

The Cultivation of Materialism in the Fashion Community on Instagram

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Cultivation Theory

The world of media studies will forever be indebted to theorist George Gerbner for his Cultivation Theory. The theory is notably one of the three most-cited in media studies according to an analysis of papers published in major scholarly journals from 1956 to 2000 (Morgan et al., 2015). It has even been explored outside of media studies, having been used in psychology and sociology textbooks (Bryant, 1986). Originally proposed in the 1960s to focus solely on the effects of television upon viewers and their world views, the theory instead focused on the effects of television viewing as a whole. Despite the revolutionary reach of television, there was far less variety for viewers to choose from compared to the plethora of options found today. Which meant studying viewing in its entirety gave researchers a unique perspective. Since then, the theory has been broadened to include other media sources such as social media or video games and, controversially, has been sharpened to focus specifically on certain genres or even programs to assess the effects media has had on viewers.

Gerbner was fascinated by the idea that, unlike any other medium before, people experienced television in very similar ways from birth throughout life. Television was bringing people together like nothing before; people from previously divided publics were now experiencing the same reality through the “television world” (Gerbner et al., 1986). The theory sought to prove the effects of television on the perceptions of people through a “generational” shift in the social and political perspectives of the average person that may or may not directly affect their behavior (Gerbner et al., 1986). They also hypothesized that a lack of change could be an even better example of cultivation since it would indicate that the messages of the television were working to maintain cultural norms instead of allowing them to evolve normally (Morgan et al., 2015). Cultivation theory sets itself apart from traditional media effects studies

because the new lifelong exposure to television meant that “before and after exposure” and “predispositions” models were no longer applicable (Gerbner, 1998). Though he never meant for cultivation to replace these models, or any other entirely, he simply meant to propose a theory that could supplement older theories to better analyze this new media format (Gerbner et al., 1986).

There have been many varying applications of cultivation theory. Studies in cultivation theory have examined television’s effects on perceptions of gender roles, age, familial dynamics, religion, sexuality, education among others, but none as extensively as violence (Gerbner et al., 1986). The main focus of most of Gerbner’s research was the cultivation of violence. Unlike other studies, when investigating television’s cultivation of violence, the researcher is urged to look not at the development of aggressive behavior but at feelings and fears of victimization, lack of dependability, and perceived danger (Morgan and Shanahan, 2010).

Though his research mostly surrounded the US, Gerbner argued that it is applicable in any country and could be used cross-culturally; it may, in fact, be the best way for a researcher to test wider similarities and differences across these national divides (Gerbner, 1998). He argued that cultivation and its effects are only restricted by structural factors like number of channels, broadcasting time, and viewing time (Gerbner et al., 1986).

The Analysis Process

Analysis of cultivation theory is defined by the process laid out by Gerbner and his team as displayed in their many cultivation studies. There are three overarching segments: institutional analysis, message system analysis, and cultivation analysis. The first segment, institutional analysis, is meant to investigate the institutions and core beliefs that drive the onset of the media

messages (Gerbner et al., 1986). This is important because Gerbner believed that in a democratic society, the decision making of citizens needs to be analyzed for the influence and objectives driving them to ensure they are not falling into the objectives set by industrial powers (Morgan and Shanahan, 2010).

Message system analysis is where the lessons taught by television are discovered and then used in cultivation analysis (Gerbner et al., 1986). This is where a researcher will begin to identify and assess the patterns they have found for the most prominent among them (Morgan et al. 2015).

In cultivation analysis, the patterns identified by message system analysis are tested against the beliefs of viewers to gauge the viewers' acceptance of them to form the desired social reality (Gerbner et al., 1986). Cultivation analysis allows researchers to discover the extent to which people are learning about the world from the television, to convert the learned perceptions to general images of the world, and to understand more about individuals' perspectives from these images (Gerbner et al., 1986). Cultivation theory believes that the overall pattern of the "television world" is what will be most thoroughly coded in the minds of viewers and will then cultivate the most established and shared conceptions of reality (Gerbner, 1998).

