RESIDENTS OF EXPOSURE: LIVING IN THE REALM OF CULTIVATION

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CAPSTONE ABSTRACT

Residents of Exposure: Living in the Realm of Cultivation

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The purpose of this project is to take a pragmatic look at some of the specific influences that the network of multi-media has contributed to the American public, and how 'cultivation' aligns with manipulation in terms of the prevailing messages that are expedited through selective media programming. This paper intends to pose the argument that some of the various content that is broadcasted and displayed across network media has an enduring effect upon its target audience. It will start off by discussing the background studies and critiques of Cultivation Theory (CT) research, highlight the main segments and the measurable impacts that correspond to CT, discuss the four realms of the multi-media environment (televisions, movie cinemas, interactive platforms, and portable devices) that allow the American public to gain has access, provide a brief content analysis by reviewing some of the agendas and stories that are currently portrayed and their plausible impact to sociological norms, and finish with asking whether or not such a powerful influence can be harmful while considering some of the possible challenges that might pertain to future research.

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**Introduction**

Consider for a moment that most Americans are actually born into the virtual habitat, or residence, which is powered by the environmental 'control system' of mass media at the bedrock of its establishment. This thought would suggest that most people are systematically connected to the conceptual framework of an artificial system that 'cultivates' and compels them to behave according to the mutually accepted terms and conditions of the world around them. But are those terms truly mutual? What control does society have in the midst of such an establishment?

The purpose of this project is to take a pragmatic look at some of the specific influences that the network of multi-media has contributed to the American public, and how 'cultivation' aligns with manipulation in terms of the prevailing messages that are expedited through selective media programming. Numerous studies have been documented to indicate how and why the media has captivated the vast attention and social involvement of the American people (Brensinger et al., 2014; Mohammadian and Habibi, 2012; Williams, 2006), but few of those studies look at what they are actually learning from the content that supports mindset of their social behavior. This paper intends to pose the argument that some of the various content that is broadcasted and displayed across network media has an enduring effect upon its target audience. It will start off by discussing the background studies and critiques of Cultivation Theory (CT) research, highlight the main segments and the measurable impacts that correspond to CT, discuss the four realms of the multi-media environment (televisions, movie cinemas, interactive platforms, and portable devices) that allow the American public to gain has access, provide a brief content analysis by reviewing some of the agendas and stories that

are currently portrayed and their plausible impact to sociological norms, and finish with asking whether or not such a powerful influence can be harmful while considering some of the possible challenges that might pertain to future research.

**The Background of Cultivation Theory**

In its most basic form, cultivation theory suggests that exposure to television viewing over time "cultivates" viewers' perception of reality; in the words of its original proponents, "television is the medium of the socialization of most people into standardized roles and behaviors. Its function is, in a word, enculturation" (Gerbner and Gross, 1976). In other words, time equals perception. Using this as a general shell, Professor George Gerbner, dean of the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Pennsylvania and his associates, Larry Gross, Michael Morgan and Nancy Signorielli, focused their research on the assumption that television (TV) exposure serves as a hegemonic socializing agent under the rationale that watching TV is really the absorption of divergent currents into a stable and common mainstream (Gerbner et al., 1986). Their method of research was accomplished by using survey questionnaires and interviews with diverse samplings of viewers according to heavy and/or light exposure to watching TV with careful observation of age, race, sex, and level of education. The resulting relationships between amounts of viewing and the tendency to respond to the questionnaire served as evidence to reveal television's contribution to viewer's conceptions of social reality. But as a noteworthy achievement, their research found that a wide variety of factors produce systematic and theoretically meaningful variations in cultivation.

Although Gerbner's concept was rather straightforward, it still ran counter to most established research at the time. Some scholars argued that "Cultivation Theory was a gross oversimplification of how the television affects behavior through culture by saying that Gerbner and his associates were incapable of uncovering the effects of TV due to total exposure because they did not specifically tap what people who watch are totally exposed to" (Hughes, 1980). They suggested that persons who watch TV might use it to find ways of conceptualizing the world through cultural innovations and variations of lifestyle through social interaction in the real world regardless of the programs that they watch. Critics further questioned Gerbner's theory because cultivation methodology that was open to 'audience perception' effects that encouraged biased optimism (Jeffres et al., 2008). Every one of these critiques are valid considerations to Gerbner's position but none of them suggest an objection to its validity. But with all research considered, what kind of network would it take to cultivate such a large establishment? What could be so accessible to support such a vast following?

