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Rethinking Reception: Epistemological Shifts from Literary Studies to Media Research

إعادة التفكير في مفهوم التلقي: تحولات إبستمولوجية من الدراسات الأدبية إلى البحوث الإعلامية

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## Rethinking Reception: Epistemological Shifts from Literary Studies to Media Research

إعادة التفكير في مفهوم التلقي: تحولات إبستمولوجية من الدراسات الأدبية إلى البحوث  
الإعلامية

### Repensée de la réception : mutations épistémologiques des études littéraires à la recherche médiatique

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#### Introduction

The concept of reception occupies a central place in contemporary critical theory, bridging literary and artistic discourses. Traditionally rooted in literary studies, particularly narrative forms such as the novel, reception theory has since expanded to encompass various modes of artistic expression, including theatre. This expansion is grounded in the recognition that the recipient—whether reader, listener, or spectator—is not a passive receiver of content but an active co-creator of meaning.

In the context of theatre, this participatory role becomes even more explicit. The performative nature of dramatic works calls for immediate and embodied engagement from the audience, whose interpretive responses help shape the overall experience of the performance. This dynamic is echoed in the work of theorists such as Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, and Patrice Pavis, who have explored the multiple ways in which a recipient constructs meaning through interaction with a text or performance. The relationship between the artistic product and the recipient is thus fundamental and multidimensional—at once aesthetic, cognitive, and emotional.

One particularly influential notion in this regard is Jauss's concept of the "horizon of expectation," which refers to the interpretive framework an audience brings to a work based on their historical, cultural, and aesthetic background. This horizon is not fixed ; it evolves over time and differs from one social group to another. While originally applied to literary texts, the concept proves especially relevant to theatrical reception. In contemporary theatre, some productions deliberately challenge or "break" the horizon of expectation to provoke new forms of engagement. For instance, performances by Mohamed Charchal eliminate verbal language altogether and confront the audience directly, relying solely on embodied expression. Such strategies force the spectator out of passive reception and into a state of immediate interpretive participation, thereby redefining both the structure and temporality of the reception process.

This study therefore aims to analyze the role of the recipient in both literature and theatre through a comparative lens, while questioning whether the act of reception functions similarly across genres or reflects specific mechanisms unique to each form. Through this inquiry, we seek to clarify the critical stakes involved in understanding how aesthetic experiences are constructed and received in contemporary contexts.

## 1. Literature Review

The term “reception” is derived from the Latin verb *Recipere*, meaning “to receive” and “to accept.” It is a relatively modern concept in literary criticism, adopted by German reception theory, which focused on the historical dimension of the reception process. Later, Anglo-Saxon scholars applied it to linguistics, media, and the arts. The concept of reception has taken on various meanings throughout its evolution.

### 1.1. Receiving Means Reading

The act of reading, central to literary theory and communication studies alike, is increasingly understood as an interactive, multi-stage process. Far from being a passive decoding of written symbols, reading is shaped by cultural, intellectual, and emotional frameworks that guide interpretation and engagement.

In this context, theorists such as Siza Qasim have described reading as a dynamic progression. Qasim compares it to a spiral staircase, ascending through various interpretive levels :

“The journey begins on the first level, which encompasses different types of signs, progresses to the second level, where the language unique to each text is addressed, and then reaches the third level, which focuses on the interpretation and explanation of the text. The final, highest level represents comprehension, where the text is fully understood or transformed into a personal experience.”  
(Makhlouf Boukrouh, 2011, p. 21)

This view reflects the broader consensus that reading involves an evolving process of decoding signs and constructing meaning. Communication and media studies echo this model, defining reception as a form of interpretive decoding that not only registers meaning but also transforms it through personal reflection. It is through this interaction that reception transcends comprehension and enters the realm of active intellectual production.

A further distinction has been made between non-productive reading—which remains unstructured and uncritical—and productive reading, which evolves into critical or creative discourse and often results in new texts or interpretations. This distinction highlights the reader’s varying degrees of involvement in the construction of meaning.