Cultivation is a result of and a source of "mediated imagery" that is most frequently the viewers' source of information (Gerbner et al., 1986). This means that cultivation is a dynamic process in which the most commonplace ideals of people are used for reference and are then manipulated to maintain them as the popular opinion (Gerbner, 1998).

There are two identified ways that cultivation functions in peoples' lives called "resonance" and "mainstreaming." Resonance is when the images seen in the media are a reflection of personal experiences in a viewer's life, serving to solidify the idea of its existence in

the world and cultivating certain images in them (Morgan et al., 2015). Mainstreaming is the process of television messages rewriting ideals that had previously served as differences between otherwise separate groups (Gerbner et al., 1986).

The information collected as part of cultivation analysis was mostly comparisons between the responses of “heavy” and “light” viewers. These groups were determined on a relational basis so that the sample group is divided almost evenly into three groups (heavy, regular, and light) with a significant difference between the heavy and light viewing times (Gerbner, 1998).

A Focus on Television

At the start of the research that led to the development of cultivation theory, television was only just entering the homes of most American families, and it was sharing the same media messages on the most comprehensive scale in history. Watching television had become a “mass ritual” that was continuously growing. People are now born into a world dictated by the television and live their lives based on the example it sets for them (Gerbner et al., 1986).

Gerbner saw how society was moving away from the church, and in its place Gerbner found that television was now the bright new source for social indoctrination. It provided people with the necessary thematic repetition through various stories that were being “ritualistically consumed from cradle to grave” by everyone regardless of their situation in life (Morgan et al., 2015). The lasting cultural effects from both television and religion can be identified as the repetition of patterns providing examples for the proper ways of the world, authenticating the beliefs and experiences of the people (Gerbner et al., 1986). These patterns can be seen in all aspects of

television from setting and casting to action and outcomes experienced by characters that are seen repeated across programs of different genres and channels (Gerbner et al., 1986).

With everyone watching television, there was less time for other types of media, a fact that served as fuel for the fire that was cultivation effects. There was less time to go towards other forms of media, such as films or books, and without the influence of media to diversify the perspectives a person is exposed to, the cultivation effects can become the public's consciousness without the same pushback other media forms would have faced (Morgan et al., 2015).

Television had become people's main source of information and socialization through entertainment (Gerbner et al., 1986). There was no need for literacy with television; anyone no matter their age or education level could watch television and take lessons from it. The constant flow of messages from the television screen could be likened today to the modern "feed" seen on social media, a continual stream of information about the world around us (Morgan et al., 2015).

Television is, however, more than just a system of stories teaching people about the world. The stories it tells are based on the truth, though it is important to note that these stories do not need to be entirely true representations of the world to be accepted (Gerbner et al., 1986). Though television seems to provide at minimum a near reality, it is constructing a consumer driven reality that waits patiently for the viewer to replicate in the physical world. It is the task of the cultivation researcher to ask whose perspective these stories are told from and how this is meant to shape the world. Television shows are, in truth, coming from the minds of a small collection of mega media conglomerates selling more than the casual viewer realizes (Gerbner, 1998). The broadcasting system has been constructed in a way that allowed for the wealthy few

to take the majority of power and distribute stories allowing for the preservation of that same power (Gerbner, 1998).

This hold of power is a result of the dynamic nature of cultivation that essentially means that by giving or withholding attention from a specific public, whether they be defined by their social standing, group participation, or beliefs, the industrial heads can control the people through their cultivated perceptions (Gerbner et al., 1986). This manipulation of message content often means that minority groups are forced to see themselves reflected in the perspectives of the majority (Morgan et al., 2015).

Television in its Entirety

Gerbner's initial focus was originally specified to television, excluding all other forms of media, but as research continued the focus naturally became increasingly specialized television, in some studies, exclusively primetime, programs airing during children specific blocks on weekend mornings, or even entertainment television (Potter, 2014). This focus, though technically specific, was as far as Gerbner intended for narrowing research in the cultivation field. This was not at all to deny the importance of specific shows, targeted audiences, or any other distinctions that could be made in the variety of television and its audience. It was instead an effort to explore what he believed to be inherently new about television: the ability to affect the entire population at anytime in their lives (Gerbner et al., 1986).

