



1-1-1974

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Charles R. Wright

University of Pennsylvania, cwright@asc.upenn.edu

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Recommended Citation (OVERRIDE)

Wright, C. R. (1974). Functional analysis and mass communication revisited. In J. G. Blumler & E. Katz (Eds.), *The uses of mass communications* (pp. 197-212). Beverly Hills: SAGE Publications, Inc. Retrieved from http://repository.upenn.edu/asc_papers/8

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Functional Analysis and Mass Communication Revisited

Abstract

Some fifteen years ago, drawing heavily upon the theoretical orientation of Merton (1957), I attempted to specify a functional perspective for the study of mass communication (Wright, 1959, 1960). The resultant paradigm provided a useful framework (labelled a functional inventory) for the classification of many alleged and some documented consequences of mass communication activities for individuals, groups, societies, and cultural systems. The essay also considered problems in the specification and codification of the kinds of communication phenomena that lend themselves to functional analysis, the need to formulate new hypotheses in terms of functional theory, and a variety of difficulties in inventing research designs and in finding research sites suitable for conducting functional analyses of mass communication. It was noted that various studies during the immediate preceding years had explicitly or implicitly used a functional framework for examining different aspects of mass communication (some were cited by way of illustration) and, therefore, the paper was not a call for something novel; rather, it was a preliminary first step toward explicit consideration of certain theoretical and methodological issues relevant to the future growth of a functional theory of mass communication.

Disciplines

Mass Communication

FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS AND MASS COMMUNICATION REVISITED

Charles R. Wright

SOME FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, drawing heavily upon the theoretical orientation of Merton (1957), I attempted to specify a functional perspective for the study of mass communication (Wright, 1959, 1960). The resultant paradigm provided a useful framework (labelled a functional inventory) for the classification of many alleged and some documented consequences of mass communication activities for individuals, groups, societies, and cultural systems. The essay also considered problems in the specification and codification of the kinds of communication phenomena that lend themselves to functional analysis, the need to formulate new hypotheses in terms of functional theory, and a variety of difficulties in inventing research designs and in finding research sites suitable for conducting functional analyses of mass communication. It was noted that various studies during the immediate preceding years had explicitly or implicitly used a functional framework for examining different aspects of mass communication (some were cited by way of illustration) and, therefore, the paper was not a call for something novel; rather, it was a preliminary first step toward explicit consideration of certain theoretical and methodological issues relevant to the future growth of a functional theory of mass communication.

However preliminary the statement was, it has not been superseded. Both the promise of functional analysis and the difficulties inherent in its application to problems of mass communication, which were foreshadowed there, remain timely a decade and a half later. In a recent survey of the historical development of mass media studies, Brown (1970: 55) observes that "there has recently been something of a vogue for the use of Merton's paradigm of functional analysis in the mass media field." Even more recently, F. Gerald Kline (1972), in a

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I am grateful to Professors Mary E. W. Goss and Herbert H. Hyman for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

constructive review of theory in mass communication research, states: "It would appear that, in general, the major *leitmotif* of communication research has been functionalist from the beginning . . . [and] we are using functional analysis as described by Merton and cited by Wright (1960)."

Among the recent theorists whose writings display, in varying degrees of explicitness and acceptance, a concern with a functional approach to an understanding of mass communications are De Fleur (1970), Edelstein (1966), Gerbner (1967), Halloran (1964), Katz, Gurevitch and Haas (1973), Klapper (1960, 1963), Kline (1972), Larsen (1964), McQuail (1969), Mendelsohn (1966), and Meyersohn (1969). These several examples of functional perspectives, together with others both theoretical and empirical (it is not our intention here to survey these developments), are testimony to the intellectual attractiveness and viability of a theoretical orientation coming into its time. As the field of mass communication research enters the last quarter of the twentieth century, functional analysis appears alive and well.