**The Five Segments of Cultivation**

Some logical answers lie within the conveyance of the story itself. In brief, CT is a broad theory that relates media content with its particular outcomes that are measured by social impacts of heavy exposure to its general audience. In short, the mainstream audience, multi-media content, commercialized agenda setting, storytelling, and social resonance are really the five main segments of CT. The mainstream, which mostly relates to the general TV audience, "can be thought of as a relative commonality of outlooks and values that exposure to features and dynamics of the TV world tend to cultivate" (Gerbner et al., 1986). Gerbner and Gross have noted that television ''is an agency of the

established order and as such serves primarily to extend and maintain rather than to alter, threaten, or weaken conventional conceptions, beliefs, and behaviors" (Saito, 2007). Knowing this, most commercial producers still prefer to dedicate time and money to present their information on television, especially during holidays and special events, because they are well aware that the TV world is still the most effective and preferred method of audience exposure. Some empirical studies have concluded that standard marketing techniques involve the use of an interview and the compilation of a questionnaire for the subjects after the exposition to novel commercial ads before the massive launch of the ad itself (Vecchiato et al., 2010).

The next segment of media content, whether it be fact-based news footage or fiction-based comedy, the world of multi-media often presents a known potential for individually skewed perceptions of realism. Accessing and observing such content can be used to inform the driving mechanisms that explain the psychological connections which might result from the internalization of shared messages. With the help of social media, most of that content has found a rapid means for dispersal by expanding the influence of television broadcasting. As far as news footage is concerned, there are many available sources that offer their own twist of the same news footage based on the journalist who is presenting the information. But as far as comedy is concerned, audience perception is a moving target. For instance, when Donald Trump began to lead the Republican primary by frustrating and intimidating his Grand Old Party (GOP) competitors on national TV, The Washington Post released an internet story that described him as the GOP's Frankenstein (Kagan, 2016). In response to that story, Matthijs Pontier created and shared a cartoon (created by Yonatan Zunger, 19.a) on his Twitter account from Amsterdam

which depicted an image of Trump as a hypnotized Frankenstein monster that was created by fictional GOP scientists (Pontier, 2016). His Twitter post was shared by thirty of his followers and rapidly shared again by two-hundred twenty-seven other participants thereafter. The content was the obvious fiction of a distorted perception, but it was still perceived and accepted by the online public as something that should be spread further throughout the network of social media. Further, due to the shared exposure to such exaggerated content, the interest of the audience might even drive their tendency to crave more of the same fiction as an alternate perception of the dull reality that is the real Donald Trump. But to better explain how interest pertains to CT, "the content of communication, such as the evaluation of a given topic, is of interest. Actors can affirmatively support a topic, reject it, or adopt an ambivalent or neutral position. In public communication, actors usually strive to establish their evaluation of a certain topic because if they succeed, their preferred modes of action will be privileged" (Gerhards and Schäfer, 2010).

But in connection with social media, distribution of shareable content can often trace back to the agenda of a commercial entity for the purpose of its production, promotion, sustainment, and improvement of its objective to gain media attention and higher credibility with the American public. Therefore, to further expand the theory of cultivation, the third segment of commercial agenda setting will mostly use the fourth segment of storytelling to cultivate the expected perception of a target audience. In terms of internet based agenda setting, "on-line processes underlying cultivation are better understood if we focus our attention on how people process the narrative or story, rather than how they process individual images and messages" (Chong, 2012). In doing so, the

storytelling capability of mass media can sometimes be very beneficial, especially when it pertains to an interactive audience participation (Bennett et al., 2010). At other times, the same capability can have harmful outcomes with regard to skepticism and credibility. There are possible instances where videos can be posted on social media which were not recorded before the approved consent of the persons involved. These videos are then copied, shared, and distributed instantaneously for all to see indefinitely. Based on related studies, this is another indication that Cultivation Theory is vibrant and adaptive (Morgan and Shanahan, 2010). But after such content has been determined, the matter of its presentation and audience reception would be the next thing to consider. There is a plausible risk that audience reception might be jeopardized by the narrative content of the agenda; especially if it is confusing or misunderstood. To avoid such an outcome, the intended message should be able to resonate, or gain traction, with its exposure to said audience.