Gerbner noticed that people seemed to watch television without any initial direction, simply watching whatever was on whenever they had the time to do so, and they would often find themselves falling into a sort of routine that they did not have to follow with books, newspapers, or films (Gerbner et al., 1986). Gerbner found that the most regular and heavy

viewers watch a wider variety of television programming (Gerbner et al., 1986). Since the viewer enters the experience with little direction, cultivation theory feels there should be no difference between the analysis of informational or entertainment programs, high or low culture, or artistic levels (Potter, 2014). The most important part of the analysis of television, in the opinion of cultivation theory, is the patterns in the programming that any viewer is unable to avoid (Gerbner et al., 1986).

While cultivation is about the overall impact of watching television, since its creation, researchers have used the title of cultivation theory to investigate specific genres or programs on television. Though the comparison is not what Gerbner intended, it has become a widespread phenomenon within the world of media studies. The trouble with this, aside from its disregard for the clearly mapped intentions of cultivation theory, is that such specific focus risks losing the emphasis of cultivation theory, which is the relationship between various programs and their combined ability to shape the world (Morgan and Shanahan, 2010). Talk shows have often been the subject of these genre specific “cultivation” studies, claiming that talk shows were better predictors of cultivation effects than overall viewing (Morgan and Shanahan, 2010). Reviewers tend to be wary of such studies as there has yet to be any kind of official ruling on whether or not these studies are cultivation theory. Despite this fact many of them still take time in their review to note the existence of such studies, which could read as, if not approval, a lack of denial (Potter, 2014).

Criticism

As with any other commonly used theory, there are plenty of criticisms of cultivation theory. It has been argued that one major failing of Gerbner and his theory is that it allows for

too many independent variables and never asks researchers to create a more comprehensive analysis to see whether the relationship between these variables plays a role in cultivation (Hughes, 1980). Upon analysis, critics found that some of Gerbner's variables were affected by an important interplay that led to some misguided results (e.g. gender and work were related in the way that women were less likely to work and therefore had more time which they could and did spend watching television) (Hughes, 1980). This study still gave examples of cultivation, but criticized the methods originally suggested for cultivation theory.

Others have criticized cultivation theory for its rise to prominence in the world of media studies. Bryant argued that cultivation owes its fame to essentially being in the right place at the right time with a decade of use mostly in its original form, an applicability to cultural studies which was also growing at the time, and the support of major media studies journals (1986). The argument that cultivation is a result of its time, however, neglects to acknowledge the way that it has developed since its conception. Others still have pushed for the use of genre specific studies, claiming that the influence of genres is what carries certain cultivation effects (Potter, 2014). This is simply redirected by the insistence that cultivation is not meant to replace all other theories but to be used alongside them.

The Introduction of New Media

Where there had been only broadcast television at the time of cultivation theory's conception, there are now so many other ways to watch television programming. Television culture was originally "eroded" by the introduction of cable channels and the even more revolutionary VCR technology (Morgan et al., 2015). Then came the internet, which only increased the diversity of programs available at any given time. Morgan argues that

understanding the role of media stories in our culture and the collection of people who are telling them is even more important now than ever as a result of the explosion of digital media in all aspects of our lives (Morgan et al., 2015).

Studies completed as early as the 1980s analyzing the new media advancements came to the conclusion that these advancements should not be considered competitors of cultivation but new delivery methods for a now increased amount of the same type of content being distributed before (Morgan et al., 2015). This is supported by business practices such as the concentration and merging of media outlets to create the mega conglomerates of today and use of recording processes like VCR allowing people to repeatedly watch the same stories with the same messages (Gerbner, 1998).

The new media sources may even prove to become a strong tool for cultivation research since modern viewing processes are trackable, which may solve a previous challenge faced by researchers having to rely solely on the experiential report of participants about the amount of media consumed (Morgan et al., 2015). Perhaps a very useful innovation in cultivation theory could be the creation of a more organized perception of social media's role in cultivation, an idea currently being explored by researchers (Morgan et al., 2015).

