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Social Reality Vs Mediated Reality: A Case Study of a Female Pakistani Tik Toker

Dr. Azam Jan[1], Dr. Abdul Qayum Khan[2]
1. Assistant Professor, Department of Communication & Media Studies, Hazara University Mansehra
2. Department of Archeology, Hazara University Mansehra

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Azam Jan
Email: azamjancms@gmail.com

Abstract: *This research is undertaken in Pakistani context where people's lives have been transformed from traditional norms and values to mass society traits thanks to the deep penetration of social media. This paper focuses on an unfortunate incident which took place in Lahore, Pakistan. The paper intends to study the case of a Pakistani female Tik Toker who purposefully invited her social media followers to a public park near the historic Minaar-e-Pakistan Lahore on August 14, 2021 in a bid to meet offline. Soon after she reached the public park, her followers, 500 odd in number turned mob and surrounded her. They came closer and closer to her and started to touch her body. Given this case, the study tends to critically review the social reality and mediated reality in theoretical perspective. The paper employs case study strategy based on review of literature revolving around Gerbner's cultivation theory. The review focuses mainly on the works of (Gerbner (1970 & 76), George et al (1980), Matabane, (1988), Busselle, et al (2004) as important contributors to the area of cultivation analysis. The paper aims at finding answers to questions like how the mediated reality i.e. cordial social media relationship between the Tik Toker and her followers became bitter in real life, and what caused the shift of turning from the norms of traditional real life where women are respected to mediated culture where actors are considered as public property? Anticipated findings suggest that mediated reality have a deep impression on the social reality in Pakistan.*

Introduction

The pioneers of cultivation analysis, George Gerbner and his colleagues focused their research mainly on media's effects on the audiences' perceptions of social reality and the same continued for decades. Gerbner & Gross (1976) believed that the unavoidable use of the mediated content, on the one hand, gauge public opinion and affect people's perceptions of social reality, and on the other, help develop a worldview which reflects the persistent prototypes of the illusory world of amusement. Following their foot prints, other scholars in the field also emphasized on the importance of this dimension of media effects (Morgan, Shanahan & Signorielli, 2015). A large number of scholars have undertaken the cultivation research in different ways and with different dimensions. Such as some studies are there on investigating how viewing mediated contents add to viewers' conceptions about violence and others researches have extended it to exploration of topics such as "religious and political orientations, sex

and gender roles, occupational and minority role stereotypes, environmental attitudes, perceptions about science, the family, occupations, and numerous others" (Morgan   & Shanahan, 2010).

At the time when the cultivation analysis was undertaken by Gerbner and his colleagues, TV had become as much part and parcel of the American lives that TV was called as second parents. Generally, cultivation effect is the correlation between the time consumed watching television and the perceptions the viewers developed about the real world.

The key hypothesis of cultivation research was that "the more people watch TV, the more their views of the world reflect dominant messages transmitted by television". Gerbner and Gross (1972) stated that "people watch television as though they were attending church, except that they watch TV more religiously." It was also noticed that mediated messages change established perceptions of "time, space, and social groupings".

Gerber and Gross undertook intermittent research on viewing of TV contents and "conception of social reality that viewing cultivates". These studies are commonly known as cultivation analysis.

Cultivation theory foresees and enlightens about effects of watching television contents and forming and moulding of opinions and conceptions with respect to the real world.

Gerbner noted that "most of what we know, or think we know, we have never personally experienced. We know these things because of the stories we see and hear in television". Gerbner and Gross first carried out analysis of one week television programs in the prime time (8PM -   11PM), they noted that 2960 persecution were shown in these programs per 100,000 characters.   The noted number of victimization was observed to be very high as compared to the actual rate of violent acts in the United States of America. They observed that the number of cases involving murder shown in the prime time TV programs were 932 per 100,000 characters, while at the actual, murder cases were reported to be 9.4 per 100,000 in America. It was mentioned that heavy viewing of the television contents has resulted in high estimation of murder cases in the real life of the society (West & Turner, 2007, PP. 410 - 413).

