The Role of Emotion in Television Cognition and Perception

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INTRODUCTION:

Emotional experiences are experiences of changes in the body (Damasio, 1994) and are a form of perception that unifies the body, the mind, and the environment (Prinz, 2004). This paper will elaborate on the emotional manipulation that is necessary to optimize television message memory and audience enjoyment. In this paper, I will discuss the philosophy of emotion as it relates to limited capacity theory, physiological assessment, and valence.

These areas combine to form a structure for comprehending the intricate relationship between emotion and television message design. Humans are hard-wired to respond to the natural environment in a certain way (Lang, Dhillon, & Dong, 1995). By hard-wired, I mean that the human brain is designed to interpret images as real, and the brain cannot discriminate between mediated images and real life images. So, for example, when faced with a threat on television, the body makes a physiological response to posture it for fight or flight.

Televised media came late on the evolutionary cycle, so we react to televised media the same way we do to a real-world event. Some people have a fear of snakes and the mere image of one on television can cause them to gasp, panic, or run out of the room even though the image is not going to come out of the television and cause them any harm. In the past, communication theories tended to emphasize rational thinking, without acknowledging how emotion influences message processing (Dillard & Wilson, 1993).

Emotion plays a vital role in the way audience members process television messages. In order for television message designers to achieve desired effects, they must understand how the brain will process the message and lead the audience to behave in the intended fashion. There are philosophical concepts than can help guide television message producers in employing the proper structural features that will invoke audience response.

EMOTION AND THE LIMITED CAPACITY MODEL.

Understanding how structural features interact can help television message designers optimize timing of events so that users/audiences remain aware of information that is important for the users/audience to successfully process television messages. An emotionally salient stimulus is going to prevail in getting attention in any circumstance because the ultimate goal of every organism is that of survival. (Survival also includes self-sacrifice that attempts to ensure one's genes make it in to future generations.) Depending on how emotionally aroused an organism is impacts how it processes environmental information.

PHYSIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF EMOTION.

Audience emotional state while viewing televised message can be evaluated to determine if desired effects are being achieved. Physiological measures (such as heart rate, skin conductance, brain activation, facial muscle electromyography and eye blink) can be used to investigate individual emotional responses. They can reveal audience attention, arousal, and if they are responding positively or negatively toward specific televised message messages. Physiological measures are able to capture slight indicators that report whether the stimuli are arousing, getting attention, or positive or negative (Lang, et al., 1995).

VALENCE.

Valence is defined as how positive or negative an organism feels toward a stimulus. Prinz (2004) argues that all emotions are valent and that some emotions may be experienced positively and negatively concurrently. Valence is important to television message production because an individuals ability to process and remember a message is influenced by how positive or how negative they feel toward the stimuli. Negative stimuli has the propensity to influence individuals withdraw, and positive stimuli have an opposite effect, having the propensity to influence approach. Being aware of the nature of the target audience will help design messages that meet producer and audience goals.

References

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