GENERAL MODEL OF COMMUNICATION RESEARCH: ORIGIN, DEVELOPMENT, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

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Abstract

The General Model of Communication was first proposed by Gerbner in 1956, and over the years, scholars have been conducting theoretical and applied research on this model. Fiske reinterpreted and modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication to form the Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication 1982. In 2022, Srivastava and Nisha applied Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication to information security research. They revamped this model to form the Revamped Version of Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication, which completely opened up the feedback route from the communicator to the audience in all communication links. These models have some superiorities. Gerbner's General Model of Communication has two advantages. The Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication and the Revamped Version of Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication inherited the advantages of the Gerbner's General Model of Communication and added their advantages. However, these models also had a common limitation that did not reflect the meaning generation that the essence lies in the fact that it did not reflect the effect of communication products on the audience. Both the Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication and the Revamped Version of Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication did not solve the problem, so academia should fully integrate modern communication phenomena based on new media technologies to continue in-depth research into the Revamped Version of Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication to overcome its limitation. Therefore, this paper gave a recommendation combined with an ongoing study for future research.

Keywords: *Gerbner, model of communication, meaning generation, theory, research*

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Model Umum Penyelidikan Komunikasi: Asal Usul, Perkembangan, Perbincangan dan Cadangan

Abstrak

Gerbner mencadangkan Model Umum Komunikasi pada 1956. Sejak itu, para sarjana telah menjalankan pelbagai kajian teoretis dan aplikasi berdasarkan model ini. Fiske mentafsir semula dan mengubah suai model tersebut serta menghasilkan Model Umum Komunikasi Gerbner yang Diubah Suai pada 1982. Pada 2022, Srivastava dan Nisha menggunakan model ini dalam kajian keselamatan maklumat dan menyusun semula menjadikannya Versi yang Dirombak bagi Model Umum Komunikasi Gerbner yang telah diubah suai. Seterusnya memperkenalkan laluan maklum balas penuh daripada komunikator kepada audiens di semua pautan komunikasi. Model-model ini mempunyai pelbagai kelebihan. Model Umum Komunikasi Gerbner menawarkan dua kelebihan utama, yang diwarisi oleh Model Umum Komunikasi Gerbner yang Diubah Suai dan Versi yang Dirombak. Kedua-dua model ini juga menambah kelebihan baharu. Walau bagaimanapun, terdapat kelemahan ketara pada semua model ini, iaitu kegagalan mencerminkan proses penjanaan makna dan kesan produk komunikasi terhadap audiens. Kedua-dua Model Umum Komunikasi Gerbner yang Diubah Suai dan Versi yang Dirombak tidak dapat mengatasi kelemahan ini. Oleh itu, para sarjana disarankan untuk mengintegrasikan fenomena komunikasi moden dengan teknologi media baharu, bagi melanjutkan kajian mendalam terhadap Versi yang Dirombak ini dan mengatasi kekurangannya. Kajian ini juga mencadangkan penyelidikan lanjut berdasarkan kajian yang sedang dijalankan untuk masa hadapan.

Kata Kunci: *Gerbner, Model Umum Komunikasi, Penjanaan Makna*

Introduction

In George Gerbner is a Hungarian-American famous communication scholar. In the early 1950s, Gerbner got into the field of communication research. During his more than 60 years of teaching and research, he made outstanding contributions to communication theory and applied research. Mcquail & Windahl (1982) listed more than 10 classic communication models that appeared in early communication research. They particularly emphasized the Gerbner's General Model of Communication and considered that this model differs from other communication models in that it may be given different forms depending on what kind of communication situation it describes. In other words, it is the only communication model that highlights the form and content of

communication product (Fiske, 1982), which is crucial to modern communication research. For modern communication, one of the main challenges is knowing how best to communicate information, because the same content of a communication product can be communicated in different forms (Lopes, 2021). In this model, the relationship between the form and the content of communication product is dynamic and interactive (Fernández, 2024). Thus, subsequent scholars have been conducting the theory and applied research on this model and have been extensively innovating communication theories (Hanafi, et al., 2022), including the Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication and the Revamped Version of Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication, and so forth. Therefore, in today's era when modern communication phenomena based on new media technologies are emerging one after another (Loos & Ivan, 2024), academia needs to re-evaluate the significance of the Gerbner's General Model of Communication and deeply understand how these revisions enhance the explanatory potential of this model for modern communication phenomena to continue to research.

Gerbner's General Model of Communication

Gerbner (1956) firstly proposed the Verbal Model which decomposed the communication process into ten fundamental aspects and determined the research fields related to each aspect. Based on this model, he drew the Basic Generalized Graphic Model (see Figure 1). In this model, it divided the communication process into perceptual dimension and means and controls dimension. In the perceptual dimension, E is an event, and M is a person or machine to perceive an event based on the selection, context, and availability to form M's perception E', which makes the relationship between the communicating agent and the event. This dimension reflects the communicator's perception process to the reality. In the means and controls dimension, M produces communication product SE which can be divided into the form and content based on the controls of communication channels and media, which makes the relationship between communicating agent and communication product. This dimension reflects the production process of communication product.

