

## Abstract

### The Cultivation Theory

The present study aims to investigate the effects of mass media on society, focusing on one of the fundamental theories of the last century, the "Cultivation Theory".

Cultivation analysis concentrates on the enduring and common consequences of growing up and living with mass media, in particular with television. For the first time in human history, children are born into homes where mass-produced stories can reach them on the average of more than 7 hours a day. Television is a centralized system of story-telling. Television serves that function, telling most of the stories to most of the people most of the time. In the typical U.S. home the television set is in use for more than seven hours a day. The media, since their birth, represented not only powerful systems capable of transmitting information and texts, but to produce great changes in social systems, cultures and families. Before turning to the theories of the effects of mass media, it is fair prospect of a historical evolution, which will be briefly outlined the changes in the conception of the relationship between media and individuals. The development of thinking about media effects may be said to have a natural history. I have chosen to follow the four steps proposed by McQuail for our discussion. As summarized by McQuail, four phases may be singled out:

#### The Phase 1: All powerful media

The first phase, which extends between the two world wars of the last century, considers the direct and immediate effects on the individual products. This phase throws light the concept that the media would have the same effect on all people. Ortega y Gasset, Gustave Le Bon and Gabriel Tarde are some scholars who have described the social imaginary of the period. Lasswell was the prominent theorist of the Hypodermic Needle Theory.

#### The Phase 2: Theory of powerful media put to the test

This era research into media effects of television continued until the early 1960s. The development of communication research has shown that the response to the stimulus is not passive and mechanistic but is mediated by some form of resistance of the recipientsudies were concerned with the influence of films on children and young people.

#### The Phase 3: Powerful media rediscovered

The third Phase (1960-1970) celebrates the return of the power and effectiveness of the media. The renewal of effect research was marked by a shift of attention towards long term effects, towards what people learn from the media directly or indirectly than direct effects on attitudes and opinions. There are not only the short term, but we see the appearance of long-term effects. It definitely leaves the S-R, stimulus-response, resulting therefore only short-term effects.

#### The Phase 4 : Negotiated media influence

Since around 1980 this phase has expanded the discussion on the effects. In this case the effects of the media are balanced by the active enjoyment of the audience. The encoding-decoding is an important system developed in this phase.

And in the context just described are inserting the theories of the effects of the media. The thesis will briefly describe the four main theories of the effects. The theory of Knowledge gap, the agenda setting, The spiral of silence, the theory of addiction. Instead Knowledge gap hypothesis, the mass media tend to increase the gap between the audience. The mass media emphasize that knowledge is not distributed equally throughout society. Instead agenda setting theory, mass media would not tell us how to think, but rather what to think. The mass media would determinate the agenda of every person. The spiral of silence examines how the media shift the orientation of public opinion on key issues that divide the above public opinion. The theory of addiction throws light the relationship between the media and social system. It is important to underline that the theory of addiction assume the existence of strong effects even in the presence of an audience not entirely passive. After taking notes of some of the most famous theories that have followed over the years about the influence of the media, the thesis will focus the attention on the cultivation theory, proposed by George Gerbner. George Gerbner was born in Budapest in Hungary on 8 August 1919. The Second World War represented a sharp brake on his academic career. After earning a Bronze Star during World War II, he turned to academe, serving as dean of the Annenberg School for Communication for 25 years, presiding over the influential Cultural Indicators Research Project, and later establishing the Cultural Environment Movement, an international organization dedicated to democratizing media. George Gerbner has used a general model of communication with a wide range of applications. He defines communication as a social interaction that takes place through messages. He considers communication as a humanizing process. Gerbner will talk about the "cultivation" to indicate the manner in which the media show their power. The research will be conducted on major American networks. Through analysis of television programs, films and fiction in particular, will be found the great cultural homogeneity. Gerbner's work is based mainly in two phases: the first focuses on the content of media programming, through the analysis of movies, news and television series, the second is aimed at investigating the effects of these audiovisual products in the viewer, the correlation between media and audience behavior. Significant is the choice of the term "cultivation"

