Understanding of media audiences

Audiences are a critical subject in studying media. ' Audience' is the term used to describe a large number of unidentifiable people, who usually united by their participation in media use. (Hartley, 2002) Media has a huge power to influence audience thinking and behaviour. There are many approaches to deconstruct the relationship between the audience and the text. The question arise here is, how do human receive text from television, or internet etc.? How do human analyse and affect by the text? In this essay, we will discover two approaches looking into the audiences and how will they related the media or how do we understand media audiences from these approaches.

In term of media, Uses and Gratifications (U&G) Theory and two-step flow theory are the essential approaches of understanding the audiences. There are many academic studies developed under the U&G theory since this idea arises over the past 100 years. On the other hand, two -step flow theory explains that the audiences will be influenced by the media or other opinion leader. Although these two theories has been criticized and negated, they help us to understand the relationship between the media and receiver.

In the first part of the essay, we will discover two theory of study the audiences. The first approach is " Uses and gratifications theory", this approach focus on the consumer and the audience, rather than the message. It is concern about how people (media audience) made choices and what they did when consuming texts. According to Katz (1959), ask not what the media can do to people, but what the people can do with media. In other words, audience should be an active role to use media for pursues their own

needs. Blumler and Katz in The uses of mass communication bring up an idea:

…something of the way in which individuals uses communications, among other resources in their environment, to satisfy their needs and achieve their goals, and to do so by simply asking them. (Blumler & Katz, 1974)

Blumler and Katz (1974) concluded that different people use the same media for different purposes; therefore, the same media content may satisfy different needs for different individuals. Rosengren (1974) developed the idea of Katz and other scholars and presented the following diagram: mmm Figure 1 (Blumler, 2004 p. 271)

The diagram put more attention to the society and individual characteristics affect much of people needs. In term of individual characteristics, not just Psychological Set-up, but also added the Social Position, and Life History. Moreover, Rosengren build up `Perceived problem and solutions' it explains human psychological process between needs and motives. Those elements not previously emphasized by Blumler and other scholars.

In the diagram, basic needs, individual characteristics and society structure are three factors interact and result in people use media for variety of gratifications. Lucas and Sherry (2004) put more simplified model of Rosengren's paradigm.

According to psychologist Maslow's hierarchic theory of needs, (1943) basic needs are divided five main cataloguers including physiological, safety, love

and belonging, esteem and self-actualization.(Maslow, 1943) More detail shows in the following figure:

http://levelupliving. com/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/hierarchy-of-needs3. png Figure 3 (ICT Learning, 2010)

However, in media perspective, according to Katz et. al put `needs' into five different categories: cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative and tension release needs. (Iqbal, 2010)

In term of individual characteristics and society, we can clearly see these factors including psychological set-up, social position, life history and media structure in figure 1. Audience thinks perceived solutions when he realizes there is a perceived problem and thereby creates motives. After that, audience use the media, make choice to choose different types of media, how much time they going to spends with media etc. Audience also uses with other behavior such as personal contacts or other means of communication. At the end, audience decides to continue use the media while he could obtains gratification or non-gratification.

Blumler et. al. concern audiences use media as a sough gratification. They point out U&G theory is built up on five assumptions. The first assumption is that ' the audience is conceived as active' (Blumler & Katz, 1974) In other words, U&G establishes people play the active role to discover their own satisfied information for different reason and in different ways. Secondly, they assume ' in the mass communication process much initiative in linking need gratification and media choice lies with the audience member'. (ibid.) This is an idea that people can allow the media to influence them. `The

media competes with other sources of need satisfaction.' (ibid.) is the third assumption of U&G. This is an idea that mass media is only one of the resources to satisfied people' needs. Therefore, mass communication must compete with other non-media resources such as interrelationship communication aim to produce the need. The forth assumption is `many of the goals media use can be derived from data supplied by the individual audience members themselves.' (ibid.) It assumes audience is rational, and can fully understand their choices and motives. Audience also are able to explain them clearly. The last assumption is `value judgments about cultural significance of mass communication should be suspended while audience operations are explored on their own terms'. (ibid.) This assumption believes people determinate the value of the media. These five assumptions help us to understanding the relationship between the media and audiences.

For the motivation for media use, McQuail, Blumler, and Brown (1972). proposed a model of " media-person interactions" to classify four different gratifications: diversion, personal relationships, personal identity and surveillance. (Katz, E.) Diversion refers to people escape from reality like everyday problem and the constraints of routine. Secondly, personal relationship is about social interaction, people using the media as a substitute companionship. Thirdly, personal identity is including people referencing, learning and exporting themselves from the text. Lastly, surveillance is means the information could be helps our life such as weather report and news. In 1983, McQuail purposed four typology of common reasons for media use, there are information, personal identity, intergration and social interaction, and entertainment. (Chandler, 1994.) This is similar

with " media-person interactions' in 1972 which have been mentioned above. Nevertheless, this typology had emphasis more on social environment and psychological.

With other theory, U&G theory received some criticism. Ang, L claims that theory did not emphasis on social context and audience is individualistic. U&G ignore the content of media, stressed that is the active audience needs. The research found out that the audience is not selective on the messages delivered to them. The result is a contradiction with the theory of assumption that audience is active to make choice for the use of media. The terms of need, motivations, and expectation have not clearly define while gratification sought and gratification obtained is indistinguishable. Despite this theory challenged by these factors, still has its value of researching by the audience's point of view of media.