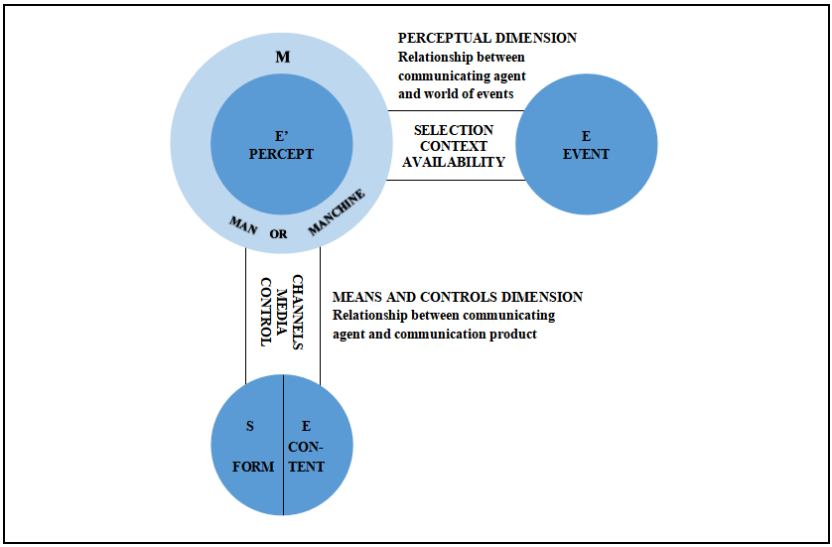


Figure 1: Basic Generalized Graphic Model (Gerbner, 1956, p. 177)

To expand the Basic Generalized Graphic Model, Gerbner (1956) further presented the Aspects of Communication Sequence Illustrated on Graphical Model, taking the communication of "rain" as an example (see Figure 2). In this model, a phenomenon called "condensation of moisture in the air" in the reality, which is an event. Someone M perceives this phenomenon, so the expression is "rain" E' in his or her mind, using "voice" to state "it is raining". The statement of someone M as a language sequence is the form S. "It is raining" as the event is the content E. Compared to the Basic Generalized Graphic Model, this model was added the second perceptual dimension. Another person M2 perceives someone M's statement as the language sequence, namely, the form S. Meanwhile, M2 perceives that someone M states the event "it's raining", namely, the content E. They become in the mind of M2 a statement "it's raining" SE'. This dimension reflects the audience's perception process to communication product.

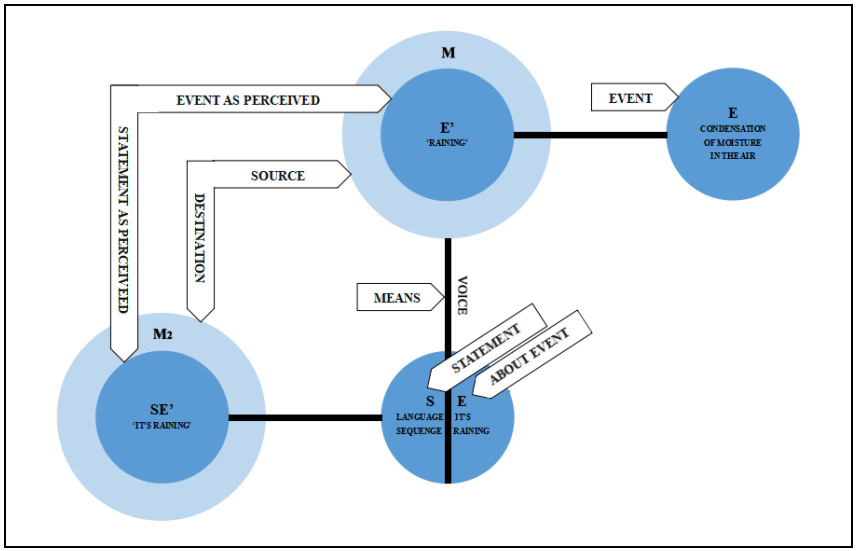


Figure 2: Aspects of Communication Sequence Illustrated on Graphical Model (Gerbner, 1956, p. 179)