Reception theorists working in the Arab world have similarly emphasized reading as an act of symbolic interpretation. In his dictionary, Hajazi Samir Saeed defines reading in this tradition as :

“A concept that refers to interpreting textual signs, considering them symbolic elements expressing the text and the civilization in which the text originated or appeared.”(Hajazi Samir Saeed, 2001, p. 66)

Understanding these symbolic signs requires awareness of the cultural and historical environment in which a text was produced. Thus, reading is both a linguistic and a cultural act, shaped by the reader's interpretive background.

This idea is reinforced by Arab critics such as Jaous and Al-Hamdani, who explore the interactive and bidirectional nature of reception. According to Al-Hamdani :

“An act of reading that necessitates cognitive engagement, wherein the reader actively interacts with the material. This aesthetic concept of reception comprises two dimensions : reactive and active. This two-sided process involves the influence exerted by the literary work on the reader, as well as the reader's response to or reception of that work.” (Cited in Boukhel Lakhdar, 2011/2012, p. 47)

This conception leads to a theory of **positive reception**, wherein the act of reading generates new interpretations through the dual forces of influence and response. As Hans Robert Jauss suggests :

“With each new reading, a fresh, productive interpretation emerges, grounded in either textual or contextual elements.” (Jauss, 2004, p. 101)

Wolfgang Iser articulates a foundational premise of reception theory through his model of dual interaction. He describes reception as the process of meaning generation produced through the interplay of two poles : the text, or “artistic pole,” and the reader, the “aesthetic pole.” Within this framework, the reader assumes multiple critical roles : interpreting, shaping, and ultimately co-constructing meaning alongside the text.

Further elaboration of this process has been proposed by Yousef and Aizer, who distinguish three stages of reception :

1. Pre-reception : shaped by the reader's expectations and previous experience before encountering the text.
2. Reception : the moment of reading and interpretive engagement.
3. Reception outcome : the emotional and cognitive responses resulting from the reading experience.

As Boukhel Lakhdar notes :

“The reader can experience a range of emotions and feelings, referred to as the chemistry of reception.” (Boukhel Lakhdar, 2011/2012, p. 47)

Ultimately, reception is best defined as :

“A mental activity that enables the reader to extract meaning from the text in a way that reflects their intellectual, cultural, and psychological background. Therefore, the role of the reader extends beyond merely revealing meaning to actively participating in its invention and construction.” (Synthesis of authors cited)

This understanding underscores the fact that reading is not merely a process of interpretation but one of aesthetic and intellectual collaboration.

## 1.2 Reception in Ancient Greek Thought

The notion of reception has deep historical roots, tracing back to the philosophical inquiries of Ancient Greece. Early Greek thinkers explored how individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to artistic and rhetorical expression, laying the groundwork for many modern concepts in reception theory.

Among the Sophists, **Protagoras** is particularly notable for his emphasis on subjectivity in perception and meaning-making. He argued that knowledge is grounded in sensory perception, but that the senses are inherently relative to the self:

“Sensory perception serves as the foundation of knowledge. However, not all senses contribute equally; rather, it is the senses in relation to the self that matter. This means that sensory experiences do not provide an objective view of reality; instead, they are inherently subjective. What one perceives as absolutely true through their senses may not be perceived in the same way by others. Consequently, the senses can yield different interpretations each time. Man is the measure of all things.” (Nadim Odeh Khader, 1997, p. 21)

In this view, reception is contingent on individual perception, making meaning highly variable and personalized.

Meanwhile, Longinus introduced a more transcendental understanding of reception through his theory of the sublime. Sublimity, for him, reflects not just rhetorical skill but a capacity to evoke powerful emotional and imaginative responses in the recipient:

“Sublimity is a form of transcendence and superiority in language, identifying it as a hallmark of exceptional poets and prose writers. These writers possess the remarkable ability to captivate the reader’s consciousness, transporting them into realms of vivid imagination through the enchanting power of their words. Sublimity is not just a singular quality but rather a special aesthetic value that invites multiple interpretations and reactions from the audience.” (Nadim Odeh Khader, 1997, p. 51)

This conception emphasizes the emotional and interpretive engagement of the audience as central to the artistic experience.

