Cultivation Theory Definition

Cultivation theory explains that how people’s conceptions of social reality are influenced according to exposure to television. “The cultivation hypothesis states that the more television people watch, the more likely they are to hold a view of reality that is closer to television's depiction of reality. This is characterized by the work of George Gerbner and his colleagues (Gerbner et al., 1979)” (Zaharopoulos, 2001).

Assumptions Major tenets of the theory

Television has become major part of our life. We spend more time watching television than at any other activities except sleep and occupational duties (Comstock, Chaffee, & Kautzman, 1978; Kubey & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). The quantity of time people use watching television is surprising. On average, persons in the developed world watch about 21 hours per week, which translates into nine years in front of the tube in a regular lifetime (Shrum, Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2003). An adult of American watches 3 to 4 hour of television per day (Comstock et al., 1978; Kubey & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Singer, 1983). Also, children spend more time watching television than at any other waking activity. Kids and young people (ages 2–17) view television about 19 hour and 40 min per week (Abelman & Atkin, 2000; AC Nielsen Company, 2000). “By the time the average person reaches the age of 70, he or she will have spent the equivalent of 7 to 10 years watching television (Strasburger, 1993). This high volume of television represents a major
source of information and entertainment for all Americans” (Brock, Hammermeister, Page, & Winterstein, 2005).

Television deeply comes into our life. Our life has dramatically changed with television. As television went into each household, there were many positive and negative phenomenons. In the modern world, we can not imagine without television. We can get many information and enjoyment from television. If we got rid of it right now, our life would be inconvenient and bored. We would not able to hear forecast prediction and our society news. Also, we would not know how we spend our much free time for entertainment. Like this, Information gleaned from television is an important part of our knowledge of how individuals act, behave, look, and feel (Bandura, 1994; Gerbner, 1969; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994). Although television has positive aspects, it has negative effects for our life at the same time. Watching television affects people by taking time away from other activities, such as social interaction, sport, and reading (Dietz, 1990). Also, it causes much violence, sexuality problems in our real society as portraying more excessive world in television. This is confirmed from scholars who have researched to find out the relationship between those who watch television extreme amount and who watch rarely.

“Gerbner and his colleagues have articulated a theory of television effects that they term cultivation (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1944; Morgan & Shanahan, 1996). They suggest that frequent viewing of television portrayals leads viewers to “cultivate” television information by integrating it into their real-world perceptions and judgments, and that this cultivation of the television point of view occurs
relatively more for those who watch more television” (Shrum, 1999).

Miller explained one of the goals of cultivation theory in his book, *Communications theories: perspectives, processes, and contexts* "The widespread influence of television was a concern for many scholars and policy makers”(282). In addition, this is explanation about the importance of cultivation theory in reality. To examine this, cultivation theory was developed by George Gerbner in 1967.

According to Shanahan, “Cultivation is a method for gauging the impact of television viewing on beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes (Morgan & Shanahan, 1997). Cultivation analysts hypothesize that people who are heavy viewers of television will be more likely to hold beliefs and attitudes congruent with the messages and world view of television.”(Shanahan, 1998). “There are a number of core issues that define what cultivation researchers focus on. This suggests that ‘cultivation’ is not just a catch-all label used to refer to people with different backgrounds and different interests looking at television fiction from different perspectives, but that a central -albeit implicit -research agenda exists”(Van Den Bulck, J., 2004). Roscos. B, Davie, and Roscos, D. said that their article, “cultivation theory, states, at its simplest level, that the media cultivates our social reality; what we watch influences how we view the world”( Roscos. B, Davie, & Roscos, D)

“Over the past decades, television has become a powerful source of information about social reality to many people (Roskos-Ewoldsen, Davies, & Roskos-Ewoldsen,2004; Van den Bulck, 1996). In fact, two basic assumptions underlying cultivation theory are that television is the most important distributor of social reality information and that heavy
viewers of television hold beliefs about the social world that are more consistent with televised representations than light viewers do (Gerbner & Gross, 1979; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994)” (Juliette, Konijn, Van, & Walma, 2005). “Television is likely to remain for a long time the chief source of repetitive and ritualized symbol systems cultivating the common consciousness of the most far-flung and heterogeneous mass publics in history” (Gerbner and Gross, 1976). So, those who watch television many hours per day are more released to television world especially in the relation of violence.

“Cultivation, as defined by Gerbner, is concerned with the cumulative pattern communicated by television over a long period of exposure rather than any particular content or specific effect. Among the questions this research seeks to answer is whether such effects are visible in a smaller community and whether there are similar effects among heavy newspaper readers. Many of the cultivation’s theories claim about heavy media use and its relationship to feelings of fear are connected to the tenets of a public health model of reporting crime and violence” (Reber & Chang, 2000).

The scholarly evidence in support of the theory

Gerbner and others claim that those who watch television more have the perception that real world is similar to the world presented in television dramas (Gerbner and Gross, 1976). This phenomenon is highly showed by heavy viewers of television than light viewers. For holding up this theory, “several studies showed significant relationships between the amount of exposure to television and viewers’ specific attitudes, perceptions,
and beliefs about the social world that were derived from televised contents” (Konijn, Molen, & Geemen, 2005).