Specific Studies

Croucher suggested the use of cultivation theory to understand the experience of Chinese international students adapting to the culture they are studying in (2011). He argued that an immigrant's use of social media will influence their perceptions of their host culture, which in this example is the key cultivation effect, and these perceptions will then affect their adaptation to the new culture and communication with natives of their host country (Croucher, 2011). Social

media specifically is important in this study because it is through these networks that students are able to create interpersonal relationships with natives and surround themselves in the host culture (Croucher, 2011). The prominence of social media in modern life means that participation is almost required for such students should they want to connect deeply with the host culture.

The research completed by Shrum et al. proposed that another aspect of the cultivation process that is specifically important is attention when viewing television and investigated how attention influenced the cultivation of materialism (2005). They found that heavy viewers who paid more attention were, in fact, more likely to express more materialistic values and even light viewers experienced some cultivation of materialism (Shrum et al., 2005). They also hypothesized that heavy viewing with increased attention not only led to inflated perceptions about the prevalence of expensive lifestyles, it also led to misconceptions about the degree of materialism in their own values (Shrum et al., 2005).

Like Shrum et al., Harmon et al. examined the cultivation of materialism though they focused more on the ways that materialistic values created dissatisfaction (Harmon et al., 2019). They believed that since most of the lifestyles displayed on television are of a higher living standard than average, viewers would be increasingly disillusioned with their own living standards (Harmon et al., 2005). They were able to confirm that heavy viewers tend to place great value on money in their lives and become more dissatisfied when their lifestyle does not match those shown on television (Harmon et al., 2005)

An Analysis of Cultivation in Social Media

Cultivation theory's belief that widespread exposure to certain themes through the media warps viewers beliefs is clearly at work on social media, as it has in all kinds of media since the

popularization of the television. The examples detailed below describe the cultivation of materialism through the use of social media, specifically Instagram. Social media is in many ways very much like television when the theory was created. While it is in no way the same as far as the connection created through the limited programming, it is constantly updating and, since it can be accessed anywhere, the viewing time can easily surpass that of television. Like television, social media does not require very much literacy. In many cases, it is even easier for younger, technologically savvy, generations to begin using social media early in life providing a similar lasting commonality as television. Perhaps the most important comparison, however, is the similarities between the way that early television and modern social media attempt to sell more than the obvious stories they present.

Social Media's place in modern society has brought about a new wave of materialism cultivated on Instagram. The problem is that when every moment of the day, and every outfit worn for it, is shared online people get bored with their lives which increases the rate of change for fashion trends. Where neon would have lasted at least an entire year before the internet, now we see that the trend could only last most of a season before people have had enough and a new obsession is found. These materialistic desires are cultivated on three levels on the platform: the fashion publication, the celebrity, and the influencer.

One such fashion publication is Who What Wear, their Instagram profile (@whowhatwear) is a constant flow of fashion information from fashion news to links to their popular stories. Many of these stories are more like shopping lists than actual stories with titles like "Top 27 Things in My Cart Right Now" or "Trust Me Buy These 20 Things" their account is constantly promoting shopping as the way to keep up with the fashion industry. Who What Wear is a trusted publication and so when they post about the need to go shopping, their followers

believe them and openly fall into the trap. While this same type of fashion journalism predates social media and some may even argue that the entire purpose of the fashion publication is to sell the products within, the immediacy of social media has increased the frequency of these articles and allowed for unprecedented access to the products and brands featured.

The wording of these articles is very carefully chosen to encourage the cultivation of materialism without committing the author to actually owning the items or even actually shopping as frequently as reported. The title “Top 27 Things in My Cart Right Now” implies that the author is considering buying these items but, just like window shopping on a rainy Saturday, there is no indication that the author plans to buy the items listed in the article. The wording of these headlines is dangerous for impressionable followers who may not recognize the careful crafting and begin to believe the narrative that these writers and editors are shopping in mass quantities multiple times a week and if their followers do not do the same they risk falling behind on the trends.

One of the most repeated rules of social media usage for a business is the need to provide followers with constant content. A user’s Instagram feed is always updating and with over a billion accounts on the platform, it is easy for a single follower to forget about any one account. Therefore, accounts often post daily if not multiple times a day using all of the available outlets for their information so that they can attempt to keep the interest of their followers. Who What Wear accomplishes this by publishing regular posts at least once a day, with some days stacking up to 5 posts in 24 hours, and posting to their Instagram story multiple times most days. This posting strategy keeps their account at the front of their followers’ minds.