In the discussion, Gerbner (1956) collectively called these models the General Model of Communication. However, the Gerbner's General Model of Communication researched by subsequent scholars was actually the Aspects of Communication Sequence Illustrated on Graphical Model. This model has been used in many communication research fields, such as Audio-visual Communication (Harcleroad, 1962; Chen, 1996; Azunwo, 2022), News Communication (Hachten, 1963; Savage, 1988; Sample et al., 2017), Organizational Communication (Voorhis, 1974; Gerpott et al., 2019), Network Communication (Seth, 2008), and Interpersonal Communication (Bortun, 2013), and so forth. These studies involve three research approaches of qualitative research, quantitative research, and critical research, as well as research methodologies including case research, phenomenological research, experimental research, non-experimental research, and so forth. Since this century, some scholars have proposed many new communication models based on the Gerbner's General Model of Communication, combining with their research fields and interests. Rennen (2000) built the Model of Journalism as a Communicative Unit. Tolkačevski (2016) established the Model of Expression of the Epigraphical Culture through Communication. Sample et al., (2017) constructed the Model with out-of-Band Context Records Sent to a Ledger, and so forth.

Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication

Fiske (1982) reinterpreted and modified the Gerbner's General Model of Communication to form the Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication (see Figure 3). In this model, Based on selection, context, and availability, someone M perceives an event E to form a statement E'. when only the media of control or the communicating channels form the coordination, it can generate a communication product SE, including the form and content. Based on selection, context, and availability, another person M2 perceives the communication product SE, including the form and content that made by someone M. What M2 perceives is not the event E but the statement about the event SE. M2 brings to SE a series of needs and concepts from his or her culture or subculture, forming SE' which results from M2's interaction or negotiation with SE. This model was added a two-way arrow to the first horizontal dimension, which means that the event can get feedback from the communicator, and was added a two-way arrow to the vertical dimension, which means that the communicator can get feedback from communication product. These revisions changed the linear characteristic of the Gerbner's General Model of Communication (Bak et al., 2020).

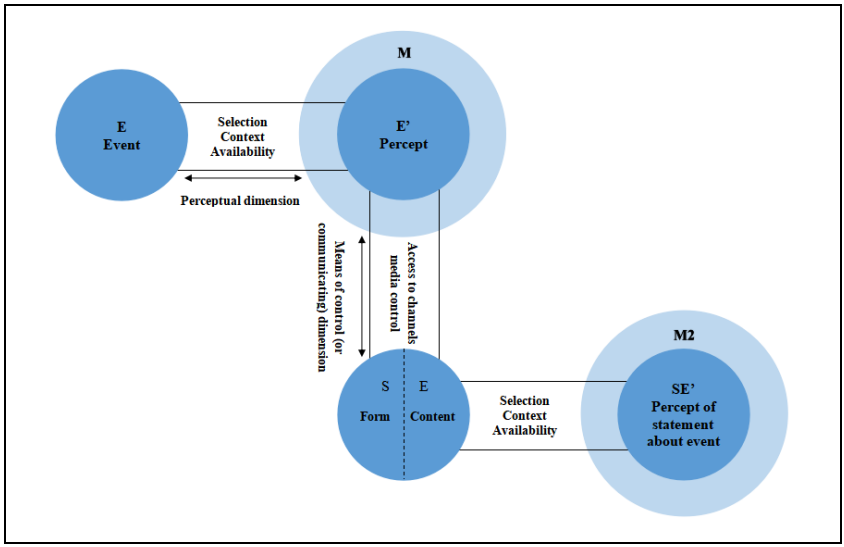


Figure 3: Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication (Fiske, 1982, p. 25)

The Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication is flexible enough to be used in various communication situations, such as Audio-visual Communication (Burkhard, 2005), Health Communication (Acharya, 2011; Acharya, 2017), Network Communication (Tham et al., 2013), Crisis Communication (Cho et al., 2020), and so forth. These studies also involve three research approaches of qualitative research, quantitative research and critical research, as well as research methodologies also including case research, phenomenological research, experimental research, non-experimental research, and so forth. Fiske (1982) specifically emphasized the form and content of communication product. He thought that a given content can communicate with many potential forms and finding the best form for a given content is one of the most critical concern of the communicator. Therefore, some scholars proposed the Layered Model of Communication which argued that the form is the interpretation of the content (Sultanow et al., 2009; Sultanow et al., 2013).

Revamped Version of Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication

Srivastava & Nisha (2022) applied the Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication to information security research and revamped this model to form the Revamped Version of Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication (see Figure 4). In this model, when an incident I occur, an analyst A perceives it and grasps some meaningful information from it based on availability, context, and selection. The analyst A interprets I and expresses it in a certain form S as I1 through all possible channels, media and controls. Then, another analyst A1 receives it and perceives the important information I1 based on availability, context and selection. This model was add a two-way arrow to the second horizontal dimension, which means communication product can get feedback from the audience. This model completely opened up the feedback route from the communicator to the audience in all communication links, which has important theoretical significance and practical value. However, it is latest revision and and no applied research on this vision has been seen in the literature so far.

