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Displays of Reality within the Context of Uses and Gratifications: A Study on the Reality Shows in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

When the television programmes in Turkey are examined, it can be seen that the viewer ratings of cabaret type show programmes, singing competition programmes and other contests and marriage programmes has been quite high in recent years. Reality shows entertain viewers with their entertaining features, and provide them with the possibility of relaxing. The aim of this study is the analysis of the viewers of cabaret type reality show programmes in Turkey within the context of the uses and gratifications approach, and the seeking of answers to questions such as what needs users are attempting to meet by watching these programmes, and how social and psychological factors affect these reasons for watching these programmes. A Focus Group Discussion was held with 12 TV viewers – 7 men and 5 women – between the ages of 25-45, within the scope of the study, and an attempt was made to reveal the reasons for the watching of reality show programmes on television.

Keywords: Uses and gratifications approach, Reality shows, Hierarchy of Needs, focus group discussions

INTRODUCTION

People use methods and vehicles which are appropriate to the social – economic lifestyle and environmental conditions while conveying their messages based on their common language. The foundations of the process of communication are comprised of the presence of common concepts on which the individuals who generate and consume the message are in agreement (Girgin, 2005). As in almost every subject, the relationship between the vehicle and civilisation also possesses an important place on the subject of communication.

The vehicles of communications are generally divided into two, based on their technologies; letters, the telephone, telegrams, etc., which facilitate the mutual communication between two people, and the cinema, radio, television and vehicles of the media, where a person who has generated a message is able to convey this message to more than one consumer, and, more and more so, to the masses (İlal, 1997, p.21).

The first example of technologies of mass communications is the invention of the printing press in the 15th century. The tradition which began with the radio, which became more widespread from the years at the end of the First World War, and with the telegram and photography in the 19th century, was continued by television. The invention of electricity and the transition to the electronic revolution has caused the progress in vehicles of communication to reach a pace which it is impossible to track, in the recent centuries. Among the advances of communications technologies in the post-industrialist society of the last centuries are the telegram (1835), the telephone (1876), photography (1827), the cinema (1895), the radio (1895), the television (1927), colour television (1951), the computer (1942), the video (1968), and the other extensions of these – namely cable television, satellite

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broadcasting, high definition television, and the world wide web – also known as the internet – which is among the latest examples of technology (İlal, 1997, p.24).

The progress of society and their need for information and knowledge has resulted in the vehicles of mass communications coming even more to the forefront. Advances in communications technologies and their entry into every area of life has led to important advances in mass communications technologies, and a further important type of communications has come to light: the Social Media. Social media vehicles such as Facebook and Twitter are able to perform dual and mass communications via the internet. People are able to share their thought on social networks, and large masses are able to track these. This type of communication, which is known as 'many to many', allows everyone who is at their PC, to take part in interactive communications as a participant, scriptwriter and publisher, all at the same time. The significant difference of this from the other forms of media is that participants are able to make comments if they wish, and that there is an atmosphere where discussions and feedback are possible.

A viewer watches a programme, not because it is offered to him / her, but in order to meet his / her different wishes, needs, desires and satisfactions. Within this context, what are the aims and desires with which television viewers in Turkey watch the reality shows which are broadcast on television? Reality show programmes are among the programmes with the highest viewer ratings, in particular with their increased popularity over the last 10 years. Within this context, our study looks into the reality shows which are broadcast on television in Turkey. Cabaret type show programmes such as "Güldür Güldür", "Arkadaşım Hoş geldin", "Üç Adam", various singing competition programmes such as "O Ses Türkiye" and "Yetenek Sizsiniz", and programmes such as "Survivor", "Ben Bilmem Eşim Bilir", "Güven Bana", "Canlı Para", Kelime oyunu", "Yemekteyiz" and "Bu Tarz Benim" are programmes which stand out with considerably high viewer ratings, which reach large viewer masses, and which have been popular in Turkey in the last 10 years. There are several underlying features which stand out in the reality show in Turkey. Juries are in the position of judges, as those who discover the skills. Reality Shows exceed their status as being "Entertainment" programmes, by creating expressions on social phenomena such as behavioural patterns. There is a reality show on almost every channel, and they have even reached the stage of making references to each other during their own programmes. For instance, a romantic relationship between two contestants may be referred to in another programme; or the programme may veer towards the exposure of the body, independently of the people or 'things' which are competed against in the contest – for example, "beauty" or "aesthetics" coming to the forefront in place of the singing in a "singing" contest", and a movement towards a "body contest" has been seen (Şener, 2015).