The consistency that the posting schedule provides is constantly reinforcing the ideas that their posts promote, which is not only present in the image itself but the attached articles. The

more an item is photographed and shared by publications like Who What Wear, the more followers are convinced that “everyone” is wearing the trendy items. Followers must acquire those trending items if they want to dub themselves a “fashion girl,” a term frequently used by the account in reference to the trendy women they interact with and feature on the account. The main thing about these “fashion girls” is that they are always ahead of the trends, meaning a constant wardrobe update and rarely repeating an outfit. It is easy for followers of publications such as Who What Wear to find themselves hypnotized by the glamorous lives depicted for these “fashion girls” and believe that their lives are exactly as presented on their social media, a thought which is rarely factual.

There is no need to worry about appearing boring and repeat the same old outfits when one can simply return to the ever trustworthy Who What Wear and find not only their own affordable line of clothing, but plenty of articles whose key selling point is affordability. While other publications, like the classic Vogue, also posts articles that encourage readers to purchase clothing that follows the latest trends, the high fashion items featured in Vogue are often more aspirational. Vogue’s prices are completely different from Who What Wear because they are a historically high fashion publication and therefore leverage their heritage for readership where the much newer Who What Wear must rely on a relatable brand persona to attract readers. By doing this they encourage interaction, which means sharing the experience of following along with advice and continuously purchasing.

The idea that a publication like Who What Wear is for the average woman only reinforces the idea that the women they report on, when they are not well-known celebrities, are “real” women whose lives are, therefore, attainable by the reader. These women tell their stories in articles published to the Who What Wear website and when an announcement that the article

is live has been posted as a picture on Instagram they often feature quotes from their interview that make them seem like regular women who happen to have a passion for fashion. Their professional photos and expertly curated outfits are played down and instead they are served to followers through a lens of relatability to create the image of a “normal” woman whose passion is constantly fueled by a constant flow of material goods.

The truth behind these glamorous mirages presented on Who What Wear’s account is that many of the items they are photographed in are borrowed or gifted. It is a well-known fact in the fashion industry that brands will send out new pieces that they want to be photographed to magazines and celebrities so that they can be seen by many different people. All these pieces are then stored in the famous fashion closet of the publication and for the remainder of their time with the publication. They can and likely will be borrowed for either fashion photoshoots or personal reasons. Alternatively, if the pieces never actually make it to the office, brands sometimes sponsor the writing of a certain article which results in articles like “We Love a Big Shopbop Sale—Here Are 37 Items We're Buying Now.” These sponsored articles not only promote materialism but also direct traffic to specific brands whose goal is to push new products, constantly keeping fans shopping as often as possible.

Fashion publications aren’t the only ones being sent new clothing to post whenever the mood strikes them, which in the brand’s eyes is hopefully very often. Celebrities also benefit greatly from the use of this marketing strategy. Brands have been known to send their new products to celebrities that they feel embody the brand or even send products of a competing brand to a celebrity that defies the brand’s identity. These marketing tactics further inflate the idea that celebrities live lavish lifestyles which lead people to attempt to replicate the façade of luxury for themselves. This is because the constant exposure meant the association of these lifestyles

with the image of a successful person. However, this replication can be difficult for the average person, meaning they must either resign themselves to only even dreaming about success as displayed by a celebrity inspired life or purchasing the clear knockoffs sold by fast fashion brands merely weeks after the outfit debuted.

One of the celebrities who are constantly imitated is Kylie Jenner, the 22-year-old entrepreneur and reality television personality. Her Instagram, @kyliejenner, is followed by millions of users all waiting to see what she is wearing in the hopes that they can learn about the next great trend from the icon herself. The Kardashian/Jenner family especially is marketed as being the newest American Royal Family though they come from relatively normal roots. Where her sisters once worked as closet organizers and took the role of the best friend to people like Paris Hilton as the family grew to fame, Jenner was raised in the limelight and is very much a native celebrity. Despite this, she is still seen by her followers as a normal, if only ambitious, young woman who just so happens to be related to the most famous television family in the United States and possibly the world.

