

# Analysis of Bullet Screen Culture from the Perspective of Uses and Gratifications Theory

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## Abstract

The influence of media on the audience has become the focus of contemporary communication studies, which should be attributed to the popularity of the 'uses and gratifications' theory to a certain extent. With the coming of the era of mobile Internet, uses and gratifications theory got more practical application, the current academic circles on the uses and gratifications research is more focused on the Internet, these days many video websites in order to strengthen the audience participatory interaction, barrage as a new form of comments become the standard of video websites. As a time-labeled communication mode, 'Bullet subtitles' culture can meet the needs of video users for self-identification as well as self-expression, which is a typical embodiment of the 'uses and gratifications' theory in the Internet era. This paper aims to analyze the audience participation behavior in the process of using bullet screen by analyzing the group characteristics of bullet screen and studying the use and gratifications of bullet screen.

## Keywords

Communication; Barrage; Uses and Gratifications Theory; Audience Participation.

## 1. Introduction

In the 1960s, E·Katz, an American sociologist, proposed and summarized the theory of uses and gratifications in his paper 'Individual's Use of Mass Communication'. For the first time, it shifted communication research from the perspective of communicators to that of audiences, paying more attention to the information that audiences want from the media and their feedback to the media after obtaining the information. It studied the audiences in communication from the perspective of social satisfaction and psychological needs. It is also one of the important viewpoints of the theory of the effect of mass communication to investigate the psychological and behavioral effects of mass communication on human beings by analyzing the audience's motivation and demand for media use. The theory holds that the audience also has the right to use and choose the media and emphasizes the restrictive role of the audience's demand on media communication.

'Bullet screen' originated in Japan and was first applied in the field of website video. It is a new way of interaction between users in the new media era. Different from the traditional text comments, the interaction based on bullet screen can satisfy the novelty psychology of video users as well as their entertainment needs. Based on the bullet screen, video users can anonymously and instantly express their own views or emotions, and the content can be related to the video content, or related to the bullet screen content posted by others, or completely unrelated content. Niconico, which was launched in Japan in 2006, is the forerunner of bullet screen video websites.

The successful operation of bullet scree website has triggered the testing of domestic Internet video field. At present, most of the online live streaming websites and clients in China have opened the function of bullet screen. The 'spectator' experience shaped by bullet screen can

meet the needs of video users for self-identification as well as self-expression. This paper aims to analyze the audience participation behavior in the process of using bullet screen by analyzing the group characteristics of bullet screen and studying the use and full capacity of bullet screen.

## **2. Propagation Characteristics of Bullet Screen Video**

As the Internet makes more and more video websites appear in the public eye, bullet screen, as a new form of comment, has become the standard of major video websites in order to strengthen audience participatory interaction. As a tool for instant interaction, bullet screen transforms the audience's instant thoughts into visual text with short text codes and rolling presentation, which is reflected in the current video screen. Its introduction has caused the alienation of traditional viewing relations: the audience has changed from passive viewers to active participants, and the central mode of 'transmission and reception' has been eliminated. The video meta-text transforms into an open discourse square, in which the audience integrates themselves and their surrounding information and generates a meaning dimension that the video text itself does not have. Like traditional network video, bullet screen video satisfies people's entertainment needs through the expression of images and image interpretation. Meanwhile, it can also see the comments of netizens who are watching the same program on the video screen, realizing instant online interaction and changing the single watching behavior of the audience in the past video programs.

### **2.1. Anonymous Participatory Interaction**

The innovative form of 'online video + real-time bullet screen' provides users with a platform for real-time interaction and improves user stickiness through high participation. Compared with the delayed feedback and linear communication mode of traditional media such as radio, TV and film, the application of bullet screen realizes the interactive demand of users for immediate online interaction and open self-expression. Such individual expression is transformed into group interaction through bullet screen technology, and a network participation culture is constructed. The same video content will attract users with similar interests, and the anonymous way of publishing allows users to express more authentic opinions.

### **2.2. Zero Distance in Space and Time**

The instantaneity of bullet screen provides a good environment for users to participate in the interaction. As the secondary creation and editing of video content, bullet screen has the synchronous characteristics, and users in different regions and Spaces can see the same comment content at the same time, realizing the zero-distance communication in time and space. The comment dialog box below or in the sidebar of the bullet screen video is more interactive and visual, bringing the close combination of the content of the bullet screen and the user's interest, while the immediacy activates the user's potential communication desire such as interest discussion and expression impulse.

