My
FIRST
ELECTRONIC
BOOK
BY WANG RUOXUE
Cultivation theory was developed in the 1960s by George Gerbner. This theory focuses on whether watching television will influence the audiences’ perception of real life. He devised cultivation theory to help people understand the consequence of living in a cultural environment dominated by television. Gerbner perceives that television had become the main source of information. “The television set has become a key member of the family; the one who tells most of the stories most of the time (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980).” This lead to a further experiment to prove his idea.

He conducted a research project called culture indicators, which focus on the study of “the relationships between institutional processes, message systems, and the public assumptions, images, and policies that they cultivate” (Gerbner, 1970). Compared with other communication at that time, this research concerned more on the influence of media on a broader scope, instead of how the audience chose media for exposure. In his research, he compared the difference between the light and heavy television viewer. He found that those who view television more heavily have a higher perception of the violence, and other incorrect beliefs about our world (Gerbner et al., 1979, 1980; Shanahan & Morgan, 1999). He found that compare to people who seldom watch television people who watch more television are more likely to perceive the world the way they see it on television. This is his main point for the cultivation theory.

In 1980 Hawkins and Pingree expanded cultivation theory in their article Some Processes in the Cultivation Effect. They did a research on the relationship of cultivation "under a variety of social and psychological conditions and attempting to tie cultivation
more directly to individual types of television content" (Hawkins & Pingree, 1980). The results show that the content and message of television affect the audience perception towards the world. Their research adds strength to Gerbner’s argument. However, this research also “probe some social and psychological processes that responsible for cultivation results” (Hawkins & Pingree, 1980), such as age and cognitive ability.

Although early research supported Gerbner’s idea, he was still subjected to criticism. Then Gerbner added some reinforcement to cultivation theory, including the notions of mainstreaming and resonance (Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., & Signorielli, N, 1980). According to Cohen and Weimann (2000), “mainstreaming, refers to the homogenization of people's divergent perceptions of social reality into a convergent view”. Resonance refers to “real world experiences interact with mediated experiences to create an image of the world (Cohen & Weimann, 2000)”.

Morgan and Shanahan (2010) indicated that cultivation theory is one of the most useful theories between 1956 to 2000. After the development of this theory (the 1960s) till 2000, there are more than 500 studies published directly relate to this theory. However, after the spread of the Internet, Gerbner’s cultivation theory confront new powerful challenges. Society’s views can also be affected by other variables since people live in an environment filled with information. People’s perception can be influenced by the message on the social media like Twitter and Facebook. However, I still believe the effectiveness of the cultivation theory. But I think this cultivation theory should not just be confined to television, it can be used to analysis a wider range of media.

Chapter 2 Marketing

A great example of cultivation applicate in another media is tobacco advertisement. Based on NBC news, E-cigarettes spent millions of dollars on advertisement every year. Even though FCC prohibited tobacco advertisement in 1971, the advertising of cigars, pipes, pipe tobacco has not been banned (The Media Bureau Federal Communications Commission, 2009). Given the reason that we are live in an information era, the internet is the most popular medium for people. Of course, tobacco does not give up the opportunity to advertise here. Many researchers suggest there are a cause and effect relation between tobacco advertisement and teenage smoking behavior (Hastings & Aitken, 1995). Tobacco advertisement creates a false reality about tobacco consumption and its effect.

According to the cultivation theory, the heavy viewer is who watch TV for a long time. Therefore, if teenager exposure to tobacco advertisement, for a long term, they are
heavy viewers in this case. It will change their attitude towards tobacco. Then the worst consequence is more and more teenagers start smoking. In 2014, The research done by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggests that 68.9% of middle and high school students see e-cigarette ads. From 2011 to 2014, the use amount of e-cigarettes rose from 1.5% to 13.4% among high school students (Fox, 2016).