Jenner's style is always evolving but tends to revolve around a mix of high-end brands and common fashion items such as her gray sweatsuit paired with Nike sneakers and a Hermes Birkin bag casually peaking into the shot. She is also known for her body-hugging dresses and catsuits that show off the signature Kardashian/Jenner slim waist and exaggerated hips. The only time she repeats outfits on social media is when she is clearly posting pictures from the same photoshoot or event. With the exception of posts about her daughter, all of Jenner's pictures display her lavish lifestyle from seemingly endless amounts of new clothes to the parties she attends with her friends or an enviable tropical vacation. Even when she is photographed with her sisters, it is always done to show how they live extremely luxurious lives. It is particularly

alluring to watch the entire family living these fabulous lives and looking so incredibly happy for the average person who will likely only ever dream of such things and yet, they believe this is normal. Paired with their popular reality television show, people feel like they know the Kardashian/Jenners and begin to believe they really are a typical family.

The people that follow Jenner's account see all this luxury and begin to think, as they did from *Who What Wear*, that this is the example of the life they must live if they want to keep up with fashion. Many followers attempt to do so by turning to fast fashion brands, whose main goal is to produce the most variety of products in the fastest and cheapest way possible. While many other celebrities, including her own sisters, have spoken out about the discomfort they feel when brands use their Instagram posts to sell duplicate clothing, Jenner has, instead, worked with the brand on many occasions. On the Fashion Nova website, there is an entire page dedicated to the pieces from their collections that Jenner has been photographed in and some of the pieces even have the original Jenner picture in the listing. While this is undoubtedly an expert business strategy it also encourages followers to buy these items and many more once they become more comfortable with the brand. The thrill of shopping only increases with the thought that there is a possibility that they could wear the same thing as Jenner before she even posts it.

The pictures of Jenner's closet are also highly influential for her followers. These posts often feature a curated corner of Jenner's closet or even just a stack of bags or shoes carelessly tossed in the frame. This casual display of wealth is startling when one considers the price of the objects in the shot treated as commonplace. One of the Hermes Birkin bags, of which Jenner boasts many, easily costs multiple thousands of dollars. Not only are the bags extremely expensive, the true lure of the Birkin bag lives in the exclusivity of it. These bags are not simply available for purchase online or even in a Hermes store, trusted Hermes customers must be

invited to purchase a Birkin bag. This is, however, knowledge held mainly by those truly invested in the fashion industry and those who simply see three similar bags would never blink twice at the exclusivity presented in the image. The casual display, to those unaware of the true value of the items in the image, leads people to believe that this behavior is normal for wealthy individuals, instead of assuming that it is a display of the absolute highest echelon of society.

Even if Jenner's followers do not go searching for the many knockoffs at their disposal, the constant exposure that results from following her family and her leads people to be more accustomed to believing that these maximalist lifestyles are the key to happiness, normalizing the practice of continuously purchasing as a form of therapy. Whether it is the joy felt by Jenner as she opens a new order from Chanel or the joy felt by her followers as they open their sixth Amazon package of the week, the heavy lean towards materialistic views are present throughout their lives. This is especially present in her Instagram stories in which she shows off her new finds or new beauty products. This is one place where Jenner seems completely comfortable and extremely happy to bask in her success. Jenner is, for some, an idol and those who place her in such a high status also find themselves worshipping material things just as she does.

Like the celebrity, the influencer promotes the habit of purchasing as often as possible to not only create joy but to stay on or ahead of trends. Influencers, as opposed to celebrities, are simply stylish individuals who have managed to amass a large following on social media that they can then use to generate partnerships with fashion brands and promote clothing at a higher rate. Konrad Sliwiak is one example of an influencer. On his Instagram (@wellitskonrad) he often posts pictures of his high end meets local-mall-style and while he is not shy about the fact that brands often gift him clothes to wear, his style is dependent on it and anyone who tries to copy these looks is off to the store to buy the items he was either gifted or loaned. In the case of

materialism, the influencer may be the most convincing considering their truly humble roots. As a college student, Sliwiak has built his brand through posting high quality, occasionally editorial style, images and consistent interaction with brands, a task that anyone could accomplish with the time and determination to do so.