One good way to analyze the fifth segment of resonance would be to look at yet another example of social media trending that also relates to Donald Trump. The leader of the Rebel Brigade Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, identified only as their Imperial Wizard, told a reporter for Richmond, Virginia-area news outlet that he, like many other KKK members, supports Trump for President of the United States (Binkowski, 2016). In relation to this statement, the Star Tribune (Cagle Cartoons) posted a fictional depiction of Trump wearing a Ku Klux Klan head mask with a caption that said "Yes we Klan!" which was posted on Pinterest and shared on-line by over ten thousand users. It can be safe to assume that the image (4.a) showing Trump's alliance with the KKK might have alarmed the American public because it linked him to a shared understanding that he

could be associated with the same level of hatred that the KKK is notoriously famous for. But this can still be used as a cognitive explanation that falls in line with the notion of resonance. This is a common method that is used to ensure that the target audience is more receptive of, and influenced by, the content that matches their conventional beliefs to reduce the risk of misunderstanding. In sum, the goal of cultivation needs each segment of content and the audience to work together in order to gain the best dynamic exposure for social effectiveness. But after discussing these examples for each segment, how else can the media Promote the theory of cultivation?

**Living in the Four Realms of Cultivation**

Since the conception of Gerbner's theory, the expansion of the multi-media landscape has accelerated exponentially. But despite the obvious consideration for evolving technology, there are really only four devices that are used to facilitate unlimited access to the multi-media network. From a conceptual framework, this paper will consider each device to represent four different realms, or physical dwellings, of virtual existence. The portrayal of an augmented virtual life can easily provide means of temporary departure from the normal conditions of real life. "The idea of involvement as an important factor in cultivation underlines the active nature of media use in which individuals are engaged in actively constructing a story rather than being passively exposed to it" (Chong, 2012). In order for cultivation to be most effective, each realm must be able to sustain the preferred living conditions of its inhabitants. In other words, the land of television, the lifestyle of movie cinema, the interactive realm of online media, and the world of a portable and personal electronic device, can each provide a 'habitat' that is capable of supporting the

immediate access to a virtual environment of media messages that can have a direct influence on social behavior and mainstream human interaction.

**Living in TV Land**

With regard to the first realm of access, the television remains to be source of the most broadly shared images and messages in history. "In November 2009, Nielsen reported that television viewing had reached an all-time high (Nielsen Wire, 2009). Television still dominates the flow of words and information that pass by our eyes and ears each day (Morgan and Shanahan, 2010). In terms of the family environment, TV media depiction has been observed to show some definitive impacts from its on-screen representations. "Studies show that women have actually made strides in the television family. Reimers (2003) found, in an examination of the father/mother roles from the 1960s to the 2000s, that fathers became more likely to bow to their wives' wishes and that mothers had become more often the problem-solvers in the home" (Wiscombe, 2014). Based on the family's perception, it is optimistic to predict that positive resonance would support the likely potential to inspire the real family to have the same association with the on-screen family and mimic the prevailing identity that falls in line with the family schema which was promoted by the TV show.