There is a study about cultivation theory conducted by Hughes. He showed that measuring alienation and fear of walking near one’s home at night related to heavy television watching. “Much of the content of television programs involves violence, Gerbner and his associates argue that persons who spend many hours each day watching television are exposed to such a heavy barrage of violence and crime-related imagery that they come to view the world as more violent and more dominated by criminal concerns than it really is” (Hughes, 1980)

As a result, they found that “such persons will tend to have inaccurate perceptions about the amount and kinds of crimes committed in the real world, to inaccurately estimate the number of persons engaged in law enforcement, to trust others less, to become alienated, and to experience an unwarranted amount of generalized fear, reflected in taking excessive precautions against violence and in being afraid to walk alone at night in their own neighborhoods” (Hughes, 1980)

**A research question or hypothesis of cultivation theory**

According to cultivation theory, television messages influence the behavior of individuals. Cultivation effects between heavy viewers of television and light viewers. Here are the following hypotheses.
H1: Those who watch television extreme amount about violence program affect their attitude, value, beliefs more likely to be violent than those who watch television rarely.

H2: Women who watch television much more about fashion programs are more likely to believe that thinness is good and valued than those who watch fashion programs rarely.

H3: Women who watch television much more about fashion programs extreme amount are associated with lower body satisfaction than those who watch fashion programs rarely.

H4: Those who watch lifestyle programs extreme amount attribute higher information value than those who watch lifestyle programs rarely.

H5: Those who watch television extreme amount about lifestyle program affect their social behavior more likely to be sophisticated than those who watch television rarely.

H6: Those who watch television much more health programs extreme amount are more likely to be interested in their health than those who watch health programs rarely.

H7: Students who watch television extreme amount display lower academic accomplishment than students who watch television rarely.

H8: Those who watch television extreme amount display differences of their attitude, values, and beliefs compared to those who watch television rarely.

**The relevance of the theory to mass communication professionals, scholars, and social critics**

Cultivation theory is related to many mass communication professionals such as advertisers, journalists, and broadcasters because they need to know how programs
influence to the viewers. They can recognize how they make the advertising, programs or articles based on this information. Especially, television influences the attitudes and beliefs of our reality. “Television has become the world’s most common and constant learning environment and the wholesale distributor of images and forms the mainstream of our popular culture” (Morgan & Signorielli, 1990). According to Shrum, “Researchers have questioned the validity of the cultivation effect. Some have suggested that the noted relations between television viewing frequency and judgments pertaining to heavily portrayed constructs are spurious and result from the correlation of some third variable (e.g., direct experience, education, personality, available time to view, etc.) with both viewing level and real-world beliefs (e.g., Doob & Macdonald, 1979; Hirsch, 1980; Hughes, 1980). Other researchers have suggested that the causal relation is reversed (Zillmann, 1980). Still other researchers have suggested that the validity of the cultivation effect may be a function of the type of judgments that people make” (Shrum, 1999).

“The findings of this study, taken in combination with earlier research, would seem to indicate that in the world of television capitalist values may give greater attention than democratic values. Research by Carlson (1985) has shown that heavy viewers of television are among the least likely to be supportive of civil liberties. Gerbner and his associates (1982) show that heavy viewers are not as disposed as light viewers to support freedom of speech. In their examination of data from Britain Wober and Gunter (1988) find that heavy viewers of television were more authoritarian that light viewers. As television becomes more pervasive it is possible that within the American political ethos capitalist values will dominate democratic value” (Carlson, 1993).
Argue for the importance of this theory over others.

“The cultivation theory has been one of the more elaborately explained and meticulously explored approaches to mass communication effects. The idea grew in 1969 out of Gerbner's Cultural Indicators Project (Potter, 1993)” (Harmon, 2001). Cultivation theory is a still powerful theory of communication over others such as priming effects, agenda setting, social cognitive theory and diffusion of innovations because television pervades the symbolic environment.

“Cultivation analysis focuses on the consequences of exposure to its recurrent patterns of stories, images, and messages. Cultivation analysis is not a substitute for but a complement to traditional approaches to media effects. Traditional research is concerned with change rather than stability and with processes more applicable to media that enter a person’s life at later stage (with mobility, literacy, etc.) and more selectively” (Gerbner, 1998).

“Future research could examine the relationship between amounts of violence in particular television programs and cultivation effects. This is consistent with Rossler and Brosius’s (2001) conclusion that cultivation effects may be genre-specific. Researchers could study a particular genre’s level of violence and compare cultivation effects between genres or programs with lower levels of violence. In today’s society, individuals are shaped by television. If research can be gathered to show the lasting effects of media violence on individuals’ perceptions, then further steps can be taken to better understand both positive and negative effects.” (Lett, DiPietro & Johnson, 2004)
Nowadays, people spend a lot of times to watch television. Through this time, many
people are influenced by the value, attitude, environment, stereotypes, and health television
depict. These things might sometimes change one’s life.

In conclusion, the cultivation theories not only raise an individuals’ knowledge
about media but also are influenced and changed our life. For that reason, this theory is
valuable to study. “The theory predicts a difference in the social reality of heavy television
viewers as opposed to light viewers. It claims that the cumulative effect of television is to
create a synthetic world that heavy viewers come to see as reality” (Reber, Chang, 2000). In
a sense, cultivation theory is worthy to research.
Reference