Aristotle, for his part, conceptualized reception through the dual notions of *catharsis* and *mimesis*. In *Poetics*, he associates catharsis with a form of emotional purification:

“This term has its origins in medical vocabulary, denoting processes of purification, cleansing, and discharge, both physically and emotionally.” (Makhlouf Boukrouh, 2011, p. 27)

The act of watching tragedy or comedy, according to Aristotle, enables the audience to release harmful emotions, reaffirming the therapeutic and participatory power of reception. This process is tightly linked to *mimesis*, or artistic imitation, which he defines as :

“A symbolic and imaginary world that leads to purification from harmful emotions. This noble purpose can only be achieved by achieving impact and response in the recipient, which he always emphasizes in his views on theater (tragedy and comedy).” (Ali Bakhosh, 2006, p. 2)

In sum, classical Greek philosophy conceptualized reception as both a cognitive and affective engagement. It was seen not as passive consumption, but as a transformative process—intellectually and emotionally—through which the recipient becomes co-responsible for the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of the work.

## 2. Receiving in Literary Studies

### 2.1 Reception Theory

Reception theory represents a major shift in literary studies, marking a move away from author- and text-centered analysis toward an emphasis on the reader's active role in constructing meaning. This theoretical evolution, largely shaped by the works of Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, frames reading as an aesthetic experience composed of three interdependent dimensions : receptive, purifying, and communicative.

The receptive dimension refers to the reader's critical engagement with the text. Rather than passively consuming content, readers interact dynamically with narrative elements—characters, themes, and language—through their own experiential and cultural lenses. This notion aligns with reader-response criticism, which asserts that each reading produces a unique interpretation influenced by the reader's background, values, and expectations.

The purifying dimension builds on the Aristotelian concept of catharsis. Literature becomes a therapeutic space where readers confront emotions and psychological tensions in a safe and symbolic context. This emotional engagement fosters empathy, self-awareness, and insight. In fictional narratives, readers often find resolution, reflection, or relief by resonating with the dilemmas and emotional journeys of characters.

The communicative dimension situates literature within a broader socio-cultural framework. Texts do not exist in isolation ; they invite dialogue with historical, ideological, and ethical contexts. Readers are not only interpreters but also evaluators of meaning, assessing how a literary work affirms or challenges dominant cultural narratives.

At the foundation of reception theory lies Hans Robert Jauss's concept of the *horizon of expectation* (*Erwartungshorizont*), which refers to the interpretive framework a reader brings to a text, shaped by their familiarity with genres, prior reading experiences, and cultural knowledge. This framework is not fixed ; it evolves over time, allowing literature to generate new meanings across historical contexts.

“Understanding always marks the beginning of interpretation, making interpretation the apparent form of understanding, followed by the realization that contributes to the formulation of meaning.” (Hans Robert Jauss)

Jauss’s early writings—including his 1967 lecture “*The History of Literature Has Not Been Studied*” and his 1970 essay “*Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory*”—called for a reconceptualization of literary history centered on the reader’s role. Rather than focusing on textual form or authorial intention, Jauss proposed a model of meaning-making grounded in three successive acts : understanding, interpretation, and application.

He also introduced the idea of esthetic distance, the gap between a reader’s expectations and the actual experience of the text. This distance can reveal how a work either satisfies, frustrates, or transforms prevailing norms and aesthetic values. Audience reactions and critical reception thus become essential to evaluating a literary work’s impact.

Wolfgang Iser, meanwhile, emphasizes the dual structure of reception, involving an interaction between the *artistic pole* (the text) and the *aesthetic pole* (the reader). For Iser, meaning is not embedded in the text itself but arises through the reader’s imaginative and interpretive activity. Reading is a collaborative process in which the recipient fills in textual gaps and generates significance.

Reception theorists collectively challenge the structuralist claim that meaning is intrinsic to form. Instead, they assert that meaning is co-constructed through a dynamic interplay between text and reader—an exchange shaped by cultural, emotional, and historical conditions. In this view, literature is no longer a static object but a living phenomenon that changes with each act of reception.

Thus, reception theory offers a holistic perspective on literary engagement, incorporating aesthetic, psychological, and cultural dimensions. It positions the reader not as a passive observer but as a co-creator of meaning, central to the unfolding dialogue between literature and society.

## 2.2 Wolfgang Iser’s Key Contributions

Wolfgang Iser’s work provides a crucial complement to Hans Robert Jauss’s foundational contributions to reception theory. Like Jauss, Iser rejects the structuralist view that meaning is confined to the text, proposing instead a dialectical model of reading in which meaning is co-produced by the interaction between the text and the reader.