The opportunity provided by the editors of this volume to reflect upon the earlier formulation of theoretical and methodological points relevant to a functional theory of mass communication is, therefore, highly welcome. Although this essay is self-contained, the reader may wish to compare certain points with the original article (Wright, 1960) which the current essay neither repeats nor replaces. The theme here is functional analysis *revisited* not necessarily revised! The reflections center on the three main topics discussed in the earlier essay (and summarized below) plus consideration of the relation between functional analysis and the uses and gratifications approach to the study of mass communication. Emphasis will be given to functional analysis of the consequences of mass communication for society, rather than for the individual, a challenging but difficult research focus.

SUBJECTS SUITABLE FOR FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS

Functional analysis is primarily concerned with the consequences of standardized, patterned, and repetitive social phenomena, such as social roles and institutional patterns (see Merton, 1957). The original essay suggested the need "for specification and codification of the kinds of phenomena in mass communication which have been, or can be, clarified by means of the functional approach, together with formal statements of the basic queries which are raised in each instance." This need persists today, together with a pressing need for the development of research designs and strategies for the functional analysis of various kinds of communication phenomena, especially with regard to their consequences at the societal level. Four kinds of communication phenomena were specified in the earlier essay, which will be commented upon now in the light of research possibilities.

Functions of the Total Mass Communication System

Mass communication in toto, or the very existence of mass media, is one kind of standardized social phenomenon whose consequences need to be examined. What difference does it make, especially for a society, to have a mass communication system? Can one design research to answer such a macro-sociological question? I (Wright, 1960: 607) concluded pessimistically that one cannot and that functional analysis at this level "appears currently to be dependent primarily on speculation, and holds little immediate promise for the development of an empirically verifiable theory of mass communication." I think now that this view was unduly pessimistic because it couched the question unrealistically (for purposes of contemporary research) in terms of all or nothing, that is, the presence or absence of mass media in a society. Recent research and theory have been both more realistic and more promising of obtaining a purchase on this macrosociological issue.

Imagine a society in which all communication was interpersonal. There were no media for mass communication. Everything that its members sought to find out about events in their environment (social and physical), everything they needed in order to discover the socially shared interpretations about these matters and prescriptions for reacting to them, everything about the values, rules and expectations of members of their society, everything that might serve as social lubricant—jokes, stories, songs, etc.—all these things were available only through direct communication between individuals. All communication needs had to be met in this way. One could conduct research to determine the extent to which individuals, or categories of individuals, made use of interpersonal communications to gratify their needs for information, guidance, and entertainment, but there would be no question about the mode of communication employed; everything had to be interpersonal.

Consider now the opposite type of imaginary society, one in which no one could communicate directly with anyone else, but all had access to mass communicated materials. One could conduct research to determine the extent to which individuals, or categories of individuals, made use of mass communication (in general, or various media in particular) to gratify their needs for information, guidance, and entertainment, but there would be no question about the mode of communication employed; everything had to be mass communication.

Societies of the first type (limited to interpersonal communication) are increasingly difficult to imagine, let alone find, except on a small scale of remote villages and exotic places. As national types they hardly exist. Societies of the second type (limited to mass communication) are entirely imaginary. In today's world, most societies have a total communications system that includes both capabilities—interpersonal and mass communication. Three questions of significance emerge: (1) What is the communication mix that characterizes a society? (2) What difference does this make? and (3) What are the conditions (both external and within the media systems) which affect the kinds of social consequences that the media have? Among the significant external conditions are other social institutions in the society (for example, forms of government);

internal conditions include the pattern of media ownership and control, degree of centralization, and standardization of media content, among others.¹

One can argue that the intrusion of any amount of mass communication into a social system creates a qualitative change that results in a society different from one solely dependent upon interpersonal communications. Beyond this, most macrosociological treatments consider variations in the facilities for mass communication. Students of modernization and development, for example, classify societies according to the quantity of various media for mass communication; for example, number of newspapers published, television transmitters in operation, cinema seats, radio transmitters, or in terms of some ratio of such facilities to total population (e.g., radio receivers per 100 persons). The assumption is usually made that increased facilities for mass communication are accompanied by an increase in their usage by more members of the population. This seems reasonable, although it is seldom documented by research.