### **2.3. An Outlet for Fragmentary Emotions**

Now some researchers held this position: barrage as a typical "rapid spike" new media, its function is not that convey information, but in "through difference to video text content, dismantling the implication of the video itself, in the process of distortion, deconstruction and reconstruction construction ritual carnival", achieve the satisfaction of users psychological demands, express the moment of viewing emotions. The comment object of bullet screen is the immediate video content rather than the whole video. With the continuous appearance of images, the audience's attention is also rapidly moved from this moment to the next moment with the progress of the video content, and the bullet screen of the last moment will lose its

context in the next video picture. Therefore, the short and quick form of bullet commentary makes it unsuitable for deep or logical language.

### **3. Psychological Needs of Users to Use Bullet Screen**

In 1974, E·Katz proposed the basic model of the process of uses and gratifications, saying that people contact media to satisfy their own needs, which are related to social and psychological factors. The technological empowerment of the barrage has given everyone a microphone and everyone is eager to have a voice. In bullet-screen video websites, users can express their opinions, vent their emotions and seek recognition through bullet-screen, so as to achieve self-satisfaction in the group.

#### **3.1. Meet Users' Needs for Social Expression**

In order to meet the needs of the audience, traditional TV media constantly change their models, from SMS interaction to the opening of Weibo and wechat. Although there are more social ways, they still have certain limitations because they are separated from video. Video as a medium, its social sex are often indirect, the traditional video website only have very low social attribute, is simply the score the discussion and the exchange cannot meet the social needs of people, in the video website, comments area generally placed in the video below, the audience can also comment on the interaction, but too much easy to be submerged, Moreover, comments are impossible to see in full screen, which reduces the interaction between viewers, and the appearance of the bullet screen undoubtedly makes up for this shortcoming.

#### **3.2. Meet User's Needs for Emotional Resonance**

Barrage is assigned to the audience can not only encourage participation, but also the originally closed video media as a public place is open to users, built the medium of interaction to create atmosphere, let the recipients as content contributors, at the same time to find their own organization, this is equivalent to provide a social platform, create a virtual hall for users to watch the video together. When multiple users are interested in the same content and send 'bullet screen' interactions in real time, it feels like many people sitting around a room chatting together. This largely eliminates the loneliness of watching videos alone.

#### **3.3. Meet User's Needs for Knowledge**

In the era of integrated media in which everyone is a communicator, we media has exerted unprecedented influence. All kinds of social media are highly permeated in people's lives, and the scope of people's activities is gradually reduced. More and more people like to carry out social circle on the Internet, especially the young people who are 'homebodies'. The Internet has become the only social platform for these young people. As a brand new way of cultural communication, bullet screen creates an opportunity for people to gather together and form a circle to express their thoughts, and the information contained in it also brings us high data value.

#### **3.4. Meet User's Needs for Personalized Pursuit**

People like to chase new phenomena and individuation in the network, and the appearance of bullet screen satisfies their curiosity. Bullet screen video originated from Niconico in Japan, and its audience is ACG culture lovers. Its position in the website can be called the paradise of 'otaku'. After bullet screen video was introduced into China, this kind of website users are called 'bullet screen clan'. In the eyes of the "bullets" clan, they are from the second world, while the reality is the third world, so their behavior is quite 'alternative' color. 'Bullet subtitles' users gradually form a subcultural language in the process of communication. When discussing a particular topic, users will use some words with specific meanings. They can put themselves in it and enjoy

themselves. This kind of alternative language and behavior satisfy the audience's pursuit of alternative and personalized.

#### **4. The Development Trend of Bullet Screen Video Driven by User Demand**

With the advent of the digital era, the competition in the media field is more intense, making media products pay more attention to the needs of the audience. As the first video website in China to introduce 'bullet subtitles', AcFun has attracted a lot of fans by providing users with the function of leaving messages on videos with subtitles, which has officially brought China into the 'bullet subtitles' trend. The features of instant comment, simultaneous sharing and interactive communication cater to the high standard of entertainment demand of the current audience.

##### **4.1. Diversification of Application Fields**

In today's fast-paced social environment, people are living in a fast pace and under great pressure, and have an increasingly strong demand for media entertainment. Watching TV dramas and movies is an important way for people to seek psychological relaxation. However, traditional watching programs is only limited to a personal behavior, which makes it difficult to connect and resonate with others. In addition, the delayed feedback and interaction of traditional media make people long for communication and psychological satisfaction when watching programs. 'Bullet subtitles' just meets people's demand. People praise or 'joke' together, which is liked by more and more audiences.