Like most influencers, Sliwiak relies on his artful photography to carry the account and catch the eye of his followers. His editorial inspired photoshoots create an interesting and professional profile which allows for strong partnerships with brands such as Express which has not only worked with him multiple times sponsoring posts on Sliwiak's account but has also featured him in campaigns on their @expressmen Instagram account. His posts create a balance between the fantasy world of fashion and the honest life of a college student, not only making him seem incredibly relatable but also encouraging the idea in the minds of his followers that this dedication to fashion and therefore constant updating of his wardrobe is a normal occurrence for college students. Though Sliwiak is open about the fact that he does receive many of his clothes and products from brands, he is also very proud of the pieces that he purchases himself and shares that pride with his followers.

Sliwiak's posts are less frequent than Who What Wear or Jenner's but his Instagram story is updated very often and could be considered the main pillar of his social media presence. This is where Sliwiak shows his followers everything from behind the scene details of his photoshoots to the trials of being a college student or the massive amounts of work that goes into being an Instagram influencer. These snapshots of his life give his followers a sense of who he is beyond the polished persona in his posts and displays the truth that Who What Wear and Jenner's accounts are less likely to present. This transparency works well for a smaller account such as Sliwiak's because it allows for followers to see him as a genuine person without him having to

sacrifice any opportunities to continue working with brands. This balance between the unattainable and the familiar is what makes it so tempting for followers to try to follow in his style footsteps.

Social media's accessibility and personalization is the main reason it has been able to advance its cultivation effects. Though it does allow for people to focus their interests in ways that cultivation theory's original conception would consider a clear disqualifier, these interests themselves often become incredibly diverse as displayed by the analysis of the different levels of fashion media present on Instagram. These diversified interests often overlap creating a complicated web of following which could arguably be likened to the act of sitting in front of a television and simply watching, regardless of the programs currently broadcasting.

In the sense of cultivation theory analysis, an understanding of companies' uses of social media as low cost, gorilla advertisement is the result of an institutional analysis. Since their contribution to the images presented by the media outlets and influencers the public depends on for direction are therefore shaping the messages sent by these accounts. These companies that sponsor posts are members institution creating the patterns and, therefore, driving cultivation on social media. The main pattern they are creating is materialism, seeing as that is what most benefits them.

All these examples use very similar language and presentation to cultivate feelings of materialism. On every front people are faced with materialistic images and wording only serves to further convince them of the false prevalence and benefit of materialism in life. Social media, especially with accounts in influential positions, constantly promote the joys of always getting something new. Especially considering the fact that Instagram is very heavily reliant on visuals. Accounts need to keep their followers by adding new material as often as possible, which often

means featuring new pieces in almost every shoot. The result is an incredibly diverse looking closet, especially in comparison to the average person whose lifestyle, without social media, would not require such a large collection.

People are suddenly convinced that there are far more people living far more luxurious lives than themselves. In the example of Who What Wear, not only does the staff participate in creating the image of a whole company of people whose lives revolve around shopping for new clothes, but they also promote people and ideas outside of the company to convince their followers that it is not just people who work specifically in fashion that dedicate their lives to creating expansive closets. In the case of Jenner, her mix of high and fast fashion create a confusing blend of realities between her life as a celebrity and her image as a “real” woman in her early twenties. This mix only serves to morph her followers’ perceptions of their own lives. Sliwiak, as the most similar to the average person, bridges the final gap between the world of the fashion publication and celebrity and the lives of followers. Together these three tiers of fashion accounts on social media create the perfect environment for which materialism is cultivated. Therefore, bolstering sales for sponsors and providing proof of the success of the cultivation.

If the true test of cultivation theory is the ability to prove its effects in the lives of viewers, one must simply look to the increased attention on social media as a source of information. The three examples listed above and their presence on Instagram are now the drivers of the fashion industry. Therefore, their opinions are the drivers of consumer behavior, which in recent years has only show a distinct increase in purchasing. When an influencer says buy this, their follower swipe their cards.

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