An attempt has been made to reveal what is paid attention to when TV programmes are watched, what is expected of the TV programmes and what senses the viewing masses are seeking to satisfy when watching the TV programme, in the focus group discussions held with the twelve individuals who were selected from among television viewers, within the scope of the study.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

It is known that media and user studies have been conducted since the beginning of the 20th century. The focus of the said studies moved from the question of "what does media do to people" to the question of "what do people do to the media", in the 1960s. Together with the adoption of active viewer opinions by the academic circles, viewer centred theories, such as the uses and gratifications approach, have developed. According to the said active viewer opinion, viewers are not passive recipients who soak up media content like a sponge or who can be directed under all circumstances. According to this opinion, viewers decide which media or content they will watch, in a conscious manner, based on their own objectives. In short, the uses and gratifications approach bases its assumptions on the opinions of active viewers (Çakır and Bozkurt, 2014).

One of the academics who first referred to the Uses and Gratifications Approach was Elihu Katz. This approach is based on the assumption that members of the viewer masses actively seek the mass communications content which is the most satisfying for them. The question, "How do people benefit from the media?" was asked, and emphasis was made on ethnographic examinations related to the receiving of messages and viewer groups with the "gratification of viewers" (Mattelart and Mattelart, 2009, taken from Blumler and Katz, 1975). The uses and gratifications approach contains information on viewers in particular that they are active and that they make motivated selections with vehicles of mass communications based on their past experiences.

The theory of uses and gratifications is a psychological approach which emphasises the active role of individuals in their choice of media in order to satisfy their needs. It focuses more on how people use the media, rather than how the media influences people. Individuals tend towards programmes which are suited to their personal desires and characteristics, when they need to. The uses and gratifications approach concentrates on the question, "what do people do with the media?", rather than the question, "what does the media do to people?", which is concentrated on by other theories (Çakır and Bozkurt, 2014,63, taken from Klapper, 1963, p.523). Within this context, the opinion that viewers are active is dominant. Accordingly, "viewers actively use a certain media and its content in order to satisfy their own personal needs or to obtain certain outcomes". The active viewer plays an active role in this process. He / she makes a conscious decision as to which programme he / she will watch. The assumptions on which this theory is based are categorised below:

1. People are motivated and active in line with their objectives when choosing media.
2. Viewers select and use the channels of communication they deem fit in order to meet their needs and desires.
3. Each person possesses different communications behaviour based on his / her own social and psychological characteristics.
4. Social and psychological conditions have an impact on the degree to which the media meets the needs and desires of individuals.
5. Media is an alternative to the other channels of communication, but most of the time the relationships between individuals are more effective than the media.

In a study carried out in Britain for the purposes of determining the motivations and gratifications of viewers in connection with watching television, it was determined that viewers are motivated by seven factors - relaxation, friendship, learning, habits, passing the time, being stimulated and avoidance, when watching television (Greenberg: 1974,76). However, when studies which examined the motivation and gratifications of viewers of reality shows in particular, rather than that of general television viewers, it was revealed that these shows are watched as a result of different needs, gratifications and motivations. These are the motivations of entertainment, resting, habits, friendship, social interaction and voyeurism. The conclusion was reached that daily viewers in particular watch reality shows more for the purpose of relieving their stresses, and that individuals whose social interaction with others is low watch these programmes in order to meet their voyeurism and social needs (Demirtaş/Başkaya, 2013, p.217).

The conclusion that the media has the power to have a positive or negative impact on society has been reached in numerous studies. Another conclusion which was obtained during the studies is that media is a vehicle which directs the mental, social and spiritual fixtures of individuals. However, when making this determination, it needs to be stated that media literacy also has a very large impact. Stuart Hall defines the reading of the messages of the media in three ways:

1. Dominant reading,
2. Negotiated reading,
3. Oppositional reading.

These manners of reading depend on the social structure, level of education and cultural structure of the individual. The media has (within its historical development) and is also being used for functions such as the educating and informing of society, the resolution of social problems, the ensuring of peace and order within society and ensuring interaction among individuals. However, today, it fails to adhere to moral principles at times, while it is also thought to give rise to social problems at times.

A qualitative change surfaced in the vehicles of mass communications at the end of the 19th century, together with advances in technology and the invention of the television. Due to its very structure, the television is a vehicle of communication which has its own authentic form of narration and system of meaning. As a vehicle of mass communication, it possesses the characteristic of being able to make references to itself and the advantage of being able to verify itself, due to the fact that it provides feedback through the electronic environment (Çelenk, 2005, p.76).

