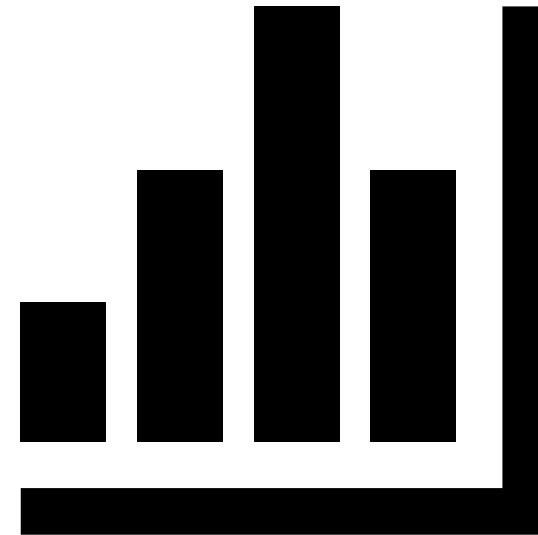


Arousal Balance

- Over-stimulated → calming media
- Under-stimulated → exciting media

Empirical Findings

- Most studies testing Mood Management Theory use experimental methods.
- There's strong evidence that people choose media based on their emotional state.
- Some specific predictions of the theory have only received partial or mixed support.



Challenges

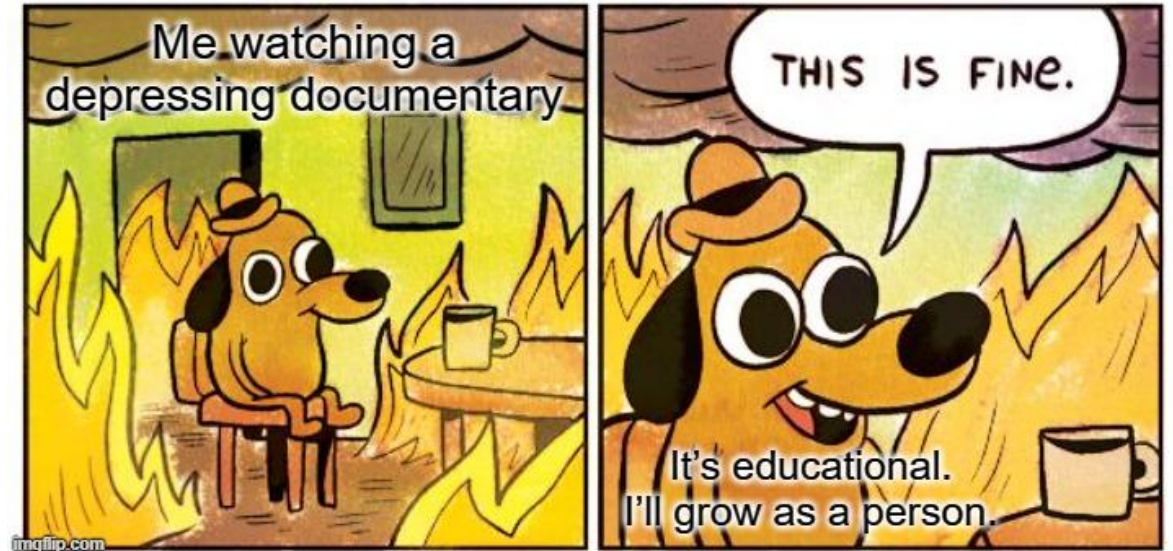
- **Not always hedonic:** people sometimes choose sad or disturbing content.
- Individual differences (e.g., gender, personality) matter.



Theory Development

New concepts:

- **Metaemotions** (e.g., enjoying sadness)
- **Telic Hedonism** (delayed gratification)
- **Informational Utility** (seeking meaning or insight)

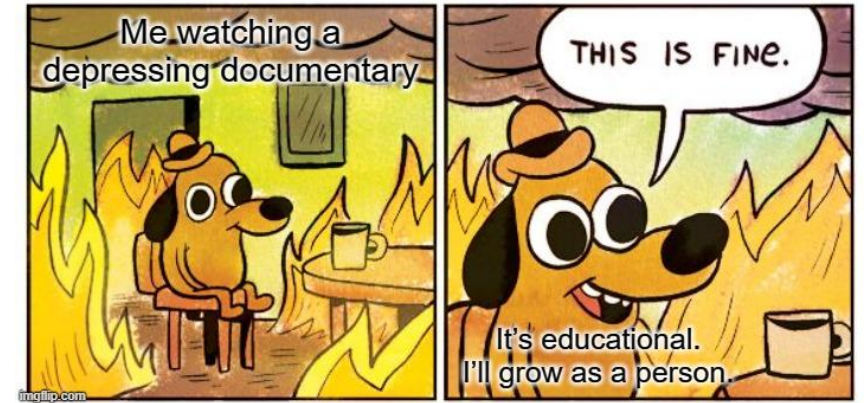


Individual Homework

Choose a theory you've just learned, read the full chapter about it, and create a meme based on it.

Print the meme (or send me per email two days before our class) and bring it to the next class. We'll have a meme challenge.

The best meme will win a prize!



References

- Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and Gratifications Research. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(4). <https://doi.org/doi/10.1086/268109>
- Knobloch-Westerwick, S. (2014). Cognitive Dissonance and Related Research. *In Choice and preference in media use: Advances in selective exposure theory and research* (pp. 158–182). Taylor & Francis Group.
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