Attempts to document the social consequences of a heavier or lighter mix of mass communications/personal communications are all too rare. Theorists of modernization argue that the intrusion and expansion of the mass media lead to changes in the members of the society and in social institutions which make both the population and the society more receptive to social change, more "modern," more "developed." The intervening mechanisms and processes by which such changes come about vary from theorist to theorist and include such psychological factors as the development of empathy and such sociological factors as the ability to move ideas, goods, records, and other commercial items about with dispatch. Examples of theoretical and empirical efforts to come to grips with the study of the role of mass communication in social change and especially in social development can be found in the works of Hyman, Levine and Wright (1967), Lerner (1958, 1963), Lerner and Schramm (1967), Pye (1963), Rogers and Svenning (1969), and Schramm (1964). Since an excellent recent summary and analysis of various theories and research on the role of mass communication in social development is presented by Frey (1973), these will not be reviewed here.

One theorist, George Gerbner (1967, 1972), takes the view that mass communication (which he defines as the mass production and distribution of messages) provides the *main* thing that members of the "audience" share and that, in this sense, mass communication creates its own *public*. Societies lacking in such facilities are also lacking in massive publics. This viewpoint suggests one macrosociological function of mass communication, namely, the creation of new publics.

Not only does mass communication provide a common stream of messages (message system) for its public, but also, in Gerbner's theory, these messages *cultivate* the images of society shared by its public. These message systems provide their audience with an interpretation of the world in terms of what *is*, what is *important*, what is *right*, and what is *related* to what else. In this manner they cultivate the audience's images of reality. This is difficult to prove, but

research is now under way at The Annenberg School of Communications under a program of studies on "cultural indicators" directed by George Gerbner and Larry Gross. The program at present consists of two prongs. The first is a continuing monitoring and analysis of the content of various mass media. In particular the project has included a systematic analysis of prime time network television drama. The second prong involves research on the public, aiming at discovering the extent to which their views about social facts correspond more to the televised presentation or more to reality. For example, are heavy viewers of television more likely than light viewers to believe that violent crimes are a common occurrence (an image of the world presented in many television dramas), and are the latter viewers more likely to have an image that corresponds more with the actual incidence of violent crimes as reflected in official statistics? To the extent that heavy viewers of television give answers more characteristic of the world as portrayed by biased television content than by life, the inference is made that their world view has been cultivated by the media. Cultivation, then, is a function of mass communication. One *social* consequence of these mass communicated latent messages could be the creation of widespread "cultural false consciousness" (Gross, 1974).

An ingenious and illuminating series of studies of the sometimes subtle consequences of mass communication, especially television, on the political process has been conducted during the past two decades by Kurt Lang and Gladys Engel Lang. In their view (Lang and Lang, 1969: 19), "the mass media structure issues and personalities. They do this gradually and over a period of time, and thus this impact seems less spectacular than the shift or crystallization of a particular vote decision." They consider, among other social effects, the ways that public events, especially political, are structured and influenced by the presence of mass media, and the ways in which mass communication helps to shape the image of public events for individuals, with related social consequences for the political process. Although the focus is on television and politics, their research has broader implications for the functional analysis of mass communication in general; it demonstrates that such studies can be made through imaginative research designs exploiting contemporary social events covered by the mass media.²

Modes of Mass Communication

A second type of functional analysis considered in the earlier essay dealt with each particular method of mass communication (e.g., newspapers, television) as a subject for analysis. The basic research question posed was what functions (and dysfunctions) can be attributed to each medium and how can these be isolated through research. One research strategy suggested was to conduct studies in societies in which a particular medium is absent or when the normal operation of a medium is disturbed, for example, by a strike, providing one can account for the influence of other factors in the situation.