Gündoğan (1991, p.18) draws attention to the following matters in connection with the characteristics of television:

> *"The television is a leader among the producer organisations of mass culture. That is because television organisations only take into account the demands of the viewer masses who pay money, with their sole purpose of making a profit. The demands of mass viewers are products which reflect a low standard of acclaim, and which have no depth, are entertaining and directed at only passing the time (and which therefore allow the avoidance of the real circumstances of real life). Television organisations are forced to make products of this quality in order to be able to continue their profits. However, at the same time, as people have become insulated and lack direction within the mass society, they depend on the television in terms of its guidance with real life experiences. The opinions, images, symbols and patterns of behaviour conveyed by television direct and show the way to people. On the one hand, this approach is connected with the loss of "selective and high" values, while on the other hand, with the directing of individuals, who are becoming more alone, to messages which are generated with similar criteria, and the phenomenon of the "masses" which is made up of homogeneous individuals."*

The widespread use of television has led to it being the vehicle which is most frequently used in the advertising, marketing and sales triangle. Very interesting alternatives have been offered to the masses together with the wide range of TV channels. Undoubtedly, one of the most significant of these are the Reality Shows. Documentaries, the news, competitions, serials, cartons and films are also counted among these. However, there is no doubt that the programmes with the highest viewer ratings today are reality shows.

The widespread use of television has also brought with it the questions which are the subject of a large number of studies on communication. The “Uses and Gratifications Approach”, which is among these, and which is also included in the literature on communications at the same time, seeks an answer to the question as to why a newspaper reader, radio listener or television viewer – who are in the position of being the consumers of the media – have chosen that newspaper, that columnist, that channel or that programme. According to Pasquier, there are active viewers who use the messages of the media to their own advantage and for themselves (Aydın, 2007, p.120). Behind these media choices, answers are sought to what the gratifications and benefits obtained by viewers with these choices, in many studies conducted on this subject. The most important points which have drawn the attention of researchers into communications, have been topics such as “why” viewers watch any programme they have selected (uses approach), the measure of the satisfaction derived from the programme which has been watched and whether the message coincides with the target (Akpınar, 2008, p.3-4).

The variety of programmes on a single channel lost its importance together with the remote control device starting to be used, and thus viewers possessed the pleasure of being able to determine the flow of programmes which are offered according to their own desires, by using the remote control device. Today, maybe we even need to consider the transfer effects which are created by “zapping” between different programme patterns and sequences, and even scenes (Şentürk: 2009, 193). Viewers may remain “glued to” image based on their feelings and needs at the time they are watching the various programmes presented to them by various different channels, or move on to a different image, thereby creating a montage. This leads us to the opinion of a flow which is comprised more of the residues of consciousness than of conscious processes. Indeed, the viewer does also state that he / she watches television – which is an indeterminate statement – rather than this or that programme, which would be an indicator that he / she consciously lost himself / herself in the scene, as if proverbially watching the flow of a river.

NEW APPROACHES TO THE THEORY OF USES AND GRATIFICATIONS

While the uses and gratifications approach argues that individuals have certain sociologic and psychological needs which they attempt to meet through the media (McQuail, 2005, p.426), it is more a theory which has been developed to explain the mass communications process. This model of communications does not only bring to the fore the intention of the message sender, but at the same time, also the meaning given to it by the viewer (Fiske, 1990, p.151). The uses and gratifications approach, which, in this context, argues that viewers are not passive but information processors who actively participate in the process, places the activity of the situation being understood by individuals at the centre of the process.

The principal components of the said approach have been defined by many researchers – in particular Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) and Rosengren (1974). Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) express the field of interest of the uses and gratifications approach as follows. The expectations brought about by social and psychological based needs are transformed into different media usage models or other activities within the vehicles of mass communication and other sources. And these, in turn, lead to the gratification of needs and other outcomes, most of which were aimed for.

Similarly, Rosengren (1974) has also argued that the uses and gratifications approach deals with many factors and the relationships between these. These are:

1. Fundamental human biological and psychological needs;
2. The personality and social traits of individuals;
3. The structure of society;
4. Personal problems;
5. The problem solutions which come to mind;
6. The motives in the solution of problems or the seeking of satisfaction;
7. The consumption of media;
8. Other modes of behaviour;
9. The models of satisfaction and dissatisfaction;
10. The impacts on individual characteristics and on the structure of society.

(For example, media structures, the structures of society, political, cultural and economic structures) (Rubin1986).

