

activities that create a readiness for action. Acute states of such arousal characterize all vital emotions, and the subjective experience of these acute states is part and parcel of all strong feelings. Emotional arousal is consequently seen as an essential component of such experiences as pleasure and displeasure, sadness and happiness, love and hate, despair and elation, gaiety and dejection, rage and exultation, exhilaration and grief, frustration and triumph, merriment and fear, anger and joy, and so on.

Based on Schachter's (1964) two-factor theory of emotion Zillmann (1996) proposed a *three-factor theory of emotion* that retains the distinction between energization by arousal and guidance by cognition. A dispositional factor integrates ontogenetically fixed and acquired dispositions in accounting for the autonomic mediation of excitatory reactivity and the guidance of immediate, deliberate, overt behaviors. An experiential factor entails the cognitive evaluation of prevailing circumstances, including the appraisal of bodily feedback (→ Sensation Seeking).

As both the evocation of emotions and the modification of moods are essential factors in the appeal and effects of media presentations, and as the intensity of both emotions and moods is largely determined by excitatory reactivity, it is imperative to consider *arousal in the context of media influence*. Intense excitement is sought via exposure to the communication media as much as through overt individual or social actions. The fact that the evocation of diverse emotions can be compacted in media presentations or in interactive media formats, such as games, actually provides optimal conditions for the creation of arousal escalations and, ultimately, for intense experiences of joyous excitement (Zillmann 2006; → Excitation and Arousal; Media Effects).

Arousal influences permeate numerous other effects of media exposure too. It has been shown, for instance, that exposure to highly arousing pleasant erotica can facilitate social aggression more than can somewhat less arousing exposure to violence (→ Violence as Media Content, Effects of; Media Effects; Fear Induction through Media Content).

See also: ► APPRAISAL THEORY ► EXCITATION AND AROUSAL ► FEAR INDUCTION THROUGH

MEDIA CONTENT ► INFORMATION PROCESSING
► MEDIA EFFECTS ► MOOD MANAGEMENT
► SENSATION SEEKING ► VIOLENCE AS MEDIA
CONTENT, EFFECTS OF

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Encoding-Decoding

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Encoding and decoding have been key concepts in communication for over fifty years, in keeping with the idea that language is a → code, and how it is received is as significant as how it is conceived. Its most prominent place, however, is in media and → cultural studies, where it has been used to integrate the analysis of texts, producers, technologies, and audiences by thinking of them as co-eval participants in the making of → meaning.

Encoding-decoding within media and cultural studies *derives* from the rejection of psychological models of → media effects. In the 1960s, the ethnomethodologist Harold Garfinkel coined the notion of a “cultural dope,” a mythic figure who supposedly “produces the stable features of the society by acting in compliance with pre-established and legitimate alternatives of action that the common culture provides” (Garfinkel 1992, 68). In the mid-1960s, Umberto Eco developed the notion of encoding-decoding, open texts, and aberrant readings by audiences (Eco 1972). Eco looked at the ways that meanings were put into Italian TV programs by producers and deciphered by viewers, and the differences between these practices. His insights were picked up by the

political sociologist Frank Parkin (1971), then by cultural studies theorist Stuart Hall (1980).

There have been *two principal methodological iterations* of the encoding-decoding approach: → uses and gratifications (U&G) and ethnography/cultural studies. Uses and gratifications operates from a psychological model of needs and pleasures; cultural studies from a political one of needs and pleasures. U&G focuses on what are regarded as fundamental psychological drives that define how people use the media to gratify themselves. Conversely, cultural studies' ethnographic work has shown some of the limitations to claims that viewers are stitched into certain perspectives by the interplay of narrative, dialogue, and image. Together, they have brought into question the notion that audiences are blank slates ready to be written on by media messages.

See also: ► AUDIENCE RESEARCH ► CODE
► CULTURAL STUDIES ► ETHNOGRAPHY OF
COMMUNICATION ► MEANING ► MEDIA
EFFECTS ► TEXT AND INTERTEXTUALITY
► USES AND GRATIFICATIONS

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Entertainment Content and Reality Perception

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A common focus of communication research has been the public's perceptions of reality as based on mass-mediated contents and images (→ Media and Perceptions of Reality). Social reality perceptions are best defined as individuals' conceptions

of the world. They include perceptions of others' opinions and behavior, social indicators such as crime, wealth, careers, professions, sex roles, and more (→ Reality and Media Reality).

An important element of the modern mass-mediated world is the *integration of news and entertainment*, facts and fiction, events, and stories into a symbolic environment in which reality and fiction are almost inseparable. Thus, the news becomes storytelling while soap operas become news. They present to us realities from other cultures, other social strata – and despite their fictional nature – are seen and interpreted as realities. The so-called → 'infotainment' narrative of the modern media affects us all. How can one make the distinction between fictional representation and factual 'real-world' information when both are so well integrated into our mediated environments?

Living in a mass-mediated world is the result of several processes: our reliance on media sources to know and interpret the 'world out there,' the distorting effect of the selection process in the media and the practice of writing news as 'storytelling,' and the mixture of information and fiction where real and fictional worlds become a homogeneous, synthetic reality.

The most important work on the impact of mass-mediated realities on audiences' perceptions has been done within the tradition of George Gerbner's *cultivation theory*. Essentially, the theory states that heavy exposure to mass media, namely television, creates and cultivates perceptions of reality more consistent with a media-conjured version of reality than with what actual reality is. It began with the "Cultural Indicators" research project in the mid-1960s, aiming to study whether and how watching television may influence viewers' ideas of what the everyday world is like. Cultivation theorists argue that television has long-term effects which are small, gradual, indirect, but cumulative and significant (→ Cultivation Effects).

One of the major constructs of cultivation theory is 'mainstreaming,' the homogenization of people's divergent perceptions of social reality into a convergent mainstream. This apparently happens through a process of construction, whereby viewers learn 'facts' about the real world from observing the world of television.

Several researchers have attempted to *refine the notion of cultivation* by examining closely the cognitive processes involved. A key distinction