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Communications 1050-001

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07/24/2013

The Cultivation Theory

Does Media form our social networking?

The “Cultivation Theory”, also referred to as “Analysis Theory”, was developed by George Gerbner in 1969 in order to understand the way in which television and media influenced social behavior; specifically violent behaviors. He believed television, over all other social mediums, was transforming individual perceptions of how the world actually worked. Prior to television broadcasting, news papers, periodicals and basic social interaction, as in religious and traditional mediums, filtered information passing it from person to person. Television has now become even more of a religious spectacle than religion itself (text p349). Even though the pre-cultivation period is not a thing of the past, televisions impact on social behavior is a slow and methodical process often referred to as the “stalagmite process”. This is due to the slow growth and continual formation that eventually builds up like a stalagmite on the floor of a cave changing over a period of many years. Gerbner developed the research study in juxtaposition to the increasing popularity of television coinciding with the increase in violent crime during the

Smith 2

1970’s. He believed the two fed each other and this was the basis for “the cultivation theory”.

Gerbner wanted to theoretically define the amount of influence television has or had on shaping perceptions of reality, which in turn affects attitudes beliefs and comprehensions patterns in social mediums. Researchers gathered information and materials that supported the “cultural indicators” research; designed to analyze the system of messages and continual broadcasts of primetime programming such as news, children’s programming and other daytime programs. This information was used in correlation with “cultivations theory” to assist in furthering the study. The new information revealed that media was responsible for the “mainstream trends” of the time.

As television grew in popularity so did the amount of time people were spending with it. Television does not discriminate. Social class or ethnicities were irrelevant in terms of how much the individual watched TV. With this powerful message convenience system it became apparent to researchers that television was a major contributor to cultural and social behaviors & beliefs. This influence on society impacts and resonates within our social norms and forms our interaction system.

The “cultivation theory” exploits television above all other media sources as responsible for the forming and shaping, cultivating individual perceptions of reality and ideals of social behavior. It is the “story teller” of our time without the wisdom that

Smith 3

accompanied its historical relevance. This type of storytelling eventually works into the social reality of certain individuals depending on the amount of television exposure they have.

Gerbner defines spectators as having light, medium or heavy exposure to television. These range anywhere from three to seven or eight hours per day of television viewing. Three hours is "light" viewing four to five is "medium" and seven or eight hours of exposure was considered "heavy use". The major focus of the “heavy” viewing population was to get their views and feelings in regards to violent crime and its prevalence within society. Strong evidence supports the mind shaping influences television has on the perceived information disseminated through television broadcasting; this balances the opinions of the “light” viewers, who did not believe all the broadcasting agenda and developed their own assumptions based on their opinions or by gathering information from other media sources. Gerbners theory would support the idea that the heavy viewing of television can warp or majorly influence those “heavy” viewers. The heavy viewing population displayed an inability to decipher the differences in reality and fiction by not taking into account potential inaccuracies and/or unreliability of the broadcasting agenda. Statistics revealed certain crimes were being committed within a two or three hour period of airing violent programs. These visuals seem to resonate with the "heavy" viewing population to become part of their reality. Certain individuals are not capable of distinguishing between what they watch on television and what is out in the world. Children can be easily influenced as well as the elderly; reasons being, they do not leave their familiar surroundings as often as the general

Smith 4

population. Children are so formable because of the repetitive, negative, social behavior portrayed on TV.. The typical example of this is the "Roadrunner- Coyote" duo. This is entertainment to certain ages but it can promote over-zealous children to behave negatively. This over-exposure can cause a false sense of what is acceptable, social behavior and insecurity within society itself. Having little physical interactions outside this realm their ability to distinguish how much danger is real or not is diluted. Television has the capacity to warp reality for other deviant behaviors and criminal activity as well.

Gerbner research has always advocated the need to educated people about the dangers of violence in comic books, sinister music, entertainment periodicals and overexpose to technology. Television has since become the most culturally influential staple of our ideological system of conformity. Predisposing inaccurate information and its respective nature causes concern for long-term research. A program that dramatizes reality, promotes bodily harm, dramatizes and distorts viewers’ attention is captivating and feeds the entertainment value which we the viewer thrive on. As mentioned before, the "cultivation theory" is like a stalagmite, as time goes on it will change as well as its composition to some degree so this analogy is perpetual in television also. Within the last ten years technology has grown dramatically creating more accessibility and diversity in televised programs.

The "cultivation theory" is measurable within certain means but its accuracy lies essentially within society’s roots. Whatever current trends dominate the social

Smith 5

environment will take hold of notions or reality based on the theme of that trend. There are elements of television that are fruitful and those that are somewhat lethal. The problem is the unworthy or incidental types of programs that run rampant are not worthy of our attention. Getting those particular programs off the air is not easy so other means of dissemination must be put forth. The theory and research applied to this area has its benefits and can help breakdown the problems linked with television social interactions and the negativity associated with it.

Today’s diverse culture is not tied to television as the information chain. Technology is making it possible to filter the information we receive which allows more critical information to assist in making rational assumptions. There is not just one national news source; there’s international news, local news, variety, drama, reality and violence of course. The biggest change in television today is the reality aspect. This enables viewers the opportunity to be part of the broadcasting. As with most trends this is an enormous change from prior years. It may be good in some respects but, as with everything, it has its pitfalls. The intrigue of reality programs captures the mind because it is so called "reality" when in actuality portions are typically scripted. The raw or boring stuff which life is full of is left out or edited for entertainment sake. The educational aspect television offers is still there. It's not as glorified of course, but is has value. There are many in the "heavy" viewing category who watch valued programs like CNN, Discovery, the History Channel, public television and other reliable documentary television. This information was not accounted for in Gerber’s original research which flaws the information to some extent. As time goes, viewers are using

Smith 6

an objective point of view that allows for more accuracy within those information outlets. Individuals have the means today to filter the unwanted information and use better judgment about what they watch and what they see as vital information or worth their attention. The ability to eliminate commercials and block unwanted programs is within our capabilities. This advantage allows today’s generation to bypass any misrepresentations assisting social progress with little distractions.

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