The emergence and subsequent penetration of social networking media is thought to be adding a new dimension to the cultivation effects of television contents. Some of the scholars in the field believe that existing standing of the cultivation theory in terms of imprinting long term and permanent media effects tends to be irrelevant keeping in view the nature of social media and its users (Webster & Ksiazek, 2012). The theory which was pioneered by George Gerbner and his colleagues in the 1960s and 1970s was discussed and debated after the diffusion of every innovative communication technologies such as "cable TV, satellite, video games and most recently social media". Since the emergence of the 21st century, more than 100 studies have affirmed the validity of the theory, indicating its capacity to develop in response to the growing media setting (Mosharafa, 2015).

This research paper, however, tends to examine the cultivation theory and its relevance to mediated environment in the arena of social networking platforms. The main objective of this research is to study the case of a Pakistani female Tik Toker who invited her virtual friends i.e. Tik tok followers to a public park near the historic Minar -e- Pakistan Lahore on August 14, 2021 for face to face meeting. Soon after she reached the public park, her followers, which numbered approximately 500 turned into mob and surrounded her. They came closer and closer to her and started tearing her clothes. Given this case, the study tends to critically review the social reality and mediated reality in theoretical perspective. The paper employs case study strategy based on review of literature revolving around Gerbner's cultivation theory. The review focuses mainly on the works of (Gerbner (1970 & 76), George et al (1980), Matabane, (1988), Busselle, et al (2004) as important contributors to the area of cultivation analysis. The paper aims at finding answers to questions like how the mediated reality i.e. cordial social media

relationship between the Tik Toker and her followers became harsh in real life, and what caused the shift of turning from the norms of traditional real life where female folk are highly respected to mediated culture where actors are considered as public property?

Cultivation Theory: An Overview

Cultivation theory is one of the most important constituent of the "cultural indicators," (CI) research project which was run for more than a decade by George Gerbner and his colleagues in 1960s (Romer, Jamieson, Bleakley & Jamieson, 2014). The pioneers considered it as a match to the then popular notion of socio-economic indicator, a gauge of key cultural issues (Gerbner, 1970). The CI project provide for the following three faceted research structure:

(i)   The first dimension is the "institutional process analysis, which looks into organizational structures of media institutions, policy formation, and processes that produce cultural messages.

(ii)   (ii) The second facet is the "message system analysis, which inquiries into broad structures and consistent patterns in mass produced messages.

(iii)   (iii) The last dimension is the cultivation analysis, which examines the cultural effects of fictional entertainment programming on viewers (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999)."

Cultivation theory presumes that TV, as a communication channel, can be differentiated from other communication tools due to its deep and wider diffusion in any social order and its power to manipulate, influence and shape social reality. This supposition originates from Gerbner and his colleagues' perceptions that "television has become the cultural arm of modern societies, which receive most of the stories most of the time from this new message delivery system (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1980)." The key assumption of the cultivation theory mentions that the more audience members expose themselves to TV programming, the more it is expected that their previously held beliefs about life will be effected by the virtual reality created by TV contents (Shrum & Bischak, 2001).

Cultivation analysis talks about the extended influence of TV on audiences. This theory suggests that the risk of television is associated mainly with its capacity to form not a specific opinion regarding a single issue, but its power to mould people's moral values and common notions about the real world.

The cultivation theory suggests that television is not meant to replicate what is going on around people's real world, but it promotes a simulated and virtual world that emphasizes on some issues which are of interest to producers of the media contents. Ultimately, the amassing of contact with television and the least familiarity with the real life problems, create a virtual reality, which with the passage of time turn more existent to the TV consumers (Maccawi & El Sayed, 2017).