This research strategy still seems promising to me, although in practice it

appears to have been more beneficial in illuminating the functions of particular media for individuals than for the social system. Kimball (1963), for example, conducted an instructive longitudinal study of the impact of a prolonged newspaper shutdown on the residents of New York City. This study was especially informative about the alternative modes of communication which people turned to for substitutes for the missing newspapers as the shutdown continued over time. It became clear that for many individuals these alternative modes were not functional equivalents for newspaper reading. The study also demonstrates the value of a research design that allows one to trace a changing awareness of functions over time. (But it was not designed to provide data on the impact of the press on the society and its social institutions.) Research opportunities need not await the total disappearance of a particular medium. Lyle (1962), for example, studied the impact of a double newspaper merger, which greatly reduced the number of daily newspapers available to residents of the Los Angeles metropolitan area. And Steiner (1963) provides some interesting qualitative data on what people did when their television set was broken, reactions which gave indirect clues as to the possible functions that television was having when in operation. Other research opportunities come to mind: the closing of a neighborhood movie house; the termination of a major mass magazine such as *Life*; a near breakdown in a total communications system such as during a natural crisis.³ These are, admittedly, atypical situations, but that is precisely why they are potentially useful as research sites. The purpose of such research is not to study the impact of the crisis per se (or other change in the communication facilities), but rather to use this moment of increased sensitivity to the missing (or changed) medium in order to cull clues as to the functions that it normally performs.

An alternative strategy is to search for occasions in which a new medium of communication is being introduced into a society, or in which an older medium is being augmented in scope or is reaching new segments of the society. Examples of studies of what happens when television is introduced into a community are found in the work of Campbell (1962), Himmelweit, Oppenheim and Vince (1958), and Schramm, Lyle and Parker (1961). The major emphasis in these studies is on the consequences of television for the individual, but some consideration is given to the larger social implications. The introduction of cable television, especially insofar as it provides for new local channel program origination, should provide research opportunities for the study of its functions for both the individual and the community. An example of a new mode (if not medium) of communication for some people is brought about through the development of literacy. An example is a recent study by Heli de Sagasti (1972).

De Sagasti explored the social implications of newly acquired adult literacy in the context of an "underdeveloped" society. Intensive interviews were conducted with adult women, migrants working as domestic servants in Lima, Peru, who had recently learned to read. Prior expectation, based upon prevailing theories about the impact of literacy upon members of developing societies, was that literacy would open the world horizons for these individuals, enhance their

interest in and exposure to national and international issues, and expand their uses of the mass media. Change their lives it did; but not exactly in the ways anticipated.

De Sagasti (1972: 2) found that the major impact of newly acquired literacy was upon the private and social skills of the individual. "Newly developed adult literacy facilitates interpersonal communication, both spoken and written; this constitutes a dominant advantage of literacy for the respondents." As literate persons, the respondents now could enjoy the privacy of reading and writing letters; the advantage of greater ease in physical mobility through their ability to read signs and directions; less vulnerability in commercial transactions through their ability to read shopping lists, bills and other documents; and a new ease and facility in conversation with others. Their use of the mass media was changed only slightly, except for reading photo-novellas for relaxation, occasional newspapers, and religious materials.

The newly literate adults' print reading is limited in range and amount. The reading that is done is used in terms of particular needs, and especially the respondents' position as migrants in a very different new environment. . . . There is little evidence of literacy increasing broadcast media use. [p. 3]

Other consequences of literacy for the individual are explored as revealed in case accounts by the women themselves.

Furthermore, de Sagasti proceeds to examine the possible implications of new adult literacy for the society. She notes that new adult literacy has a "multiplying effect" as skills of reading and writing are shared with illiterates and as new literates attempt to influence illiterates to learn to read. Literacy appears to have a clear, if modest, impact on occupational role performance and on new occupational goals. It has a greater impact on the new literate's educational and occupational aspirations for her children. And it has implications for the development of personal characteristics that may allow the migrant to better adapt to and function within her new urban environment. New literacy is associated with a desire to remain in the city rather than to return to the rural homeland, thereby potentially affecting patterns of residential mobility and stability in the society. And new literacy leads to the desire and determination to have one's children more fully participate in the opportunities of the new urban society. Thus, this study touches upon both the individual and social consequences of acquiring a new mode of communication, one customarily associated with exposure to the mass media. It illustrates the feasibility and benefits of future functional research conducted on such strategic populations undergoing changes in major modes of communication.