to indicate an effect not seen in the short term (stimulus - response) on the audience, which indeed can be found only through the continuous process of cultivating the media are doing. The methodology followed by George Gerbner throws light the introduction of so-called "cultural indicators". The cultural indicators are units of measures used to study the cultures and changes. The theory of cultivation examines the general effects produced by the totality of television programs. We shall analyze the content of these programs. The sociologist, and his colleagues had analyzed the television drama aired by the networks in prime time and weekends since 1969. Until 1984, they have analyzed 2105 program (1204 and 901 in the early evening and weekends), 6055 and 19116 characters minor characters. Gebrner divided the audience into three main categories : Low-Viewers (viewers who watch television for less than 2 hours per day) Normal-viewers (between 2 and 6 hours per day) and heavy-viewers (those who spend more than 6 hours a day in front of the screen). The research will focus in particular on the latter category. Cultivation differential is the margin of difference in conceptions of reality between light and heavy viewers in the same demographic subgroups. The historical context from which these studies were born is so important: The images of the Vietnam War, the intense sequences of fighting racial and youth problems were shown on TV every day, generations have never been so far each other, and world tensions of the Cold War made even more aggravate the clash of generations. The television had become the narrator of society. The research began in the late 60 ', when the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence decided to stop the increasing violence in society, including violence on television. The methods used in research by George Gerbner are many. Can be synthesized in two main categories: quantitative and qualitative. The Cultivation Theory concentrates on two processes known as "mainstreaming" and "resonance" to explain the differences between groups of viewers. According to Gerbner, mainstreaming is the idea that heavy viewers that come from different demographic groups still acquire similar ways of seeing the world. The Cultivation Theory ignores the influence of other forms of media, such as commercials, magazines, newspapers, music, advertisements, and many others. Cultivation theory describes the phenomenon in which the vision of reality is altered by the viewer from the images of violence, and how this drive him to believe the world more dangerous and more risky. Gerbner called this phenomenon Mean World Index. It describes the phenomenon in which the vision of reality by the viewer is altered from the images of violence, and how this led him to believe the world more dangerous and more risky. This also induces the formation of other effects on the audience. Those who watch television, especially heavy viewers are forced by this view to rely less on interpersonal relationships and are inclined to think more for themselves. The thesis will then analyze the two phases of which the work of Gerbner is based mainly on: the first focuses on the content of media programming, through the analysis of movies, news and television series, the second is aimed at investigating the effects in the viewer these audiovisual products, the correlation between media and audience behavior.

Then the thesis focuses the attention on the violence in the media.

It's necessary to distinguish two main types of violence: the show, typically present in the Horror Film, is the most easily identifiable, and there is also the violence lukewarm, which is paradoxically the most inside of the television schedule, which seems not to too much noise and this makes it difficult to find. Gerbner proposes starting from the late 60's the 90's, year by year, a "Profile of Violence. The focus of his studies is violence. Gerbner and his colleagues have conducted extensive studies to test the process of cultivation. In particular, they tried to discover to what extent the audience to see altered their view of reality, such as television affected the values and beliefs of people, and how television had changed expectations. Television tends to exacerbate particularly the image of violence in the world, putting on stage exponential data with respect to what the statistics say in reference to the real world. According to Gerbner, the sheer quantity of violence on television encourages the idea that aggressive behavior is normal. The more violence one sees on television, the more one feels threatened by violence. Studies have shown direct correlations between the quantity of television watched and general fearfulness about the world: heavy viewers believe the world to be much more dangerous than do light viewers. Initially the project involved the Hungarian sociologist and his colleagues was commissioned only to curb the phenomenon of violence grew in those years. Only later the study on the effects of television extended the investigation in other areas: gender roles, generational stereotypes, health, science, family, politics and religion. The mind, as Gerbner says, become "militarized". The spectator holding the world worse than it really is, becomes fearful and anxious. Gerbner believes correlated with the "mean world syndrome", a number that grows more and more Americans who declare themselves in favor of capital punishment. Gerbner became particularly interested in the effects of television on children and young people who, he asserted, were more easily persuaded. Gerbner argues that children or, more generally, children, spend more than seven hours a day in front of the screen. For the first time we see a different actor in the fundamental process of growth of each person, the TV.

Most of the violence we see on the screen, is the kind of violence that Gerbner calls "happy violence". It is quick, cold, efficient, accomplished most times by good guys, even for a good cause, and always leads to a happy ending. The violence that we see on the screen so would lead to two consequences on the spectators. The first effect, which is what we focused on that paper, is what Gerbner defines Mean World Syndrome, to indicate how the media affect the construction of reality by the viewer. The second effect is called spectator effect, the public has a growing indifference toward violence, and a consequent decrease in sensitivity. The first criticisms of the theory of cultivation, are moved since 70s. The attacks, numerous and fierce, they turned to the methodology, the reliability of results, and the concept of violence developed by the sociologist. A lot of scholars think that cultivation research focuses more on the effects rather than who or what is being influenced. One of the harshest criticism was directed by Paul Hirsch, who

contested every statement of Gerbner re-analyzing his research. But the most serious charge that Hirsch turned to Gerbner was to have omitted the results that did not agree in his thesis. A correlation between television exposure and the beliefs of viewers do not, of course, prove that there is a causal relationship, although it may suggest the possibility of one. There is relatively little evidence of cultivation effects outside the USA. Gerbner despite this, together with his team, answered every single allegation made against the theory of which is the principal author. However, the many criticisms, and discussions have helped to raise awareness and extend the work of Gerbner. The method of cultural indicators has had great resonance particularly in academic life. The final part of this thesis however, will focus on a possible "modernization" of the theory of cultivation. A lot of sociologists have asked if with the advent of new technologies, the Internet and the Web 2.0 was still possible to speak of cultivation. The introduction of the Internet has multiplied our viewing capabilities and we can be more selective than ever. YouTube and other computer-mediated technologies are making this process affordable, quick, and easy. YouTube, for example, is now an important instrument for many aspects of society. It represents one of the symbols for the current generation, it is the evolution of entertainment television. The cultivation in this case could turn into emulation. Probably the effect of emulation, is one of the greatest dangers of new media that the thesis will analyze. The conclusions and final comments will be treated in the last part of the thesis.