As per the CI project of Gerbner and his associates (1969), television programs and organized message prototypes not only mirror original norms and values in a social order, but operate as an agent of a directed social change in society as well. In a study titled "A return to cultural indicators," the scholar James Shanahan studies the idea of cultural indicators in line with the problem of showing violent content on TV and representations of minority groups. The study concluded that in relation to portrayal of communities like gays, African Americans, or women, television content do imitate a directional social change and performs as an influential cultural indicator. It is believed that TV depictions can be held up for a considerable time in association with the definite tempo of social change with respect to the recognition of the aforementioned communities, however, in due course of time, TV programs are tended to catch up and yet over symbolize the groups in question (Shanahan, 2004).

Nevertheless, if it is assumed that all suppositions of the cultivation analysis tend to be valid for time to come; questions still exist about the powers of influencing audiences' views about the real world. For

instance, to find out answers to the question of how cultivation effect of the TV contents can be made valid in the arena of internet where people are left with so many choices for information? Nielsen reported that people in the US now spend more time consuming visual content on mainstream televisions, mobile phones and the Internet than ever. However, the data revealed that TV tended to be the leading source of visual content for people of almost all walks of life with average increase of 22 minutes per month per person for the last 12 months. The report however, notices a trend in which light TV consumers in the age bracket from 18-34 stream more online visuals and heavy online consumers are recorded below par in TV watching (Nielsen, 2011).

Television delicately passes on veiled and invasive cultural norms and moral standards with respect to what is right and adequate in a social order, often in an indiscernible way. The frequently transmitted content in TV programs overtime, serves as the moulder of people's perceptions of the real world. This notion has been supported by a number of researchers undertaking studies in this field. For example, people who consume TV content for extended time period, specifically, programs with violent content, are likely to experience the "mean world Syndrome" a view of the world as innately intimidating and risky. Likewise, a study investigating the representation of females in TV programs and its correlation with chauvinism against them has found that heavy consumers with similar demographics, are more likely to show higher levels of 'sexism' when came across with much similar situation in the real life (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 2002).

Cultivation Theory and the New Media Age

Social media was believed to take away the time that was previously reserved for watching TV. However, it is now assumed that social networking platforms are complementing TV watching, particularly live programs. A more relevant research supported this assumption by indicating that audiences' responses on social media to TV contents during live programs has lead to increased viewership (Nielsen 2011).

The relevance of cultivation theory was questioned by Napoli (2010) when he observed that new media technologies are proved to be "relatively more interactive having selective viewing devices and provides more channels and programming choices to more fragmented audiences."

The surfacing of digital technologies, the mushroom growth of TV channels coupled with diversity in TV contents has paved way for discussions with respect to the relevancy of cultivation analysis as a workable research approach. It is stated that modern digital media can be taken as innovative tools for delivering the same messages to the audiences (Morgan et al., 2015).

Though increase in the new digital media tools and the presence of abundant of TV channels which provide for more variety in programs and opportunity of exposing to sensational entertaining contents, the core premises, styles, and fundamental messages are yet to alter. Cultivation theory is said to deal more with cumulative communications, the theory can easily be exposed to criticism when it is restricted to analyse the effects of such communications involving the least combined awareness (Dilliplane, Goldman & Mutz, 2013).

It is also imperative to mention Gerbner's inventive notion of TV viewing. Gerbner and his colleagues perceived TV as a "system in which the overall themes, patterns and images were of more interest from the cultivation research tradition than individual programs and/or programming decisions by some big networks" (Gerbner, 1998). Gerbner perceived TV as a prevailing social power which transmits quite a few messages for heterogeneous masses that moulds their perceptions of 'social reality', as against the approach emphasizing on the analysis of instant effects of exposing to TV contents (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1986).

Nonetheless, the prevalent changes in the media industry are threatening the relevance of the key propositions of the cultivation theory, as new media seems to offer variety of channels and messages, with potentials to bring division among viewers. Resultantly, researchers in the field focus on the importance to changing the original theoretical approach of the cultivation analysis, and to focus more on the context of social networking platforms in dealing with the cultivation theory (Morgan et al., 2015).