Institutional Analysis

A third application of the functional approach suggested in 1960 was in the institutional analysis of mass media and communication organizations, "examining the function of some repeated and patterned operation within that

organization" (Wright, 1960: 608). Case studies, comparative analyses of differently organized media, and experiments were suggested as promising research strategies. During the past 15 years there has been a rise in the attention given to sociological analyses of mass communication organizations and institutions. Examples can be found in Halmos (1969), Tunstall (1970), and Wright (forthcoming). Several of these studies adopt a functional perspective. Space constrains us to one illustration here, and we chose one that addresses the topic at a broad level—television as a social institution.

An implicitly functional approach to the analysis of certain features of television as a social institution is provided by Katz (1973) in his article, "Television as a Horseless Carriage." Katz sets as his task an analysis of the problems faced in the introduction of television (especially in small and developing nations) and sees them, in part at least, as consequences of the uncritical transplantation of certain professional norms or conventions from radio broadcasting. Specifically, he considers three such professional norms (1973: 382): "(1) the goal of non-stop broadcasting; (2) the orientation toward an everybody audience; and (3) the striving for up-to-the-minute news." The norm of non-stop broadcasting is seen as having the dysfunction of making television trivial, through the exhaustion of talent and through resorting to repetitive formula dramatic series, with the further effect of leading viewers to use television more as a background for other activities than as a significant cultural experience deserving the viewer's full attention. The norm of striving for large heterogeneous audiences—of all ages and social classes—has the dysfunction of failing to meet the needs of minority audiences. And the norm for up-to-the-minute news prevents the development of in-depth "newsmagazine" treatments by television. Katz then proceeds to speculate on the consequences of these norms, inherited from radio, for television broadcasting in new nations. His central thesis is, to summarize, that (1973: 391)

certain professional views—certain conventions—about the nature of television seem to me dysfunctional from the point of view of the inherent nature of the medium, and its essential, or at least potential, difference from radio. They are certainly dysfunctional from the point of view of the potential role of television in nation-building and in the stimulation of indigenous cultural expression and creativity.

Admittedly theoretical rather than empirical, Katz's presentation nonetheless illustrates the kinds of questions raised by a functional analysis of institutionalized practices in the mass media.

Examples of the consequences of other institutionalized practices in mass communication can be found in the work of Cantor (1971) on Hollywood television producers, Elliot (1972) on a television series production, Faulkner (1971) on hiring practices among Hollywood musicians, and Tuchman (1972, 1973a, 1973b) on conventions of objectivity in news making and reporting through newspapers and television.

Functional Analysis of Basic Communication Activities

The fourth level of functional analysis advocated in the earlier essay is rather abstract but crucial for the development of a functional theory of mass communication. The central arguments in its formulation are, in briefest summary, as follows: Mass communication, as institutionalized in modern societies, constitutes a social phenomenon qualitatively and quantitatively different from personalized communication. The several kinds of communication activities in which people engage (and four were identified at that time—surveillance of the environment or news activity, interpretation of the events surveyed and prescriptions for reactions to them, the transmission of social values and other elements of culture to new members of the society, young or old, and human amusement or entertainment) could be, and are, carried out both by means of mass communications and by other more personalized forms. The critical questions for research center on what are the consequences (manifest and latent) of carrying out these communications activities by means of mass communication; consequences for individuals, groups of individuals, societies, and culture.

An important distinction, sometimes blurred in subsequent reviews, is between functions and communication activities. Our working quartet of communications—surveillance, correlation, cultural transmission, and entertainment—was intended to refer to common kinds of activities which might or might not be carried out as mass communications or as private, personal communications. These activities were not synonyms for functions, which, as noted, refer to the consequences of routinely carrying out such communication activities through the institutionalized processes of mass communications.