**Chapter 3 Magazine**

Besides advertisement, cultivation can also use in magazines. This relation was confirmed by Aaron M. Cornett (2012) in his research *Examining the Effects of Men's Magazines on Men's Perceptions of Women Through Cultivation Theory*. Frist he sends anonymous survey questionnaire to participants from the University of Kansas and gather 108 male responded. This survey is used to defined if the participants think women as sex objects. When he measures the exposure to the non-pornographic men's magazines, pornographic magazines, and Internet pornography, he uses the cultivation analysis. Develop a scale from light to heavy to help him define how often the participants read pornographic-relate publication.

From the results, he found that there is a positive correlation between how long, how often a man reads pornographic-relate publication and the perception of women as sex objects who is less intelligent. Also in his research, he found that “there was a strong correlation between viewing Internet pornography and the perception of women as sex objects (Cornett, 2012)”. Though the results of this research we can find a cultivation effects of the magazines and Internet. Those who consume more pornographic-relate publication, adopt that woman should be like what they see in the pornography. However, these may not accurately reflect reality.

**Chapter 4 TV**

Another example is cartoons. Cartoons have become known as "baby-sitter." This means more and more parents let their children watch cartoons to be entertained while they are busy working or accomplishing other tasks such as cleaning and cooking. Which means, a nine-years-old child may have 9 years' history of watch TV. Therefore, it is fair to say that watching cartoons has become a learning tool for children and affect their behavior in a long term. As what the cultivation theory says, “watching a great deal of television will be associated with a tendency to hold specific and distinct conceptions of reality (Stephen & John Karen, 2009)”. There for the reason for high rate of copy-catting
victims among children under 10 years old is that children who consume too many cartoons assume to believe that what they see in the cartoon will happen in reality.

Therefore, I think different with the violence in drama. Violence in the cartoon is far more dangerous than what I think. According to a research from the State University of New York Geneseo’s Department of Psychology, “…only 27% of 4- to 8-year-olds and a mere 16% of 9- to 12-year-olds [can] correctly [identify] that the cartoon they had just watched contained violence”. This means the majority of the children cannot figure out what is violence in cartoons. So, while they experience some violence in reality, they may not know that is violence. Different with children who watch a little television, those who consume more violence cartoon will not think that is harmful. There is a research said that “if comedy does, in fact, camouflage violence, then the perception of non-humorous violent media as funny should reduce the perceived severity of that violence (Steven J. Kirsh, 2006).” Cartoons undermine violence behavior within the show by making the acts funny. So I think cultivation effect in violence cartoon is more dangerous.

The example of studying the cultivation theory between television and violence or gender is prevalent. In this example, I want to write about my own experience of how drama cultivates my perception about America’s high school. The name of the drama is Gossip girl and I watched this drama for 6 years. Gossip girl is about a bunch of privileged teenagers who lives in upper east side of New York. The main characters Serena Van Der Woodsen and Blair Waldorf are the beautiful socialites. This drama attracted me because of two reasons. Fist, besides daily studying, they have plenty of time to do whatever they want. Their extracurricular activities are various. Second, their uniform is more stylish and fashion.

This drama first broadcast in 2007. In that year, I was a third-year junior high school student. After watching that drama, I was surprised by how wonderful high school life is. However, high school in China is totally different with America. Therefore, I was looking forward to seeing America high school for a long time. In my perspective, America high school should like what I see in that drama. But, it turns out that drama is different with reality. America high school student also have after school class and their uniform is not that stylish. The incidental messages in the drama such as America uniform are stylish is encoding while I watching that drama. So in the long term, I believe that is a social reality.

The last example is television’s cultivation of race. In Celina’s (2010) research, The Race of Cultivation Theory Social Perceptions of Latinos in the United States, she focused on investigates if there is a relationship between the exposure to television portrayals of Latinos to the real world perceptions of Latinos in the United States. She
Cultivation theory

used an already existing survey done by Dana Mastro, Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, and Michelle Ortiz from the University of Arizona. Update the research by add additional factor and her hypothesizes. In order to test people in a broad range. She conducted her survey on the surveymonkey.com. There were 179 adults who responded this survey ranging from 19 to 92 years old. The result shows “the amount of television viewing correlates with the negative real world perceptions of Latinos in terms of the level of violence and criminality (Celina, 2010).” She also thinks this cultivation effect is not limited to cultivating a false image of the Latinos.

References