Central to Iser’s framework is the notion that a literary work is not fully realized until it is read. The act of reading activates the latent possibilities embedded within the text, and meaning emerges not as a fixed property but as a product of continuous negotiation between the written material and the reader’s interpretive responses. As Iser puts it, the text exists “between” the printed words and the reader’s internal experience.



One of Iser's most influential ideas is the concept of the "implied reader"—a theoretical figure embedded within the structure of the text itself. This model reader represents the anticipated responses, assumptions, and interpretive strategies expected by the text. The implied reader enables scholars to trace how texts guide, constrain, or invite interpretation through textual cues and narrative design.

Iser also introduces the concept of "wandering viewpoint", which explains how readers navigate textual space through shifting perspectives as they progress through a narrative. This movement is crucial for accessing the deeper layers of theme and meaning in a literary work.

Ultimately, Iser emphasizes that the reader's subjectivity is not a hindrance to interpretation but an essential element. Through engagement, hesitation, projection, and reflection, the reader co-constructs the work's meaning. Literature, in Iser's view, is not a self-contained object but an evolving experience shaped by the reader's involvement.

### **2.3 Dr. Nazem Al-Awda's Summary of Reception Theory Principles**

Dr. Nazem Al-Awda offers a valuable synthesis of reception theory, drawing together key principles that illuminate the active and historically situated role of the reader in shaping literary meaning.

He first emphasizes the importance of literary engagement, noting that literature acquires its full significance only through the act of reading. The text becomes a site of inquiry where the reader brings personal questions, expectations, and interpretive energy, transforming the literary object into a participatory process.

Building on this, Al-Awda addresses the presence of implicit references and contextual expectations in literary works. Readers approach texts equipped with interpretive habits shaped by prior reading experiences and exposure to literary conventions. Jauss's concept of the horizon of expectation helps explain how these cognitive frames influence initial comprehension and subsequent interpretation.

Al-Awda also foregrounds the historical responsiveness of literature. Texts do not operate in a vacuum ; they resonate with the cultural, political, and emotional realities of their time. As such, each reading becomes an encounter between a historically situated audience and a historically situated work.

This leads to what Al-Awda calls the aesthetics of reception, the idea that every literary work must be understood within a historical and literary continuum. No text is isolated ; each is shaped by a network of genre conventions, thematic inheritances, and stylistic traditions that it may either continue or subvert.

Furthermore, Al-Awda underscores the value of historical references in deepening interpretation. Understanding the conditions under which a text was produced—its political climate, intellectual trends, and social concerns—enhances the reader's ability to appreciate its significance and critique its implications.

Finally, Al-Awda argues for seeing literature as part of general history. Beyond reflecting the times, literature actively shapes social consciousness, preserves collective

memory, and participates in cultural transformation. Its aesthetic forms become vehicles for historical awareness and ethical engagement.

Together, these principles form a comprehensive interpretive framework. Al-Awda's synthesis demonstrates that reception theory is not merely a model of reading but a powerful lens through which to explore the entanglements between literature, the reader, and the historical world.

### **3. The Introduction of the Concept of Receptivity into Media and Communication Sciences**

#### **3.1. Historical Foundations of Reception in Media Studies**

The integration of the concept of reception into media and communication studies emerged at the intersection of two key developments: the advancement of audience research and the evolution of media technologies. Initially, the production and circulation of cultural products—whether in literature, art, or performance—were largely restricted to privileged social classes, notably the aristocracy and bourgeoisie. The general public, constrained by limited access to education and financial resources, remained on the periphery of cultural participation.

This dynamic began to shift significantly in the 19th and 20th centuries with the advent of mass communication technologies, including the press, cinema, radio, and television. These innovations democratized access to culture, allowing new social groups to become not only consumers but also interpreters of cultural content. As Makhlouf Boukrouh notes:

“These innovations opened the field to diverse social groups, allowing not only access to cultural products but also enabling audiences to critique and comment on these works to extract their inherent meanings.” (Boukrouh, 2011, p. 65)

This transition marked a paradigm shift in audience behavior, as reception was no longer passive but became participatory, interpretive, and at times even transformative.

