

Chapter 15

Media Effects and Cultural Approaches to Research

Approaches to Media Effects Analysis

- scientific method: a widely used research method that studies phenomena in systematic stages;
 - > it includes identifying the research problem, reviewing existing research, developing working hypotheses, determining appropriate research design, collecting information, analyzing results to see if the hypotheses have been verified, and interpreting the implications of the study.
- random assignment: a social science research method for assigning research subjects; it ensures that every subject has an equal chance of being placed in either the experimental group or the control group.
- survey research: in social science research, a method of collecting and measuring data taken from a group of respondents.
- longitudinal studies: a term used for research studies that are conducted over long periods of time and often rely on large government and academic survey databases.
- content analysis: in social science research, a method for studying and coding media texts and programs.

Hypodermic-Needle Model

- One of the earliest and least persuasive media theories attributed powerful effects to the mass media.
- Having watched Hitler use radio, film, and print media as propaganda tools for Nazism, they worried that the popular media in America also had a strong hold over vulnerable audiences.
- > sometimes also called the *magic bullet theory* or the *direct effects model*. It suggests that the media shoot their potent effects directly into unsuspecting victims.

Minimal-Effects Model

- With the rise of empirical research techniques, social scientists began demonstrating that the media alone do not cause people to change their attitudes and behaviors.
- At this point, the limited or **minimal-effects model** emerged.
- Based on tightly controlled experiments and surveys, researchers generally argued that people engage in **selective exposure** and **selective retention** with regard to the media.
- That is, we selectively expose ourselves to media messages that are most familiar to us, and we retain messages that confirm values and attitudes we already hold.
- Minimal-effects researchers argued that in most cases the mass media reinforce existing behaviors and attitudes rather than change them.

Uses And Gratifications Model

- A response to the minimal-effects theory, the **uses and gratifications model** was proposed in the 1940s to contest the notion of audience passivity.
- Under this model, researchers—usually using in-depth interviews to supplement survey questionnaires—studied the ways in which people used the media to satisfy various emotional or intellectual needs.



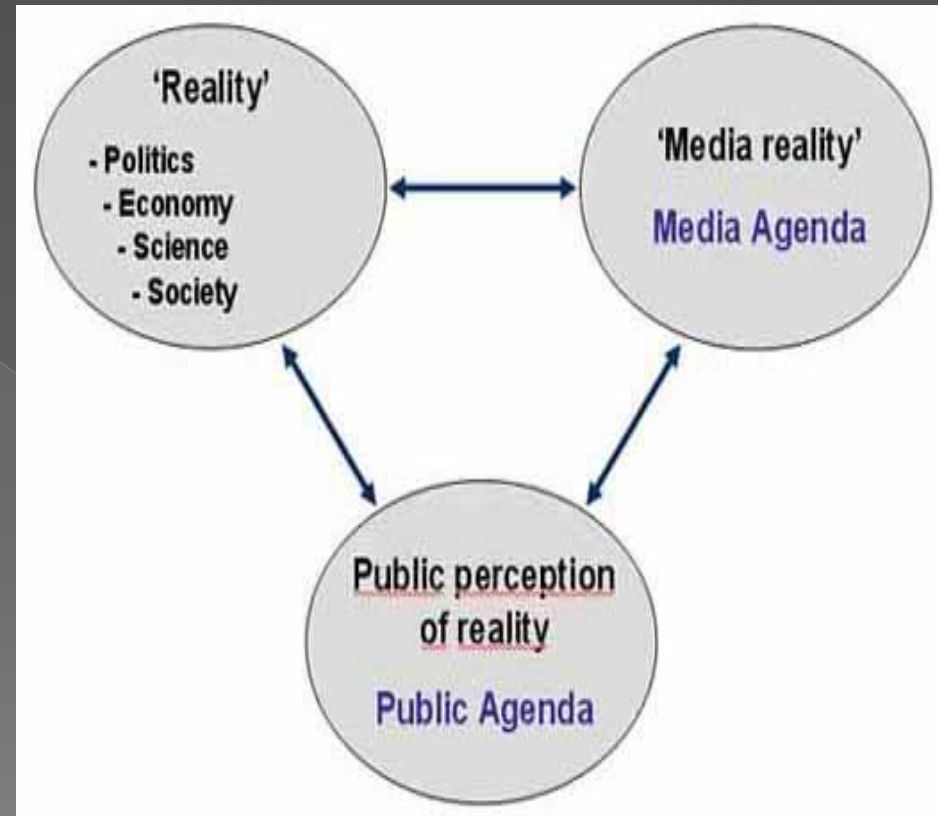
Spiral of Silence Model

- Developed by German communication theorist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann in the 1970s and 1980s,
- the **spiral of silence** is a theory that links the mass media, social psychology, and the formation of public opinion. It proposes that those who find that their views on controversial issues are in the minority will keep their views to themselves—i.e., become silent—for fear of social isolation.
- As those in the minority voice their views less often, alternative and minority perspectives are diminished and even silenced.



Agenda-Setting Model

- A key phenomenon posited by media effects researchers has been **agenda-setting**:
- the idea that when the mass media pay attention to particular events or issues, they determine—that is, set the agenda for—the major topics of discussion for individuals and society.



Social Learning Theory

- **Social Learning Theory - Supporters of social learning theory often cite the anecdotal evidence of real-life imitations of media aggression... as evidence of social learning theory at work.**
- Yet critics note that many studies find no link between media content and aggression.
- For example, millions of people have watched episodes of the Three Stooges with no subsequent aggressive behavior.
- In this view, critics say social learning theory simply makes television a scapegoat for larger social problems relating to violence.
- Others suggest that experiencing media depictions of aggression can actually help viewers to peacefully let off steam through a catharsis effect.



The Cultivation Effect Model

- **the cultivation effect—suggests that heavy viewing of television leads individuals to perceive reality in ways that are consistent with television portrayals.**
- **This area of effects research attempts to push researchers past the focus on individual behavior and toward larger ideas about the media's impact on society.**
- **The major research in this area grew from the TV violence profiles of George Gerbner and his colleagues, who attempted to make broad generalizations about the impact of televised violence on real life.**
- **The basic idea suggests that the more time an audience spends viewing television and absorbing its viewpoints, the more likely it is that the audience's own views of social reality will be “cultivated” by the images and portrayals they see on television.**

Tidal Wave of Violence

○ **Gerbner's cultivation theory says that television has become the main source of storytelling in today's society.**

> **Those who watch four or more hours a day are labeled heavy television viewers and those who view less than four hours per day, according to Gerbner are light viewers.**

● **Heavy viewers are exposed to more violence and therefore are effected by the Mean World Syndrome, an idea that the world is worse then it actually is.**

● **According to Gerbner, the overuse of television is creating a homogeneous and fearful populace.**

Within the Cultivation Effect theory is perhaps one of the most important analysis of media effects – the Mean World Syndrome

Mean World Syndrome

- "...specifies that repeated, intense exposure to deviant definitions of 'reality' in the mass media leads to perception of the 'reality' as normal.
- The result is a social legitimization of the 'reality' depicted in the mass media, which can influence behavior."



The Mean World Syndrome - Desensitization & Acceleration