The uses and gratifications approach, which has developed as a result of active viewer research, deals with the degree to which the use of vehicles of mass communications are effective in meeting the needs of people (Güngör, 2011). The scientist, who first examined human needs in a scientific manner, and shed light on the subject of motivation, is the American scientist Abraham H. Maslow (Eren, 2001, p.30). While not having been developed directly oriented at understanding the motivation in working life, Maslow's theory became popular together with the book dated 1960 of Douglas McGregor (Luthans: 1995, 151). According to Maslow, people have certain needs which direct certain behaviours from the time of their birth. These needs influence human behaviour until they are satisfied and are listed from bottom to top within a hierarchic order. People progress from the bottom up as they meet their lower level needs, and the need which has been satisfied is no longer able to influence behaviour (Maslow, 1970).

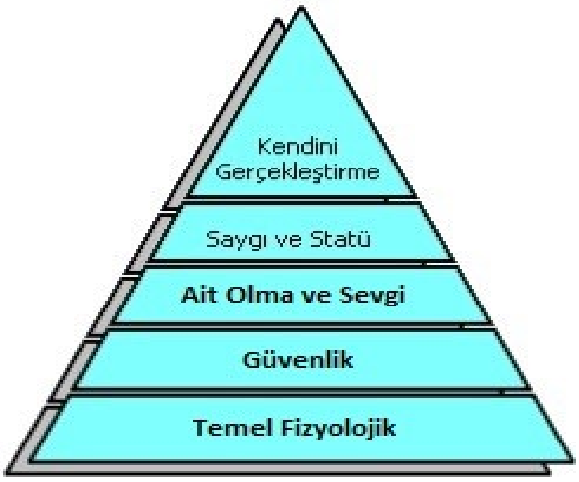

Figure 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, http://www.sabittuncel.com/main.php?kid=789 (From bottom to top: Physiological, Safety, Love / Belonging, Esteem, Self-Actualisation)

Maslow examined human needs in five fundamental categories – as physiological, safety, love / belonging, esteem and self-actualisation, in a consecutive sequence. The first two needs were dealt with as basic (primary) needs and the last three as socio-psychological or secondary needs. In the uses and gratifications approach, individuals watch TV programmes in order to meet their secondary needs.

SOME STUDIES DIRECTED AT THE USES AND GRATIFICATIONS APPROACH

In the studies conducted into uses and gratifications in both Turkey and the rest of the world, the gratifications obtained by people from watching and monitoring media content are collected together under the following general headings (Koçak and Özcan, 2002):

1. Entertainment,
2. The acquisition of knowledge,
3. Passing time,
4. Relaxation,
5. Relieving stress,
6. Becoming social.

Studies carried out on the Uses and Gratifications Approach are comprised more of studies directed at the impacts of the television, radio and internet. One of the pioneering studies in connection with this approach is the study by Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Herta Herzog, which was conducted between 1942-1944, concerning which programmes radio listeners choose in order to gratify which of their needs (Küçükkurt et al, 2009, taken from Jensen and Rosengren 2007). On the other hand, in the study conducted by Blumler, McQuail and Brown on television viewers in Britain in 1972, the gratifications obtained by people from watching television were categorised as amusement (entertainment), personal relationships, personal identity and observation. In his book, in which he refers to the Uses and Gratifications Approach, Fiske lists the gratifications people obtain from the media, based on studies on various media content, as follows (2003),

Stating that viewers who follow competition programmes (game shows) obtain four basic gratifications from these:

I. Self-appreciation,
II. Social interaction,
III. Excitement,
IV. Education.

Similarly, the gratifications obtained by viewers who follow murder serials are excitement, avoidance, knowledge and a feeling of safety.

Studies have also been carried out into reality shows. The study conducted by Woods and Ebersole (2007) researched the reasons why people watch reality shows. Five factors were found as a result of the study. These are likening oneself to real characters, entertainment, changes of feeling, passing the time and participation for others. The relationship between these factors and the levels of TV watching was examined in the study. Focus was placed on the interaction between the parasocial *(Where viewers take pleasure from seeing a character they like on the screen, the desire to see these characters on screen again pushes them to watch the series again. Thus, a close connection is formed between the viewer and the character in the series. This connection, which is formed between the target audience and the media character, is known as 'parasocial' interaction.)* and the perceived reality, and as a result of the study, it was determined that reality TV viewers did not have particularly similar categories with the other viewer masses, and that in particular due to reality TVs making interactive programmes, the levels of likening to real individuals was higher when compared to the other TV viewer masses (Woods and Ebersole, 2007, p.23).