But aside from immediate family concerns, another social example of cultivation is often found in the presentation of commercial TV ads. The commercial goal to achieve growth at low cost demands that its agenda agrees with the existing terms of conventional social norms (Gerbner et al., 1986). One very infectious, and perhaps dangerous, form of advertising is the promotion of prescription strength pharmaceutical drugs. According to

a statement by NCBI (2006), direct-to-consumer advertising (DTCA) of prescription drugs in the United States is controversial (Frosch et al., 2010). Underlying the debate are disagreements over the role of consumers in Medical decision making, the appropriateness of consumers engaging in self-diagnosis, and the ethics of an industry promoting potentially dangerous drugs. For the sake of resonance and agenda setting, each commercial shows a vivid representation of how terrible, as compared to how wonderful, life can be for the individual with the help of the new medication. The role of patients in medical decision-making has changed in recent decades. "Patients are no longer viewed as passive recipients of medical care, but instead as active participants who play a key role in making clinical decisions with their health care providers" (Frosch et al., 2010).

Opponents of DTCA argue that it misleads consumers into taking costly prescription drugs that they do not need and that in seeking to sell products, pharmaceutical marketers turn normal human experiences with things like hair loss or shyness to be associated with actual diseases. Such advertisements routinely made exaggerated claims about the effectiveness of their products and seldom disclosed their ingredients or risks. As a potential impact, consumers and health providers may become skeptical of DTCA under the notion that pharmaceutical marketers might function according to their own best interest. Nevertheless, the promotion of DTCA commercials has continued to increase which further posits the question of whether or not media endorsements that are presented in the virtual world are mutually beneficial to the consumers that exist in the real world.

**The Lifestyle of Movie Cinema**

The real world, for the sake of variety, does present a health alternative to cultivation that is more direct than the distorted information that is presented on television. In fact, the movie theater experience is an evolving means of entertainment that is commonly used as a convenient escape' from the everyday trappings of TV world at home. The movie house provides a similar means to access the same stories that are commonly seen on TV, but on a much larger scale… Cinematic presentations generally go hand-in-hand with the same potential influence of watching TV, but with the added bonus of minimal distractions and a big screen video display. Although movie goers know they have to go out of their way to watch a crowded or expensive theater presentation, they do so because of the anticipated experience that they would probably never get from seeing the same effects on TV at home. Especially with the availability of three-dimensional (3D) imaging, blockbuster movies have a great deal more of a thrill to experience on the big screen. Although empirical evidence on the effect of cinematic immersion is scarce, it was found that higher immersion led to an increase in intensity of all viewer emotions (Visch et al., 2010). Nevertheless, the theater serves as an example of how its high potential for entertainment can provide the enticing effects and a tremendous appeal to its consumers who tend to rush out and  line the sidewalks when they know what a movie theater has to offer.

However, cinematic cultivation is even more difficult to achieve when compared to the methods that are used in a made-for-television series. "Movies and television drama suggest in many ways that what they show mimics reality. Typically, for instance, actors and directors will stress in press-interviews how they rode with police officers to learn how to make their acting more realistic. According to Bauer (1992) viewers have actually

come to expect and demand a high level of 'apparent facticity'. When a movie does not

look realistic enough watching it may be irritating" (Van den Bulck and Vandebosch,

2003). In fact, their level of intensity must also have a legal obligation to publish an

approved rating for the messages and the images that are shown in the theaters.

According to an applicable study, the nature of media marketing culture ensures that

participatory fandom can be a paradox of both the overt strength for, and the covert

weakness against, its success (Shefrin, 2004). Nevertheless, a cinema without audience

doesn't make sense when having that audience is considered the requirement for

prosperity and success of the production. "Being successful in attracting audiences,

increases per capita of movie going which leads not only to reduce the risk of movie

industry but also augmentation the profitability" (Mohammadian, M., and Habibi, E. S.,

2012). One good example of a blockbuster that has represented this concept is the

production of the movie '*Star Wars*'. Fandom for this particular storyline is so dedicated

that the movie has achieved a record following. The target audience consists of various

age and social demographics, but the resounding effects of cultivation are extremely

noticeable because of its fictional storyline and the cultural need for a constructed reality.

As a dynamic result, '*Star Wars*' has generated thousands of public forums and hundreds

of Jedi Churches (http://www.jedichurch.org) that have been, and continue to be spawned

from the storytelling influence of this movie and its many related sequels. This kind of

social impact requires active participation from its exposure to each fan. The agenda for

this kind of message relies heavily upon the resonance of the viewer before, during, and

after the presentation. In the case of '*Star Wars*', millions of people are going out of their

way to support what began as a fictional enterprise. This manner of appeal, although

unique to this genre, should serve as an indication of how important the influence of movie theaters can be.

