Chapter Ten. Theoretical Perspectives
There is a social significance in all contents of the media. Guided by the theoretical approach taken by Zhang et al., the current research has also found similar theoretical groundings in the cultivation theory, the social cognitive theory, and the ethnolinguistic theory. George Gerbner first introduced the cultivation theory in 1969 in *Towards 'Cultural Indicators': The Analysis of Mass Mediated Public Message System*. Through constant exposure, and consistent incorporation the mass media is able to transcend the barriers of time, space, and social grouping. The cultivation theory remains perhaps the ‘best documented and the most investigated’. The major premise as enunciated by the cultivation theory posits that the more a person spends time consuming media (or television commercials for that matter) the closer his or her views are going to be about the world as portrayed in the media. Repeated words, visuals, and cues play an important role in the way viewers’ shapes their perception and attitudes about the world and their responses will be influenced by what they see in the world as shown on television. Television provides people or viewers with ‘slice of ordinary lives’ that not only supply norms for conduct, but also beliefs for a wide range of real life situations.

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*For a further elaboration on the way the theories have been employed in media studies see Zhang, Harwood, Williams, McEwen, Wadleigh, & Thimm, 2006.*
Various researches have reported a number of finding that can be taken as a support for the cultivation hypotheses\(^8\). Cultivation theory has served as an important theoretical rationale for stereotypical gender representation in advertising, and portrayal of people on TV commercials.

Expounding the social cognitive theory and the media’s role in influencing behaviour, Albert Bandura contends that ‘a vast amount of social learning occurs either designedly or intentionally from models in one’s immediate environment. However a vast amount of this information about human values, styles of thinking and behaviour pattern is gained from the extensive modeling in the symbolic environment of the mass media\(^4\). A heavy exposure to this symbolic world may eventually make the televised image appear to be authentic state of human affairs.

But how exactly is this influence effected? Bandura explicitly points out that the effect of the media may not be direct and can take place through a variety of means, through various degrees.

There’s no single pattern of social influence. The media can imply idea either directly or through adopters...in some instances media

\(^8\) See (McQuail, 2005, pp. 497-9). Ch 18, for a discussion of the evidence
both teach new forms of behaviour and create motivators for acting by altering people’s values preferences, efficiency beliefs, outcome expectations, and perceptions of opportunity structures. In other instances, the media teach but other adopters provide the incentive motivation to perform what has been learned observationally. In still other instances, the effects of media maybe entirely socially mediated. That is, people who had no exposure to the media are influenced by adopters who have had the exposure and then, themselves, become transmitters of the new ways. Within these differing patterns of social influence the media can serve as originating, as well as reinforcing influences. [Own emphasis]

Lastly the ethnolinguistic theory posits that the strength of groups and the survival of its language within a given system depends on their vitality measured in terms of institutional support (and most importantly from the view of this research) and representation in the media. And as Zhang et al recent works have begun to explore media presence and portrayal of groups from a vitality perspective. The mere presence or absence of a group in the media is an indicator of its importance
or vitality, and this approach considers the merit of examining content itself rather than examining its effect significance.

References:

5. Ibid pg. 113