In the study conducted by Demirtaş and Başkaya in Turkey, in 2013, the motivations behind people watching the reality music contest, "O Ses Türkiye" were researched. The significance of the role played by age and gender in the watching of this contest was examined. The study focused on the motivations of the definition of personal identity, entertainment, changes of feeling, friendship, social interaction and voyeurism. The study was comprised of data such as the demographic information of 182 individuals and their weekly TV viewing times, as well as 27 likert type questions. The 27 questions were constituted of the sub-dimensions of the 7 motivations. As a result, it was determined that the contest was watched more by people of a higher age, and that the motivation for this was friendship, arising from the sub-dimension of loneliness. It was also determined that this programme was watched with the motivation of changes of feeling, for passing time without thinking during daily life and avoiding the issues of daily life (Demirtaş / Başkaya: 2013, 218-219-223).

THE LIMITATIONS AND METHODS OF THE STUDY

The limitations of the study are that it is comprised of 12 television viewers – 7 men and 5 women – who are between the ages of 25-45. The method of the study is focus group discussions. Focus group discussions have been held with the 12 television viewers who were selected.

THE FINDINGS

Answers to the following questions were sought in the study:

1. Which reality show do viewers follow the most?
2. How long have viewers been following reality shows?
3. Why do viewers follow reality shows?
4. How frequently do viewers watch reality shows?
5. What are the motivations with which viewers watch reality shows?
6. Do the motivations of viewers to watch reality shows display any significant difference according to the amount of time they spend in front of the TV?

The most viewed reality show programmes are the programmes titled, "Güldür Güldür" and "Arkadaşım Hoş geldin", which are comedy programmes.

The reasons for watching reality shows are that they are entertaining, they relieve the daily stresses and fatigue, the fact that other family members watch it together and the fact that they are able to alter the mood of individuals.

Another reality programme which is well-liked is "Bu Tarz Benim", and the reasons for this programme being watched are the fact that the viewers enjoy the tension between the jury and contestants, being able to empathise with the contestants and enjoyment of competition.

Viewers responded to the question, *Which programmes do you watch at what frequency?* By stating that they mostly followed show programmes which concentrated on comedy on a regular basis, and that they watched show programmes of the format of "Bu Tarz Benim", to pass the time when they were free and to escape from their thoughts and problems.

Viewers generally watch show programmes among a crowd.

Viewers stated that they have more fun when they watch these types of shows within a crowded group.

While there was no age, gender and educational status difference in viewers who watch comedy show programmes, it was seen that the viewers of the show programme titled "Bu Tarz Benim" were mostly female, and between the ages of 35-45.

Viewers between the ages of 32-45, from among those who took part in the focus group discussions, stated that they followed these types of programmes conscientiously and that they were loyal viewers.

On the other hand, those in the 25-32 age range watch reality shows in particular, when they watch TV, and prefer to watch film and music programmes, which also relax them, when not watching these programmes.

In the light of the data which has been obtained, it is possible for us to say that the reasons why viewers watch reality shows are reasons such as relieving the daily stress, relaxing and cheering up in general.

CONCLUSION

Individuals have social and individual needs which are met through certain modes of behaviour. Where the personal and environmental possibilities used to meet needs are not present, or are inadequate, people attempt to meet these needs through other alternatives, such as vehicles of mass communication. Individuals tend towards vehicles of mass communication generally for their needs such as strengthening their personality, gaining prestige and acquiring safety, avoiding daily issues, emotional relaxation, passing the time and entertainment, obtaining information and having opinions and forming personal relationships such as friendships.

While the Uses and Gratifications Approach considers the sender category in the mass communications process as secondary, it brings the needs and motivations of the viewer to the forefront. On the other hand, in this approach the viewer masses are formulated as a category who use the vehicles of communication in order to satisfy certain needs.

In the study an attempt has been made to examine the mutual interaction endeavours of the viewer masses and the media. It is known that the reason behind the media side mostly tending towards these types of programmes is their concern for ratings. The concern for ratings stands at the head of the media, like the sword of Damocles. Media organisations must ensure the economic conditions required for them to be able to continue. Their earnings from advertising are the only way this can be done. Therefore TV organisations are dependent on programmes similar to reality shows, as they are able to receive more advertising for these programmes and thus to protect their economic strength.

The productions which receive the highest ratings in Turkey are reality shows. As can be understood from the focus group discussions held within the scope of the study, viewers watch programmes which make them laugh and relax them in order to escape from their problems, stresses and worries about life. For this reason, TV broadcasters give regular and frequent slots to these types of programmes during their daily broadcasting streams. Indeed, they broadcast these at prime time, when viewer ratings are at the highest. These programmes result in a mutual win-win strategy, and while the viewer masses escape from their daily problems and stresses in the manner they desire, TV organisations increase their ratings and get their share from the advertising cake.

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