**The Realm of Interactive Media**

But when exposure is in question, very high concentrations of media influence can also be found on the internet due to its suitability for rapid exposure and immediate participation. "This new area of social interaction that is the internet comes with increased methods of engaging in civic life, such as signing online petitions, participating in online discussions and groups, and voicing opinions to audiences that might not otherwise be available to all people" (Brensinger, 2014). Which especially holds true with regard to the younger generation and their huge environment of gaming, social networking sites (SNS), and computer-mediated communication (CMC). For example, Facebook has been attributed to be the largest online community for SNS. Users have been found to develop an actual addiction to the need for social networking. Humans are highly dependent on the social support of others, and ostracism from the social group impacts negatively on a variety of health-related variables, including one's self-esteem and sense of belonging, emotional well-being sense of life meaning, purpose, self-efficacy, and self-worth (Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Stillman et al., 2009). Therefore, Facebook serves as a means for a person to create their own personal identity profile online for other to see and find them acceptable as a peer which effectively ties them to a bond as a member of a new type of family support. The media also has a very strong influence upon the youth as well. Various forms of CMC offer ways to communicate with and gain insight into the character traits and the personal lives of big time celebrities. All the variables of multi-media content that this paper has identified have the

potential to bombard their attention and cultivate bonds that influence their need to belong. The level of impact to the family could very well depend on how much those bonds are linked to media control. As a ready alternative, the access to online media can be more alluring just for the sake of its unlimited sources and applications. "Internet content is literally unbounded, and when traditional media migrate online (e.g., Web-based digital television), comprehensive analyses of content may be all but impossible" (Chaffee and Metzger, 2001). "The internet was designed to be decentralized, meaning that control is distributed to all users who have relatively equal opportunity to contribute content. This means that young citizens are not just the targets of content, but active participants in the creation and targeting of content through their social networks" (Bennett et al., 2010).

But to introduce a more immersive alternative, the virtual world of gaming can serve as another interactive social habitat to measure cultivation. "Data from the 2004 Pew Internet and American Life Project show that 75% of all Internet users play games and that half of them do so online"(Williams, 2006). But now through web-based gaming software, the same interaction can be achieved without ever leaving home. A recent survey found youth gaming a nearly universal phenomenon, with 97% of respondents aged 12 to 17 reporting playing some form of video game (Bennett et al., 2010). In particular, online ''networked'' video games on both console and PC systems represent an increasingly popular space within the medium and one that has received little study. Some gaming consoles, such as Xbox and PlayStation, have grown so popular that they continue to support a thriving commercial industry. Using one small example to show how much influence they have, both platforms released a game series called '*Grand Theft*

*Auto IV'* (GTA IV) which succeeded in challenging and almost redefining the social boundaries of justice, law, and the appropriate level of content for the attention of younger audiences. Players of this game are expected to explore every corner of the game based city with the objective to build personal wealth, ownership of property, and control of territory without any fear sickness, death, or criminal punishment. "The game world of GTA IV is therefore fraught with violence and players are rewarded and reinforced for their use of violence in order to advance in the game.

From a cultivation perspective, GTA IV contains multiple meta-messages from its central themes of the necessity of violence to achieve one's goals and the rampant nature of violence and drugs to subtler ideas such as the types of advertising one hears on the radio while driving" (Chong, 2012). The game title is the main characteristic of its underlying strategy. The player is allowed to steal, fight to the death, sail, fly, shoot at cops, drive into pedestrians, or request 'services' from a prostitute and a lap dance from a stripper. As industry marketing had planned, GTA IV achieved resonance with players who could be described as having a 'mean world syndrome' because they already have a preconceived notion that everyone looks out for themselves and being possessive is the best way to survive (Chong, 2012). Based on the game's popularity, that ongoing resonance has seemed to become a reliable means of cultivation, and GTA IV remains to be a very popular game to this day. But if players do not wish to be trapped at home in front of a game console, are many other multi-media games that are designed for cultivation.