As a preliminary step toward a functional analysis of these consequences, we presented a functional inventory of mass-communicated activities, a subject upon which we reflect in the following section.

BEYOND THE FUNCTIONAL INVENTORY

In functional analysis a distinction is made between functions and effects. Not all possible effects of mass communication are germane to the functional framework, but only those effects that are of serious consequence or significance for the system under examination, for example, the society.

Sensitivity to the distinction between mere effects and significant functions or dysfunctions is nicely illustrated in a much neglected early study of the impact of television on adolescents in Sydney, Australia (Campbell, 1962). The study employed a research design combining independent before-and-after surveys with a panel design. Two groups of 12-year-old and 15-year-old adolescents were studied in 1956, three months before the introduction of television into Sydney; in 1959 a new group of 12-year-olds was studied (three years after the introduction of television) and reinterviews were made with the original 12-year-olds (then aged 15). Data were gathered on the effects of

television on leisure activities, family relations, neighborhood relations, and ego-ideals. Our example comes from the treatment of leisure activities. The researchers report on the impact of television in reducing time spent on a variety of leisure-time activities, such as viewing films, listening to the radio, and reading. They observe that the most striking change occurred in a sharp reduction in social interaction, and they go on to speculate upon the consequences of these effects for adolescent development (Campbell, 1962: 112):

Some of these changes are unlikely to affect adolescent development, but the losses in *general neighborhood contacts* (excursions, miscellaneous activities and religion) and *social interactions* are more serious. The former is likely to make the adolescents' task of orienting to their own worlds more difficult, and, since most human development is dependent upon close social interactions with others, the latter is likely to retard maturity in almost all areas of development.

The functional inventory, presented in a three-page schema in the original essay, was intended as an aid in classifying various claims and findings about communication effects and as a device for reminding us to consider both the potentially dysfunctional and functional aspects of mass-communicated activities.

Admittedly a formal scheme (criticized by some as mechanical in its application; see Brown, 1970), the functional inventory has served its purposes well and it remains a useful heuristic device. But it has never succeeded as a paradigm for directing research about the functions of mass communication activities.

Much of the continuing debate about the macrosociological functions of mass communication takes the form of a polemic that pits opposite "functional" and "dysfunctional" outcomes. Proponents of the mass media see beneficial effects; critics dwell on the harm. An excellent summary statement of the opposing views is presented by Larsen (1960), who relates claims about the mass media to the continuing sociological concern with the problem of social order, "how society or elements therein can achieve stability amidst constant demands for adjustment and change." Larsen (1960: 24) notes that many descriptive claims about media functions deal

not so much with *whether* the media contribute to order as to the *kind of order* that emerges in a mass media oriented society, *i.e.*, does mass communication enhance social and political involvement and cultural creativity or does it induce apathy, indifference, and standardization and thus constitute a mechanism for the manipulation of the masses and the concentration of power?

Larsen concludes that this question "has been pursued mainly in terms of the activity versus the passivity potential of the media." His review of the literature examines statements about broad social effects of the mass media in terms of whether they tend to impute an *energizing* or *enervating* impact to mass communications.

Larsen's cogent summary serves precisely to illustrate the value of a functional orientation. The functional framework suggests that mass communication cannot be simply assigned one or the other broad social effect. But the theoretical framework can be extended beyond Larsen's summary question. A further theoretical orientation, and one which ought to direct future research, is *not* what kind of order mass communication facilitates, but rather to what *degree*, in what *manner*, and under what *conditions* does mass communication lead to greater (or lesser) social and political involvement?

Generalizing from this example suggests a family of related questions that serve to transform the functional inventory from a classificatory device into a source of more theoretically pertinent sociological questions. The first stage of such a programmatic approach remains, as the original inventory implied, a consideration of the possible functions and dysfunctions of some regularized mass communication activity. As an example, the institutionalized practice of transmitting news about an impending danger (e.g., flood) by means of mass media, publicly to all who are capable of receiving the message, might, on the one hand, aid in the society's survival through permitting its members, individually or in an organized manner, to escape catastrophe. On the other hand, such a broadcasting of "bad news" could be dysfunctional for the society if it led to panic, anti-social attempts at personal survival at the expense of others, and other undesirable effects. The generation of such lists of hypothetical consequences might be the product of speculation or it could be supported by research evidence that such effects occurred.