The second approach to understand the audiences is Two-Step Flow of communication. (P. E. Lazarsfeld, 1944) Lazarseld, Berelson and Gaudet introduced their hypothesis in 1955. Research had been carried out on the decision making on a Presidential election, the result of the research had concluded that information does not flow directly from the text into the audiences' mind but is filtered through `opinion leaders' then leader influence other audiences (followers). (Katz, 1955.) There is two distance stage of media text transmitted. The figure illustrates the how this theory works:

Figure 4 (Katz, 1955)

In the diagram above, messages no longer dispatch from the mass media (producers) to the receivers directly. Messages were first transmitted to opinion leader who then interpreted and give the information to other (followers) in face-to-face. (ibid.) This explains why media may have failed to alter audiences' attitude or behavior. In other words, the effect of mass media is not universal, must be assessed to other media channels to influence the information or opinions.

Unfortunately, this hypothesis has criticized and being questioned, For example, figure 4 shows followers only received message from opinion leader. Obviously, we can receive the information from mass media directly. In additional, some scholars discover that transmitting information in society not only two step flow. It is involved multi step flow. (Inglis, 1990) The transmitted is more complicated than we imagine. Moreover, we might get confuse who is the opinion leader. It is a general assumption that a person who influences other people can be opinion leader because they use media more, and socially active. Baran, S, J. defines opinion leader as a ` people who initially consume media content, interpret it in light of their own values and beliefs, and then pass it on to opinion followers'. (Baran, 2002.) In other words, most of the opinion leader's social position or status or by virtue of their grater interest in the topic at hand. (Robinson, 1976) Nonetheless, we cannot be certain who opinion leader is? For instance, A is an opinion leader of fashion; however, A is a follower in music while B is an opinion leader. Therefore, opinion leader is depends on the position, background and issue etc. These theories receive many critics from scholars due to the confusion of the position of the person. In spite of those criticisms, two-step flow

receives praises and influence mass media especially advertising. The theory refined the ability to predict the influence of media messages on audience behavior,(Dave, 2009) and the reason why people sometime does not influence by media.

In the second part of the essay will be illustrate how those two approaches contribute to our understanding of media audiences. Through the study of uses and gratifications and two-step flow theory, we can understand what audience can do with media, their motivations to use media and how media can be transmitted. Put these knowledge into a mass media and into the society, we can explain some social phenomenon and why audience influences by each other.

Uses and gratifications approach is very suitable in explaining why people watch television. To apply this theory into the context of audiences which watch TV, watching TV provide the basic needs, society media structure and individuals characteristics which will sum up to gratifications in Blumeler Theory where by they are information, personal identity, integration and social interaction, and entertainment. TV channels provide information such as news and advertisement. Audiences can easily find themselves on TV programme like quiz show. For example, audiences can compare with the experts, laugh at the contestants' mistake. (Chandler, 1994) In term of integration and social interaction, audiences may watch the TV together and so create an interaction or communication. They also recognize and more importantly to interact with the highly stylized images presented by TV programmer, especially those entertainers, talk show hosts. (Levy, 1979) Audiences entertained by TV programme such as game shows and soap

operas. They are able to relax, escape from reality. Despite new means of media counties come out namely internet and telephone, still, television can `survive' in the completion because tally audience needs of U&G theory. Subsequencetly, we can use U&G theory to explain audience use other means of media such as magazine and radio.

On the other hand, many companies and advertiser may apply to two step flow approach. They agree that customer might change their view of the product or company because of other users' opinion. Evidently, a business would be a success as long as they gained the opinion leader support. This is because opinion leader will ' promote' for the business. For instance, social network such as Facebook reaches nearly 500 million active users in 2010 since Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg launch the website reaches mere 1 million active users in 2004. (Facebook, 2010) In this case, word of the mouth is `I add you on Facebook' or `how come you don't have facebook?' The initial opinion leader on Facebook is the founder and his university classmates. The aim of communication within the campus, however, communication has power to influence other. When a follower became an opinion leader, number of users will dramatically increase. Although the initial aim of founder is not a business, which shows how two-step flow works. Again, that theory can apply to other media or business, especially in this information explosion era. People can easy to obtain information or review from `opinion leader'.

And other example of two step flow is the source of Lazarseld et. al' study - election campaigns. They concluded that only 5% of the people changed their voting behavior as a result of these media messages. (Katz, 1955.) The

voters influence by their interpersonal communication (such as friends, politic tradition) and short-run considerations (such as candidate attractiveness or current social issue). This view of media effects known as limited effects theory.

Audience is a giant subject of studying media. Beside these two approaches, we can extend the study of understanding audience. Those audiences have different preference or motivation in using the media. We can construct the audience to different cataloguers. In some study, gender, ages, and social class are the elements to decide the audience to use media. For instance, newspaper readers in different gender, age and social position will choose to buy/read different newspaper. The following table shows the newspaper readership:

(Griffiths, 2010)

In conclusion, uses and gratification and two-step flow theories are the important theories to study audience's behavior. Through this theory of U&G, we can understand what people do with the media, how audience satisfy their need by using media to establish such needs and why people using different kinds of media or communication such as radio and television. In the same way, we can see sometime media not fully influence the audience in the theory of two step flow. This approach also suggests audiences are influenced by or face-to face communication with the opinion leader who is more active in media uses. There are many other approaches which provide knowledge for understanding the audience's behavior. In spite of some criticisms of these two theories which we had discussed in the essay, Uses

and gratification theory and Two-step flow hypothesis are significant

theoretically.