Methodology

This study employs case study strategy based on review of literature revolving around Gerbner's cultivation theory. The following lines enlist the case of Pakistani female Tik Toker and subsequent discussion in line with the cultivation theory.

Case Study (The Tik Toker)

She is a popular Tik Toker, who appeared on this social networking site in the early part of 2017. Initially, she used to share her indecent photos on the site to attract as much followers as she could. Soon after realizing that the numbers of her followers are increasing, she started sharing videos on tik tok. In most of her videos, her gestures and body movements were found to be sexually offensive and were tempting to arouse emotions of her young followers. During her four years of presence on social networking site, her followers' number reached to around 20,000. On Pakistan's Independence Day, 14 August 2021, she invited her followers to reach historic Minar -e- Pakistan in Lahore and meet her offline. It took no time, when her followers turned mob and started coming close to her. Some of the followers even tore her cloths in trying to touch her body. It was a strange incident for people living in societies like ours. We are living under the norms of traditional society where women are extremely respected. And the other way around, the people in our society believe that the women who publicly expose themselves are morally corrupt. The same Tik Toker was performing on a mini television screen and was creating a mediated environment, but unfortunately, her followers who were viewing her videos since long (heavy viewers) became part of that mediated environment. They started thinking of the Tik Toker as morally corrupt, and when she came in front of them, the unfortunate incident took place.

Aligning cultivation theory with smart phones' screens and the Tik Toker case

Before discussing cultivation theory, it is apt to enlighten that the content posted and shared on different social networking platform mostly appear on the small screens of smart phones with internet connections. The videos in particular are zealously watched on these mini screens by the youth across the globe.

It is not a rocket science to believe that screens of the smart phones are much the same in structure and function as traditional television screens. So, it would not be wrong to call these small screens of mobile phones as television in miniature. The following paragraphs need to be discussed in light of mobile screen as TV in miniature, because, both perform similar functions and have almost the same effects. For instance, take into account the following major functions of television.

Information: Both traditional television and smart phones with internet connections are used for information purposes. The only difference is that information flow in television is vertical; the contents normally flow from producers of contents to consumers of the contents. The people at both ends are unfamiliar to each other, and may have different culture, different needs and different aspirations. Whereas, the information flow in the social networking platforms is horizontal; the information, most often float among users and users. If we talk about the efficacy of information transmitted via both the channels, the results are assumed to be similar. However, in case of information flow in the new media

systems, there seems to be a possibility of spreading fake information or disinformation.

Entertainment: Traditional television was once the only source of entertainment. The emergence of social networking media effectively intruded to this domain of the television. As discussed in the previous paragraph, visuals for television are produced by unknown people, whereas, videos floated on social media are produced by mostly familiar people having a local touch. It is noted that proximity, both geographical and cultural in the contents bears more influence for the users than contents with lesser proximity. Hence, visuals posted and shared on social networking platforms are tend to be more entertaining because of its close proximity than the videos produced and transmitted via television.

Companionship: There was a time when television was considered as a company in person. People used to watch television when they felt alone at their homes. But in this age of digital social platforms, the concept of companionship has been revolutionized. The users of social media now make online friends and interact with them when they want. This trend of online friendship has turned tables on the off line relationships, and even moved across borders. Examples exist that these online friendship has turned into intimate relationship. A Pakistani woman was reported to have crossed Pakistani border for India to meet and marry her online Indian boyfriend.

Key assumption of cultivation analysis

1. TV poles apart in essence from other traditional mass media.
2. TV contours audiences' attitudes

Keeping in view added facility of visuals and easy accessibility, TV is the "central cultural arm" of every social fabric (Gerbner, Gross, Jackson-Beeck, Jeffries-Fox & Signorielli, 1978, p. 178.). Television provides contents to people of different natures, cultures and aspirations for satisfaction of their respective needs. For example, during the Iraq war, TV disseminated news live from the battle field. The people who were in favour of the attack were pointed to the significance of targeting military installations, and those viewers who were against this war noted the death toll of the civilians (West & Turner, 2007). To put it simple, TV is the traditional storyteller and is capable of bringing people of different natures together.