Contemporary theory and research add to the mounting inventory of alleged and/or demonstrated consequences of mass communication. To mention but a few examples, McCombs and Shaw (1972) have investigated the agenda-setting function of mass media, that is, their impact in determining for the public what seem to be the major political issues in an election campaign. Mendelsohn (1966) presents an analysis of the psychological and sociological functions of entertainment that is derived from the mass media of communication. Tichenor, Donohue and Olien (1970) have developed the hypothesis that one dysfunction of mass communicated information is an increase in the knowledge gap between various social strata in the society who are differentially likely to pay attention to these materials and to build upon prior knowledge. The list could be extended. A good review is provided by Kline (1972) and Robinson (1972).

But to settle for this type of accounting is insufficient. More critical for a sociological understanding of the functions of mass communication is consideration of the factors mentioned above. To what *degree* does mass communicated news of this sort lead to survival or to panic? In what *manner*, or by what social mechanisms are these varying consequences brought about? And under what *conditions* does mass communication lead to greater or lesser chances of organized survival or panic? Such a set of questions, hardly easily answered, point to new directions for research about the various functions and dysfunctions of mass-communicated surveillance, correlation, cultural transmission, and entertainment—as partially itemized in the functional inventory.

FORMULATING HYPOTHESES ABOUT COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

A final use of functional theory suggested in the original article aimed at the functional analysis of mass communications themselves as systems. The focus here is to select some regularized feature of communications and to attempt to understand its existence and persistence in terms of the functions (significant consequences) that it has for the communication system of which it is a part. This section of the original paper was couched in terms of directions for the formulation and phrasing of hypotheses and propositions in functional terms, and supplied as an example a hypothetical analysis of the functions of mass communicated surveillance (news) for the "normal" operation of individuals in today's complex world. This hypothetical analysis was followed by some suggested strategies for research upon the problem. It seems significant now, in hindsight, that the article sought the "easy way out" by supplying an example of functional analysis on the level of the *individual*. It remained for De Fleur (1970) to arrive independently at a clear and insightful example of the application of this functional approach to the analysis of mass communication as a *social system*.

De Fleur applies functional analysis to explain the persistence of "low-taste" content in the mass media despite its opposition by prestigious critics. He arrives at the conclusion that

the function of what we have called low-taste content is to maintain the financial equilibrium of a *deeply institutionalized social system which is tightly integrated with the whole of the American economic institution*. The probability that our system of mass communication in this respect can be drastically altered by the occasional outbursts of critics seems small indeed [p. 171].

Other examples of a functional analysis of the mass media as social systems are hard to find. Inkeles' (1950, 1968) descriptive analysis of the Soviet system of mass communication is an outstanding exception. De Fleur's example itself is more theoretical than empirical. He notes (p. 162):

the analysis of social systems is extremely difficult. In fact, this strategy for the study of social phenomena is at the forefront of general sociological theory. . . . A functional analysis of the contribution of some item to the stability of a system, then, is a procedure that is somewhat less than completely rigorous.

He concludes, nevertheless, as we do, that this strategy offers a great deal of promise for understanding mass communication systems. And he too sees this form of functional analysis as a "strategy for inducing or locating hypotheses that can be tested empirically by comparative studies or other appropriate research methods."

USES AS FUNCTIONS VS. FUNCTIONS OF USES

Years have blurred (or else the initial formulations were inadequately sharp) the distinctions between several concepts central to a functional approach to the study of mass communications. Functions, as intended in the theoretical paradigm presented many years ago, referred to the *consequences* of certain routine, regular and standardized components of communications. As such, they were distinct from the intended effects, or purposes, of the communicator and from the intended use or motivations of the receiver. Thus, a network might intend that a television situation comedy attract a large number of viewers in order to provide an audience for the sale of its sponsor's products; but the program might have the consequence (among others) of making bigotry a socially acceptable topic for public observation, discussion, and laughter. Or a viewer might turn to televised entertainment of that type for the purpose of relaxation, but continued exposure to such a program might have the consequence of reducing his prejudice against minorities.