Media exposure is a relatively new concept in relation to understanding the dynamics of public opinion and political change. Traditional models of media exposure have been

severely challenged by the shift to online news consumption and news-sharing on social

media (Williams, 2006). The online culture is now able to coalesce around digital media

forms, whose properties contrast sharply with traditional or old media, which were

designed to distribute prepackaged content to mass audiences via one-way transmission

channels (Bennett et al., 2010). Thus, as soon as there is content to share, the internet

allows its users to choose their environment, determine if the story will resonate with

their existing preferences, and promote the same story while adding their own

commentary based on their own social agenda. "The internet as a medium has

revolutionized how people seek out and consume information. It is no longer a question

as to whether the internet has or is changing the face of the news media; it has already

been shown to do so" (Brensinger, 2014). For example, in recent news, NJ.com issued a

story that went viral across social media. Apparently, one of the female athletes was

interviewed at a press conference because she was recognized as the first Muslim

American woman to every wear a hijab while participating in the Olympic Games

(Andrews, 2016). In light of some of the televised political debates and the tragic

terrorists' attacks that have been perpetrated by members of ISIS (France and Florida), it

would seem that the article's agenda was to use the added photograph of her wearing a

religious head dress (1.a) to provoke an emotional firestorm. The title of the article,

"Donald who? How N.J. fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad dissed Trump at the Rio Olympics",

highlighted the disrespect that was insinuated during the athlete's comment for only one

question that was asked by the USA Today journalist during the interview. Her response

seemed to have been adjusted to coincide with the negative agenda for the headline,

regardless of the positive message that she may have tried to convey. When Ibtihaj

Muhammad was asked about Donald Trump's ban pertaining to Muslim immigration, here response was simply "Who?" (Andrews, 2016). But when Ibtihaj Muhammad went on to say, "that's the gift and the curse of social media: You hear from young women all the time, but you also hear from the haters. We, as a country, have to change, and I feel like this is a moment" (Andrews, 2016), the story went negative. Readers of the story reacted right away with comments stating that "Muslims ought to be the ones to change", "that's not what (the Olympics are) about", "there are three women on the U.S. Olympic Fencing Team that call N.J. home (but) you won't hear about two of them; they don't wear hijabs" (Andrews, 2016). The obvious conflict lies between the actual statements during the interview and the negative headline of the story. The story itself even points out that Ibtihaj Muhammad avoided saying anything further about Donald Trump; nevertheless, her words were still portrayed as a "diss"-respectful statement. As a result, the probable cost to the athlete is that now she might have to carry the burden of being an ungrateful and unpatriotic minority that represents the stereotypical attitude of other Muslim Americans in society. The obvious benefit is that agenda for journalist to capture the public's attention was well planned and successful. The added consideration is the potential impact to current social norms. In this case it would appear that Ibtihaj Muhammad's words might hold true. The mainstream stigma that the Muslim community harbors terrorism might be further perpetuated because of this article, and Trump's proposal to ban Muslim immigration might gain added support from the general public. The sad irony of this negative outcome is that, according to the words of her statement, this is the American perception that she was hoping to change.

**The Realm of Portable Electronic Devices**

However, when it comes to major events like the Presidential election and the Olympic games, media stories like the one discussed above are rapidly spread by way of a wireless network connection that is often made possible through personally owned electronic devices. Considering the fact that every person has the right to own a smart phone, the impact to a variety of social norms, including driving, going to school, working, and even personal security can be very noticeable. But as a ready alternative, the access to online media can be more alluring just for the sake of its unlimited sources and applications. "More than any other technologies for mass communication, contemporary media allow for a greater quantity of information transmission and retrieval, place more control over both content creation and selection in the hands of their users, and do so with less cost to the average consumer. Gaming and internet platforms currently support a convenient realm of interaction which can serve as a ready example of that technology. "Internet content is literally unbounded, and when traditional media migrate online (e.g., web-based digital television), comprehensive analyses of content may be all but impossible" (Chaffee and Metzger, 2001). "The internet was designed to be decentralized, meaning that control is distributed to all users who have relatively equal opportunity to contribute content. This means that young citizens are not just the targets of content, but active participants in the creation and targeting of content through their social networks" (Bennett et al., 2010). Thus, the virtual world of web-based gaming can serve as another interactive social habitat to that supports media cultivation. To measure this immersive alternative, "data from the 2004 Pew Internet and American Life Project show that 75% of all Internet users play games and that half of them do so online" (Williams, 2006). But now through web-based gaming software, the same interaction can be achieved without