To match-up the Tik Toker case, it is believed that there were culturally diverse people in her followers. Every one of them noted her videos and actions with their own cultural spectacles, and thus perceived her differently. The people overwhelmed with emotions happened to come closer and touched her body when she came in front of them.

The second supposition is related to the effects of TV. Gerbner and Gross (1976) noted that the essence of the perception nurtured by television is not so much explicit thoughts and judgments as more fundamental suppositions regarding the reality of life and standards of decision on which consciousness is based. Gerbner and his colleagues mentioned four steps to be followed when carrying out studies on cultivation theory (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 2002): "Message system analysis; assessing exposure time; investigating people's views about the world; and establishing relationships" (cited in Mosharafa, 2015).

1.   Message System Analysis

While conducting analysis of the message system, the study focused on identifying the nature, pattern, representation (how a video portrays different subjects) and frequency of the videos, photos, and other related content shown in various TV shows. It was revealed that the nature of contents, representation of characters in the contents, and frequency of certain sequences deeply influence the viewers' perception of social reality.

The Tik Toker case: Taking mobile phone as TV in miniature, most of the contents shared by the Tik

Toker were analysed as indecent keeping in view socio-cultural conditions of Pakistan. In most of her videos and pictures, there appeared to be a sexual appeal, at least for the young people. She often posed her in the photos and videos with short and tight dress, moving her body or gesturing as if she is enticing viewers for intimate relationship.

2.   Assessing Exposure Time

In terms of measuring the time spent watching television, the research took into account an average time consumed by the viewers on a typical day, followed by tagging them as "heavy viewers and light viewers". As shown in the enlisted literature (West & Turner, 2007) (900 murders per 100000 characters), that heavy viewers of television contents perceived mediated reality as social reality.

The Tik Toker: Most of her followers were following her since long as per the first information report (FIR) filed in the police station. In other words majority of them were heavy viewers of the Tik Toker videos. So they were supposed to be living in mediated culture created by her.

3.   Explore Audiences' Visions of the World

This step was about searching answers to asking in line the viewers' perception concerning their society they live in, and that too without reference to any mediated reality. Most of the heavy viewers of television thought about the real world to be much the same as shown in the television programming as cited in the above mentioned literature (West & Turner, 2007).

The Tik Toker: majority (70%) of Pakistan's population lives in traditional society. Here in this part of the country, people think of the females who expose themselves publicly as women with loose moral character, hence it lead to the unfortunate incident.

4.   Establishing Relationships

In the final step, the investigators studied the relationship of television watching with viewers' predisposition to answer to the questions in accordance with what has been viewed in the mediated world. This step was an attempt to find out the influence of watching TV on the viewers' perception of social reality. It is also suggested that people of diverse nature characteristically have different judgments; hence it is not necessary to find out similar answers to the same questions asked from the TV viewers, but to have less dissimilar answers from the group of heavy TV viewers.

The Tik Toker: Since, the followers have been viewing her videos for a long time, so they are considered to be heavy viewers, so most of them perceived her as woman of their own, in other words, a public property and acted accordingly. Though, there were people of different cultures in her followers, but since majority of them were heavy viewers, so their consequent actions were much similar.

Cultivation Theory: Concepts used by other researchers and The Tik Toker Case:

Hawkins's Perceived Reality Concept

According to Robert Hawkins (1977), when people believe that the contents shown on the television screen exist in the real life, there are more chances of influence of these mediated contents on the viewers' perceptions about social reality and corresponding actions. Perceived reality has been defined by Hawkins as multi-faceted notion where different factors have deep impression on the viewers' opinions regarding the reality of a thing, character, and incident.