Alongside technological changes, several sociopolitical and economic forces contributed to the evolution of audience studies. Governmental policies, legislative frameworks, market pressures, ideological interests, and propaganda mechanisms all played roles in shaping how audiences were studied and conceptualized. In this context, Algerian scholar Ali Kassaïssa coined the phrase “Fashions of Social Science” to describe the growing influence of these intersecting forces:

“This movement, encompassing technological, political, economic, and historical dynamics, has acquired a scientific character, distancing itself from purely ideological frameworks.” (Kassaïssa, 2006–2007, p. 114)

Kassaïssa's view underscores the transformation of audience studies into a rigorous, interdisciplinary field of inquiry, no longer tethered exclusively to propaganda studies or ideological critique.

Within this evolving landscape, the concept of reception became a central focus. As audience research moved beyond early concerns about the direct effects of media, new theoretical models emerged—most notably the uses and gratifications approach and reception theory. These models acknowledged the active agency of audiences, who now selected, interpreted, and recontextualized media content based on personal, social, and cultural needs.

To understand the current challenges in reception studies, it is essential to revisit the foundations laid by earlier media research. As Boukrouh points out :

“To comprehend the current challenges associated with the study of audience and reception, it is crucial to consider all research conducted in this field over the past two decades.”(Boukrouh, 2011, p. 115)

Reception in media studies thus reflects both a technological democratization and a conceptual evolution—one that redefines the audience as a critical actor in meaning-making and cultural participation.

### **3.2. The “Pre-Scientific Stage” (Early 20th Century – 1930s)**

According to Ali Kassaïssa, the earliest phase of audience research—termed the “*pre-scientific stage*”—spanned from the early 1900s to the late 1930s. During this period, approaches to studying audience reception were largely speculative and anecdotal, lacking empirical rigor. Analyses were often based on subjective impressions or theoretical assumptions rather than systematic observation or data collection.

“Attempts to analyze the relationship between media broadcasts and audiences were characterized by subjective impressions, opinions, and theories, rather than objective analysis and facts.”  
(Boukrouh, 2011, p. 76)

In this early stage, media were viewed as powerful tools capable of directly shaping public opinion and behavior. This belief aligned with linear models of communication, in which the message originates with a sender and is passively absorbed by the audience. The audience, in such models, played a minimal interpretive role.

“This model prioritizes the sender’s role and overlooks audience engagement.”  
(Boukrouh, 2011, p. 106)

These early theories mirrored the sociopolitical context of the time, which often favored authoritarian uses of media to influence mass behavior, particularly in wartime or propaganda settings.

### **3.3. The Stage of Scientific Investigations**

A more methodologically rigorous stage of audience research began in the mid-20th century, introducing empirical tools and sociological frameworks into media studies. In this phase, scholars began to analyze how media operated within larger social and cultural systems, recognizing that audience responses were shaped by variables such as class, age, gender, and context.

One of the most notable contributions came from Paul Lazarsfeld, whose studies on media influence during the 1940 U.S. presidential election demonstrated that media effects were mediated by interpersonal relationships and pre-existing beliefs. Other studies focused on media content directed at children and adolescents, especially regarding violence and sexuality, reflecting growing concern over the societal impacts of media exposure. (Ali Kassaissa, 2012)

This phase laid the theoretical groundwork for subsequent generations of reception studies. In particular, David Morley initiated what Kassaissa refers to as the *third generation* of research, marked by its ethnographic orientation. Morley's studies investigated how different communities interpreted media texts based on cultural positioning and lived experience.

“This generation is characterized by an ethnographic approach to analyzing Internet use within diverse sociocultural environments.” (Kassaissa, 2012, p. 81)

This signaled a major epistemological shift—from studying the effects of media in isolation to analyzing media as part of complex interpretive ecosystems.

### 3.4. The Stage of “Non-Obviousness”

Kassaissa identifies a third phase in audience research, termed the “*stage of non-obviousness*”, which emerged in response to the ambivalence surrounding media influence. In the 1930s, scholars and political actors often assumed that media wielded vast and direct power over public opinion, particularly in the context of wartime propaganda and mass mobilization.

However, during the 1950s and 1960s—amid relative political stability—this perception shifted. Theories of limited media effects began to dominate, suggesting that media influence was neither uniform nor automatic but filtered through personal and social mediators. When international tensions resurfaced in the 1970s, academic interest returned to audience interpretation and agency.

