

Chapter 2

Applying Uses and Gratifications to Promote Cognitive and Affective Learning via Online Instructional Content

Rebecca M. L. Curnalia
Youngstown State University, USA

Amber L. Ferris
University of Akron, USA

ABSTRACT

Instructional design benefits from integration and application of communication theory to help guide practice. Uses and gratifications (U&G) is a useful approach for developing, evaluating, and selecting fully integrated, interactive course materials. U&G has assumptions related to individuals, uses, and effects that apply to a myriad of communication channels, including instructional materials. There are four considerations derived from U&G that the authors address in this chapter: user motives, platform affordances, user activity, and user outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

Uses and gratifications (U&G) is a useful approach for developing, evaluating, and selecting fully integrated, interactive course materials. U&G offers suggestions for

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how the characteristics of users (students or other learners) relate to their use of the features in online instructional content and, as a result, the learning outcomes in courses that use online instructional content.

Instructional design would benefit from integration and application of communication theory to help guide practice. Sprague (1993) argued that research in communication education did not use the breadth of communication theory to explore instructional practices and outcomes, and later pointed out that the lack of theory led to conceptual muddiness and an over-simplification of the complexities of instructional communication (Sprague, 2002). For example, there has been an understandable but narrow focus in the instructional literature on teachers' prosocial behaviors, such as immediacy, relationship-building, and affect.

Sprague (2002) rightly challenged teacher-scholars in communication to apply new theories, work across disciplinary boundaries, and ask bigger questions about strategies for student learning: It comes down to the question of our ultimate goal as teacher educators. If we want to know how to help teachers achieve the perception that they have supported student learning, we can rely on the current models, but if we want to help teachers engage in behaviors that have high probability of leading to significant cognitive learning, there is still much to investigate (p. 352). To that end, U&G has assumptions related to individuals, uses, and effects that apply to a myriad of communication channels, including instructional technologies like interactive textbooks.

Converged Online Instructional Materials

Converged, online instructional materials are used in traditional courses, distance education courses, and flipped courses. They are a shift from flat e-textbooks to interactive resources that encourage self-paced and more self-directed learning that is then supplemented by the course instructor.

E-textbooks have been offered since 2001 and their features have evolved to incorporate multimedia, interactive discussions, activities, quizzes, and adaptation to students' learning. Textbooks have converged with learning management system (LMS) functionalities so that fully online course packages, such as text content with embedded videos, engagement opportunities, and assessments are available for adoption and for instructor development. Moreover, with the growth of open educational resources, instructors can design fully converged online courses in their own university's LMS.

Media convergence, or the merging of different media formats into a new form of media, offers unique opportunities for expanding access and engagement. Convergence also changes audiences, giving users more options and more control over what they use, when they use it, and how they use it (Jenkins, 2004). User control is one of the

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