The Tik Toker: As her videos were having sexual appeals, the followers believed that she is morally corrupt and when she physically came in front of them, they reacted accordingly.

A couple of such facets of perceived reality as mentioned by Hawkins are "Magic Window and Social Expectations dimensions" (Hawkins, 1977).

Hawkins's magic window Concept

It is argued to be the extent to which TV contents allow the viewers to note the mediated realty

whether it exists in any part of the world in real or it is only dramatizations of the events and characters. The Tik Toker: In her videos, she used to wear short and very indecent dress, which is generally worn by ultra-liberal women who are commonly known as call girls in this part of the world. The followers perceived the Tik Toker as call girl and they rushed to the site when invited by her.

Hawkins's Social realism Concept

According to this concept of Hawkins, the viewer's normally try to match the characters in the contents transmitted by televisions with those which happen to exist in the real world.

Since, the Magic Window aspect talks about the viewers' opinions created by the contents of the television, the concept of the "Social Expectations deals with the viewer's experience of the world" i.e. a character or incident presented on TV screen actually exists in real life. For instance, young viewers would quote television content to be factual if these viewers believe that a TV character or incident happened to be there on the earth we live in.

The Tik Toker: The followers thought of the characters like her to exist in the real life. The TikToker body movements and gestures often have negative connotations in this part of the world. And such characters, thought very rarely, exists in our real social life, drew dissent.

Potter's Syntax Concept

The concept of syntax is much similar to Hawkins' magic window. But syntax focuses on the reality, carried by the method of the communication. It is pinched from the transmitted videos and is directly related to the environment or situation in which a description occurs, e.g. "clothes, actors' and accent" (Potter, 1988).

The TikToker: In her videos, she used to wear short and very indecent dress, which is generally worn by ultra-liberal women who are commonly known as call girls in this part of the world. The followers perceived the TikToker as call girl and they rushed to the site when invited by her.

Potter's Semantic Concept

This concept by Potter enlighten about viewers' faith and confidence in the actuality of coded connotation of transmitted contents.

The TikToker: Her tone, talking style and body movements are found to be sexually very offensive at least for young people in countries like ours.

Conclusion

The appearance of internet and the rise in social networking sites on the one hand are estimated to change the customary television consumption patterns of the viewers, while on the other hand, the surfacing of new thought and outlooks generated by social media has the potential to fragment the viewers, which, ultimately can add to disharmony of cultural exhibitions and testing of the mainstream cultivation theory. Cultivation study started with the conception of George Gerbner in the early part of 1970s. It is believed to be one of the regularly discussed areas of mass communication research, and is duly given space in the other contemporary social sciences (Morgan, 2009). This theory during its infancy was critically viewed as not widely valid, but its wide spread use and survival for a long time brings testimony to its reliability and validity. Studies on the psychological practices in line with cultivation analysis ensure provisions of valid proof of its universal general efficacy. Nonetheless, avenues for innovative theoretical approaches subsist. Meticulously, knowing the border line stipulations of the general effect along with the basic process systems tends to enlighten on the perceptions of the audiences influenced by television contents. Furthermore, even though the decline in watching television has been forecasted since long, but it is not the case since the stuff presented on the new digital technologies are much the same. The social media platforms offer both novel stuff and

innovative consuming experiences which can potentially add to modification of cultivation approach.

Cultivation theory and The Tik Toker: She had seen and observed soft, loving and caring online behaviour of the followers through their online comments on her videos. Given this, she opted to have an offline meeting with her followers. Subsequently, she invited her friends on the given date to Minar - e- Pakistan in the city of Lahore. The Tik Toker was expecting a warm welcome and a caring response from her loving online friends in the real life situation but unfortunately, it was not the case. This was much in line with Gerber's one of the findings that the behaviour learnt by watching TV is not necessarily be followed in the real life.

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