This renewed attention led to the rise of the uses and gratifications approach, which reframed the central research question : instead of asking “*What do media do to people ?*”, scholars began asking “*What do people do with media ?*” This shift emphasized individual motivations and media choices shaped by specific needs.

In tandem, newer paradigms emphasized the symbolic and sociocultural **dimensions** of reception. Media consumption was seen not merely as exposure to messages but as an interpretive act situated in a particular social world.

“This perspective emphasized the cultural, symbolic, and sociological dimensions of the phenomenon of media reception.” (Boukrouh, 2011, p. 107)

This transition was marked by a conceptual move from the Message–Effect (M–E) model—focused on how media messages impact audiences—to the Message–

Reception (M–R) model, which foregrounds the role of the audience in constructing meaning. Two influential models embody this evolution :

- Elihu Katz's *uses and gratifications* model, which focuses on individual media uses based on psychological and social needs.
- David Morley's interaction and interpretation model, which explores how meaning is shaped through cultural positioning and social identity. (Kassaïssa, 2005, p. 71)

Together, these approaches represent a major methodological and theoretical transformation. Reception is no longer viewed as a linear, top-down process, but as a dialogical interaction shaped by context, culture, and lived experience. Audience research now recognizes the active and interpretive agency of individuals, reinforcing the foundational claim of reception theory : meaning is made, not merely received.

#### 4. Factors Conducive to the Introduction of Reception Theory into Media Research

The incorporation of reception theory into media research has been shaped by a convergence of theoretical, historical, and methodological developments. Several key influences have contributed to this shift, each reinforcing the transition from passive models of audience behavior to more dynamic, interpretive frameworks.

A foundational factor was the emergence of German theories of influence and receptivity in the mid-1960s. Originating in literary studies, these theories emphasized the reader's active role in constructing meaning. By extending the concept of receptivity beyond passive consumption, they laid the groundwork for a view of the audience as an interpreter—an agent engaging with, rather than merely absorbing, media texts.

Simultaneously, the rise of realist currents redirected scholarly attention toward the biographical and historical dimensions of media production. These approaches insisted on contextualizing messages within the lived experience of the communicator, while also recognizing that audiences interpret content through their own socially and historically grounded perspectives.

Another important theoretical influence came from the textualist school in literary **criticism**, which challenged author-centered interpretations and reoriented focus toward the reader. As Kassaïssa notes :

“Textualism affirms that the meaning of a text does not exist a priori in the author's intention, but is constructed by the reader through the act of reading.” (Kassaïssa, 2005, p. 71)

This idea resonates strongly with the core assumptions of reception theory, which frame interpretation as a reader-driven process rather than one governed by textual determinism.

The critical turn of the 1980s, influenced notably by the Frankfurt School and the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, further reinforced this shift.

Reception was no longer seen as ideologically neutral, but as embedded within systems of power. These frameworks emphasized how class, ideology, and institutional structures shape both media production and audience decoding. As Kassaïssa explains :

“These critical frameworks encourage a reading of media messages not in isolation but within the power structures that produce and circulate them, thereby recognizing reception as ideologically charged.”(Kassaïssa, 2005, p. 72)

In this context, reception theory signaled a decisive break from the notion of a passive audience. Instead, audiences were now seen as agents of interpretation, capable of resisting, reinterpreting, or even ignoring intended messages. This is captured in Kassaïssa’s assertion :

“Audiences decode messages in light of their own needs, values, and cultural positioning, and may resist, reinterpret, or even ignore intended meanings.” (Kassaïssa, 2012, p. 91)

Closely related to this was the growing recognition of contextual factors as more decisive than textual features alone in shaping interpretation. As Kassaïssa elaborates :

“Contextual variables—social, psychological, and cultural—play a more decisive role in shaping interpretation than textual variables.”(Kassaïssa, 2012, pp. 91–92)

This emphasis on context prompted researchers to adopt ethnographic methods, allowing them to access how real audiences interpret media. Techniques such as in-depth interviews, direct observation, and participant observation became vital tools for understanding meaning-making in practice :