Although we do not regard needs as functions, it is possible to conceive of the satisfaction of felt needs as functional. That is, one consequence of a communication activity might be the satisfaction of certain users' needs. Such needs may be satisfied through the use of mass media or through other modes of communication. This multi-source range of functional alternatives for the satisfaction of human needs has been recognized most dramatically in the recent study by Katz, Gurevitch and Haas (1973).

Starting with a list of 35 social and psychological needs expected to be satisfied by exposure to the mass media, the researchers asked a cross-section of Israeli adults to specify how much each of five mass media (books, cinema, newspapers, radio, and television) helped to satisfy each need. In addition, each respondent was asked to say what else was more helpful to him than the media in satisfying each need. The results from this open-ended question were quite surprising. In all instances a majority of the respondents could nominate some non-media source that better served the particular need. The greatest dependence on the mass media appeared in satisfaction of the need to know what the world thinks about us (i.e., Israelis) and the need to strengthen knowledge, information, and understanding of sociopolitical matters. But even among these, as the authors note, "other sources of gratification taken together equal the mass media in importance." Among the several non-media sources of gratification specified, interpersonal communications (with friends, family, lectures) emerged most important. Katz, Gurevitch and Haas (1973: 180) observe that

media-related needs are not, by and large, generated by the media. Most predate the emergence of the media and, properly, ought to be viewed within the wider range of human needs. As such, they have always been, and remain, satisfied in a variety of ways, most quite unrelated to the mass media. The surprising thing is to realize the extent and range of the media's encroachment on the "older" ways of satisfying social and psychological needs.

This study is of singular significance in sharpening our perspective on the relative importance of each of several mass media, mass communications in total, and interpersonal modes of communication as functional alternatives for meeting an individual's communications needs. Nevertheless, it brings us only to the edge of a tantalizing next order of theoretical question, namely, what are the functions of satisfying such needs regularly by the use of the mass media (or alternatives)? To put it another way, the "uses and gratifications" tradition in research tells us much about the extent to which certain personal needs are being fulfilled by one or another of the communications media. The next step is to ask, what are the social consequences of having these needs of individuals fulfilled in this manner rather than in some other way?

Such questions are not easily answered, even in one's imagination, let alone through rigorous research. The sociological value of strategic research on the uses of various media of communication and the gratifications and other consequences of such uses was forecast by Katz (1959) and Blumler (1964). It is entirely possible that other papers in the current volume contain examples precisely on this point. But if they do not, it seems singularly appropriate that this volume at long last brings together the challenge of the two orientations toward communication explicitly formulated by Katz and Blumler, on the one hand, and by myself on the other, some 15 years ago. I feel confident that these two editors of the current volume share with me the hope that at least some of our readers will be stimulated to join us in the exciting task of combining the two perspectives in future research on the role of mass communications and interpersonal communications in society.

NOTES

1. A functional perspective also reminds us of the need for research on the consequences which other social institutions have for mass communication. What, for example, are the functional requirements for the existence and operation of mass communication in a society? We need to consider not only the material resources and technology necessary for mass communication but also the social, economic, political, and other organizational arrangements required. And we need studies of the effects of changes in social, governmental, economic, and other institutional areas upon the nature and operations of the communication system. These problems, however, cannot be explored in the current essay.

2. For a recent study of television and politics that combines a concern about the political consequences of mass communication with a consideration for the gratifications of the audience see Blumler and McQuail (1969).

3. Clues to the functions normally performed by mass communication also may come through research during moments of social crisis in which the media are fully operative but the public is sensitized to their importance because of the crisis. Examples of such social crises are political assassinations, urban riots, commodity shortages, and episodes of a suspected "killer at large" in a community.

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