##### **4.2. Go from Small to Large**

'Bullet subtitles' was introduced into China in 2008, and was initially only used in some special video websites. The audience was only fans of ACG culture, so it was a niche video playing function. Until 2012, major domestic network video operators began to explore this interactive mode, and its application scope and audience began to gradually expand. If in video websites, bullet screen is exclusive to young people, then bullet screen in cinemas and live TV has undoubtedly become a shared interactive technology of the public. Whether the films 'The Legend of Qin' and 'Tiny Times 3' introduced the bullet screen into cinemas, or hunan SATELLITE TV's interactive mode of bullet screen during the live broadcast of the evening party, both gained positive feedback from users and attracted the attention and hot comments from all walks of life. Cinema and TV are not only for young people, but also for the popularization of bullet screen, which covers multiple age groups. With the wide application of bullet screen in the media field, its audience will gradually expand. Tencent, the official partner of Boao Conference in 2016, also used bullet screen in the live video.

##### **4.3. Promoting Multiple Benefits**

Advertising income is the economic pillar for media to maintain survival and seek development. If media want to survive, they need to attract advertisers with audiences. However, bullet screen is entering the life of the public, which can arouse people's curiosity and freshness. Before the release of the 'Legend of Qin' and 'Tiny Times 3', the function of 'bullet screen' became a good publicity stunt for the film, successfully attracting a large number of audiences to experience the 'bullet screen movie', which not only improved the box office of the film, but also brought considerable income to the cinema due to the increase of passenger flow. In addition, the interaction and emotional release of the audience during the movie also greatly satisfied their own entertainment needs. The same is true for the use of bullet screen on websites and TELEVISIONS. Under this user-participatory interactive economic industry chain, the audience, bullet screen and advertisers can all take what they need and benefit multiple parties.

#### 4.4. Gradually Improved Management

Strengthening content management should be an important link in the future development of bullet-screen video. There are still some problems in the current bullet-screen video system.

##### 4.4.1. Bullet Screen Mask Affects Viewing

Although the bullet screen can be synchronized in time, the more exciting and important the plot, the more serious the text coverage, affecting the viewing effect. Hunan satellite TV in the golden eagle festival interconnected celebration party USES the barrage live interactive mode, but there is no use in the party direct seeding barrage, reason is that the technical level is limited, barrage of the image content is audited Delay release, after the barrage movie 'small age 3' in the show, many pictures are not only complete coverage of text, even appeared the harmful information review, It affects the viewing effect.

##### 4.4.2. Easy to 'Spiral of Silence'

When voices contrary to the mainstream opinions appear in the barrage, they are often drowned in a large number of mainstream barrage, or attacked by the newcomers, and the minority voices will gradually disappear in the subsequent content due to the lack of channels for refutation and discussion, resulting in the phenomenon of 'spiral of silence'.

The uncontrolled publication of bullet screen content is related to the lack of technical level of bullet screen and improper expression of users. In the face of such anomie, on the one hand, professional technical operation personnel should be trained to improve the management level of bullet screen video. On the other hand, it is necessary to strengthen the monitoring of harmful information, shield or prohibit users who publish harmful information, and curb harmful information from appearing in live broadcast content. With the development of Internet technology and media convergence With the improvement of the level, the management of bullet screen technology will be more standardized and scientific, so as to enhance users' audio-visual experience with a healthy ecology.

### 5. Conclusion

Grasping the needs of the audience is the magic weapon for the success of the current media, and more importantly, it is bold innovation to explore and meet the needs of the audience to the maximum extent. From the perspective of the uses and gratifications theory, bullet screen video not only meets the audience's demand for social tools, but also meets the audience's emotional appeal and knowledge demand.

However, it should be noted that there are many drawbacks in the bullet-screen technology. How to break through these difficulties, realize the industrialization development of bullet-screen video and foster a healthy market environment are the urgent problems to be solved at present. Of course, the uses and gratifications theory also has certain limitations, such as: exaggerated audience's initiative; Ignoring the restriction of social environment; Separation from media production process and social system; It is difficult to fully reveal the social relationship between audience and media; Too much emphasis on psychological factors and so on.

The emergence and popularity of bullet screen culture is the result of the joint influence of social environment, cultural integration, Internet technology and other aspects. Reviewing the development process of bullet screen culture in China, high-quality interactive experience makes bullet screen culture gradually known and welcomed by the public. Even so, for the mainstream group, bullet screen is still a new thing on the Internet, and bullet screen culture still belongs to the social subculture. Under the influence of commercial development, political power management and mainstream culture, bullet screen culture will undergo significant

changes in the future. There is still a long way to go before it can be fully recognized by mainstream culture and mainstream groups.

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