ever leaving home. As a result, social interactions in the real world can be directly affected by the simultaneous activity that may also be occurring on privately own portable devices. For example, individuals can become distracted with a smartphone while they are supposed to be driving, working, sitting in class, or even while walking through a dark alley because the device will prompt them to immerse themselves into another 'virtual' world. In association with portable device usage, video games are a fairly new consideration to the conceptual framework of the virtual environment. It is very reasonable to expect that every portable device that is sold on the market is made to support the download and installation of some type of game. "Applied to video gaming, cultivation theory suggests that through continuous exposure to the video game world, players' views of their real world will become more akin to that of the game world" (Chong, et.al, 2012). One recent game in  particular, '*Pokémon*', has managed to inundate the attention of many people in the mobile gaming environment. According to NBC News, '*Pokémon-Go*' has rocketed to the top of the mobile game charts within days of its release, and has since been downloaded more than 75 million times (Newcomb, 2016). The game is designed to motivate its players to search for and capture numerous different kinds of imaginary Pokémon characters in order to trade and evolve each one to upgrade its fighting abilities against another trained Pokémon. The only problem is that each Pokémon must be found within a real location, where it virtually lives, in order to capture it for virtual ownership in the game. As a result, hundreds of cell phone gamers have been walking through public parks, businesses, museums, sanctuaries, and landmarks in order to collect fictional characters and negotiate battles and trades with other gamers at designated Pokéstops.

But as a larger concern, "does cultivation also apply to video game worlds? Only Mierlo and Bulck (2004) have investigated this possibility, with a correlational study of Flemish school children. The authors argued that video games have become so realistic that they have begun to resemble reality, making cultivation possible. Their main conclusion was that the connection between cultivation and games is probably smaller than with television, but that the issues of genre and game content must be considered much more carefully than for television" (Williams, 2006). "Nonetheless, the findings suggest that many of the conclusions about possible cultivation effects derived from the rich literature on cultivation effects of television cannot be simply extended to video games. One key difference is that unlike video gamers, television viewers have been assumed to be both passive and non-selective. Moreover, unlike the passive television viewer, the gamer is actively involved in interacting with the medium he/she is using" (Chong, 2012). It also stands to reason that such a grand scale of audience reception is likely to increase with the introduction of more new games and rapid access to online network connectivity. The phenomenon of new technologies is an ongoing process that requires constant monitoring for further research in the Internet age. Smart phones extend the capability of other media devices by facilitating private access to all of the content that is either transmitted by satellite or stored on the internet. A cell phone can even function as its own stand-alone media source to upload, capture, and stream real-time images and information through wireless network connectivity.

Everything that is shown on television, and big screen cinema, can now be accessed wirelessly and displayed in the palm of the viewer's hand. As such, that handheld

distraction forces the individual to choose between interacting with what is going on around them, or interact with the activity that is happing on their portable device.

But there exists a more urgent threat to our world. An official story by the U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute presents the notion that "terrorist attacks are, in fact, media events, designed to draw the attention of the press since, without a larger audience, a terrorist attack will have accomplished very little" (Dauber, 2009). It is with this understanding that foreign insurgents have found an effective way to use their cell phones as a tool to augment their ultimate goal to spread fear. "Information and communication technologies have developed to such a point that these groups can film, edit, and upload their own attacks within minutes of staging them, whether the Western media are present or not. In this radically new information environment, the enemy is no longer dependent upon the traditional media" (Dauber, 2009). But from a cultural perspective, Homeland Security might have to find new ways to adapt and remain ready at a moment's notice to respond or prevent possible panic and outrage because of unverified distribution of fear-based cell phone footage. Such footage can also be cut and edited to show inaccurate information that cause law enforcement to take extra time to verify. With this in mind, there is really no limit to the negative impact that a portable device can have on the social order.