“Researchers use deep interviews, direct observation, and participant observation to uncover the meanings audiences attribute to media products.”(Kassaïssa, 2012, p. 92)

Finally, inspired by the work of David Morley, reception studies in the 1980s began to examine family dynamics and domestic viewing contexts. The focus shifted from macro-level ideological analysis to micro-level, differentiated practices of reception. As summarized from Morley :

“The concept of ‘decoding’ evolved into that of ‘viewing,’ emphasizing that family members assign different meanings to media content depending on gender roles, power dynamics, and social positions within the home.”(Synthesis from Morley, cited in Kassaïssa, 2005)

This expansion of the field solidified reception theory’s relevance beyond literary studies, affirming its value in understanding how media are interpreted within lived social realities.

In sum, the integration of reception theory into media research was not the result of a single theoretical shift, but rather a convergence of intellectual traditions and empirical needs. From the foundational influence of German literary theory to the contextual turn in cultural studies, each factor contributed to a richer, more complex understanding of how audiences engage with media. The transition from linear models to interpretive frameworks highlighted the audience's agency, while the adoption of ethnographic and sociological methods grounded theoretical insights in lived experience. As reception studies continue to evolve, they reaffirm the importance of considering cultural, historical, and interpersonal contexts in the analysis of meaning-making. This multidimensional approach not only expands the scope of media research but also aligns it more closely with contemporary inquiries into power, identity, and communication.

## Results

The comparative analysis of reception across literary and media studies reveals both significant divergences and compelling intersections, which together redefine the scope and applicability of the concept in contemporary scholarship.

Reception theory, although initially formulated within literary criticism, has undergone substantial transformation within media studies. As Makhlouf Boukrouh suggests, its adaptation to mass and digital communication reflects a paradigmatic shift :

“Although reception theory originated in literary criticism, its development in media studies has extended the concept's scope to include new communicative paradigms.” (Synthesis from Boukrouh)

In media contexts, reception is no longer framed solely in terms of decoding static texts. Rather, it is shaped by interactive, real-time, and often asynchronous engagement with multimodal content. Boukrouh affirms that :

“The development of media technologies has accelerated the evolution of reception theory, surpassing its original literary framework. What was once decoding has become viewing—active, contextual, variable.” (Boukrouh, 2011, p. 107)

This transformation has ushered in a third generation of reception studies, especially concerned with digital environments, participatory cultures, and user interactivity.

Rather than representing a conceptual confusion, the overlap between literary and media uses of reception signals an interdisciplinary convergence. As Kassaïssa argues :

“Media and communication sciences derive their epistemological legitimacy from adjacent disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and literature.” (Kassaïssa, 2012)

This shared epistemic ancestry justifies the blending of theoretical tools and encourages cross-pollination between disciplines. Furthermore, reception is inherently

shaped by the social and psychological makeup of the individual. It would be reductionist to isolate media interpretation from broader human dynamics :

“Human communication is never detached from the individual’s social identity or psychological structure ; therefore, studying media reception requires input from both fields.” (Interdisciplinary synthesis)

This reflects a more general principle of intellectual inquiry, articulated again by Kassaïssa :

“No human phenomenon can be fully understood when isolated from its broader epistemological ecosystem.” (Kassaïssa, 2005)

New communication technologies have further expanded the concept of reception in several directions. Ethnographic research has revealed how users construct meaning through their digital interactions :

“Ethnography of new mass media allows researchers to understand how specific users construct meaning through digital content and platforms.” (Kassaïssa, 2012)

Simultaneously, the figure of the recipient has evolved from a traditional reader to a media user, operating in hybrid communicative ecosystems :

“From reader to viewer to user, the recipient becomes an actor navigating hybrid media ecosystems.” (Synthesis)

Reception now encompasses not only the physical presence of audiences but also their intangible participation in virtual, decentralized spaces :

“Unlike the traditional reader, the modern media recipient exists both physically and virtually, participating in dispersed, asynchronous communication.” (Kassaïssa, 2012)

Together, these findings affirm the enduring relevance of reception theory while calling for its continuous redefinition in light of cultural, technological, and methodological transformations.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this exploration of the concept of reception across literary studies and media research reveals crucial insights into the evolving dynamics between audiences and texts. Originally grounded in literary criticism, reception theory has since been reconfigured to account for the profound changes brought about by digital communication technologies and shifting patterns of media consumption.