**Summary**

In a literal sense, the utility and flexibility of CT can be seen in its adoption as an explanatory framework in areas beyond those originally investigated by Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli (1986). By this rationale, the general thesis of this paper has

introduced the role of cultivation and the shared information that is promoted across a variety of four different platform 'realms' which serve as a systematic connection to the conceptual framework of an artificial environment that is mostly supported by mass media. Those realms can directly support a variety of social influences, from social forums, peer groups, to other various captivating stories, that bombard the American public's attention and steer their focus and support the artificial conditions of their immediate environment. From an individual standpoint, especially in terms of immersive gaming and interactive media, too many distractions can create an attention deficit that would impair situational awareness, time management, and individual self-control. But from a social community standpoint, "the contemporary media landscape clearly engages young citizens differently than the legacy media did, in terms of what constitutes information, how it is linked to action options, and how it may be shared over peer networks" (Bennett, 2010). As a behavioral result, the exposure to that information can cultivate the ways in which the American public gains access, organize, and act upon the content that their media exposure has provided to them. The challenge, of course, would be to find a way to keep the influence of these conditions as a beneficial asset to promote health dialogue and improve social harmony.

However, such effects can also lead to a potential obsession with multi-media content, which could lead to an unhealthy reliance upon a virtual habitat that promotes counter-cultivation and social decay. It would therefore be reasonable to argue that technology may have a negative effect on the liberation of an American society that seems to be passive and openly vulnerable to the influence of its own media. This is a power that is not to be undermined simply because of lack of evidence or uncertain levels of exposure

to known percentages. "As different social media and networking websites progress throughout their own lifecycles, ways of communicating and sharing the news media rise with the tide (Greer and Yan, 2011). Many users have already taken to posting, sharing, and commenting on the news media through social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, which will likely continue to expand into the future (Glynn, Huge, and Hoffman, 2012). That the news media has had an effect on civic engagement is no longer up for question, but its ability to continue doing so in the future may be" (Brensinger, 2014). That said, the future paradigmatic research of CT has the important challenge to discover how to reduce the power of mass media because its cultivational role can also be a reckless cultural influence. For the sake of America, the unstable agendas that circulate through mass media can offset the balance of a stable democracy due to lack of focus and solidarity. As such, our general society may be subject to the whims of a psychological anarchy by way of unlimited multi-media production through the hegemonic realm that continues to dominate. But for now, as long as there are popular storytelling systems and purveyors of widely shared messages, Gerbner's main ideas are likely to persist. Breaking news, public events, tragic mishaps, online research, and all source credibility must be checked and verified to ensure the dissemination of the perceived message. The added challenge to this opportunity involves the need to recognize the coercive impacts that are prevalent amid the ever changing realm of media content, and focus upon what is necessary to avoid the potential for deception and misinformation. Otherwise, the risk of unwanted naivety and gullibility might creep in to the understanding of that information, and the cultivation of a lie would happen just as rapidly as the cultivation of the truth.

Through supported analysis, this project has also visited the various research that identifies the media as the anchor that secures the overarching agenda for maintaining the current social environment of the American public, and utilized some of the pertinent studies in CT that introduced the conceptual framework of a media habitat that encourages high levels of exposure to its commercialized agenda that directly influences the psychological living conditions of an interactive habitat. Technological improvements to media presentation, network accessibility, and immersive gaming environments present a challenging opportunity for many Americans to focus their attention and balance their time based on the environment that they feel is most suitable for their own well-being and social preferences. This paper has presented the idea that media content can determine the conceptualization, social reality, and the mainstream perceptions of that cultivate many of our common social interactions. As suggested from the start, the conceptual terms that support the relationship between mass media and the American public can be mutually destructive, or mutually beneficial.

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