The findings of this study demonstrate that reception theory has evolved more rapidly and expansively within media studies than in its literary origins. This acceleration reflects not only the increasing complexity of contemporary media ecosystems but also the growing need to understand audience behavior through flexible, interdisciplinary frameworks.



The convergence of disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and literary theory confirms that reception is not a phenomenon confined to a single epistemological domain. Rather, it emerges at the intersection of multiple forms of human inquiry, reinforcing the idea that audience engagement is shaped by both cognitive structures and cultural conditions. Media and communication studies thus derive their methodological and theoretical legitimacy from a broader network of the social sciences.

Furthermore, the rise of new communication technologies has fundamentally reshaped the reception process. Concepts such as audience duality—which recognizes recipients as simultaneously present in both physical and virtual spaces—and the increasing use of ethnographic methods have deepened our capacity to analyze reception in contextually sensitive and experientially grounded ways.

Looking ahead, the relevance of reception theory will depend on its continued adaptability. Its strength lies in its openness to transformation, allowing it to respond to new communicative paradigms and socio-cultural shifts. Future research must therefore remain attuned to these dynamics, ensuring that reception continues to serve as a critical framework for understanding how meaning is co-constructed between texts, technologies, and audiences.

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### Abstract

This article revisits the concept of reception from an interdisciplinary perspective, tracing its evolution from literary theory to its current applications in media and communication sciences. Initially rooted in literary criticism, the reception model has undergone substantial transformations due to technological innovations and changes in audience behavior. The article highlights the complex intersections between media studies and adjacent disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and literature, thereby challenging the notion of disciplinary autonomy. Rather than representing a limitation, this epistemological convergence is reframed as a strength—one that enables more robust theoretical frameworks and nuanced audience research. It concludes that media and communication sciences must fully embrace interdisciplinarity to respond effectively to the complexities of contemporary media ecosystems.

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### Keywords

Reception theory, media studies, literary criticism, interdisciplinary research, audience analysis, communication technologies

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### Résumé

Cet article propose une relecture du concept de réception selon une approche interdisciplinaire, retraçant son évolution de la critique littéraire vers son intégration dans les sciences de l'information et de la communication. D'abord ancrée dans la théorie littéraire, la notion de réception a été profondément reconfigurée par les mutations technologiques et l'évolution des pratiques médiatiques. L'étude met en lumière les chevauchements entre ces disciplines et des champs connexes tels que la sociologie, la psychologie ou la littérature, et interroge la pertinence de l'autonomie disciplinaire. Loin d'être une faiblesse, cette convergence épistémologique est perçue comme une richesse, porteuse de cadres théoriques renouvelés et d'approches empiriques plus fines. L'article conclut à la nécessité, pour les sciences de la communication, d'assumer pleinement cette transversalité afin de mieux appréhender la complexité des rapports contemporains aux médias.

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**Mots-clés**

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Théorie de la réception, études médiatiques, critique littéraire, interdisciplinarité, analyse des publics, technologies de la communication

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**ملخص**

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يعيد هذا المقال طرح مفهوم "التلقي" من منظور معرفي بياني، متتبّعًا تطوّره من الدراسات الأدبية إلى تطبيقاته المعاصرة في علوم الإعلام والاتصال. ورغم انبثاقه من النظرية الأدبية، فقد شهد نموذج التلقي تحولات عميقة نتيجة التطور التكنولوجي وتغيّر أنماط التفاعل الجماهيري. وتبرز الدراسة التداخلات المعرفية بين علوم الإعلام وحقول أخرى مثل علم النفس، وعلم الاجتماع، والأدب، ما يضع مفهوم استقلالية التخصصات موضع مساءلة. ولا تُعدّ هذه التداخلات ضعفًا، بل هي مصدر إثراء نظري وتجديد منهجي في تحليل الجمهور. ويخلص المقال إلى ضرورة استثمار هذه التفاعلات المعرفية لفهم أعمق وأكثر دقة لتعقيدات المشهد الإعلامي المعاصر.

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**الكلمات المفتاحية**

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التلقي، دراسات الإعلام، النقد الأدبي، البحث البياني، تحليل الجمهور، تكنولوجيا الاتصال

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