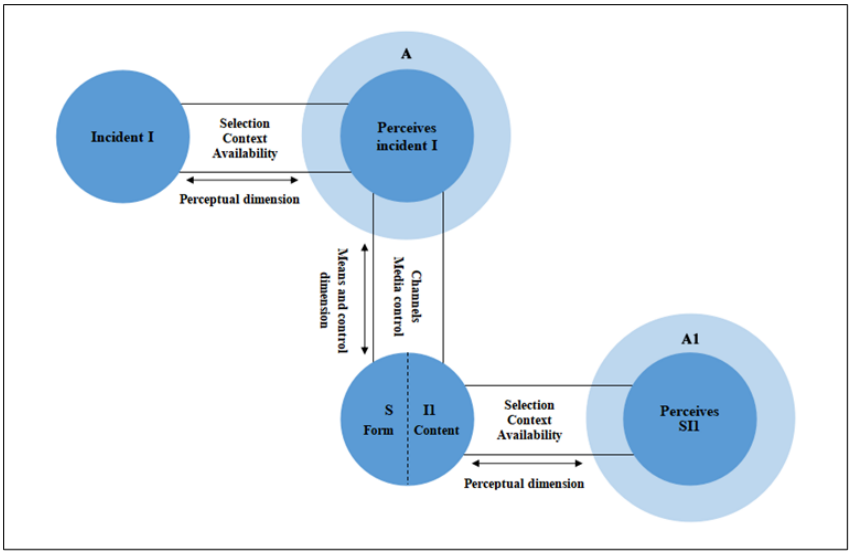


Figure 4: Revamped Version of Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication (Srivastava & Nisha, 2022, p. 10）

Discussion

It can be seen from the literature above that the General Model of Communication undergone a process of gradual development. These models talked about have some superiorities. Compared with Lasswell's Model, the Gerbner's General Model of Communication has two advantages. Firstly, it connects the information transited by communication product with social reality and allows people to ask questions about perception and meaning. Secondly, it divides communication into two dimensions, including the perception dimension and the control dimension (Cingerová & Dulebová, 2023). The most important difference that distinguishes this model from other communication models is that perception is at the forefront, including the communicator's perception and the audience's perception, which is very important for analyzing the communication process (Bak et al, 2020). Whether the communicator's perception or the audience's perception, they are perceptions based on selection, context and availability (Pradika, 2023). Therefore, the information transited by communication product may have different meanings in different cultures or contexts

(Falade, 2021). The control dimension involves the communicator and his or her responsibility to provide the best understanding to the audience (Johnson et al., 2023). Therefore, the communicator needs to select the channel with the greatest control from the various available communication channels, which is also the most effective channel (Pedestru, 2009).

The Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication and the Revamped Version of Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication inherited the advantages of the Gerbner's General Model of Communication, and added their own advantages. Fiske (1982) emphasized that the relationship between the form and the content of a communication product is dynamic and interactive when he discussed the Modified Gerbner's General Model of communication. Specifically, It is a common practice for the communicator to use a fixed form of text, photos, audio, or video to report events that occur in real society. However, another situation is gradually increasing in today's media environment. When an event occurs, the communicator can utilize specific media to use text to publish a brief message, or deliver some photos, or record an audio, or film a video, or even produce a fusion of these forms. Meantime, the audience also has the freedom to select in what form to receive communication product. If it says that Gerbner criticized the view that the form of communication product is only a carrier for transmitting the content (Holmes, 2005), then Fiske emphasized the need to choose the best form to transmit the content, which is the basic problem faced by the communicator (McKeown, 2005). Srivastava & Nisha (2022) emphasized the significance of the form to the content when they discussed the Revamped Version of Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication and considered that one of the difficulties in studying information security is how to identify and record tacit knowledge, because security analysts need to share their tacit knowledge to respond uncertain and unpredictable environment.

The Gerbner's General Model of Communication is linear rather than circular (McKeown, 2005), so the communicator's perception is the event signal rather than the event itself (Savage, 1988), and the audience's perception is the event statement rather than the perception of the event itself (Bak et al, 2020). In this case, the communicator's reliance on the media will distort the objectiveness of the event over time. As the horizontal-vertical link continues over time, specific information become dominant and adopted as the truth by the audience (Cho, et al., 2020). Kraus (2008) pointed out the importance of feedback in a communication

model, which creates a circle in the communication, making the communication model having circularity, and the fact defined by the audience as true are also true in its result. According to the view of Fiske (1982), feedback in communication refers to the transmission of the receiver's reaction back to the sender, so he respectively added a two-way arrow in the first horizontal and vertical dimensions to the Gerbner's General Model of Communication, forming the modified version. These revisions add the feedback route to the Gerbner's General Model of Communication to help the communicator tailor communication product based on audience's response. Srivastava & Nisha (2022) added a two-way arrow in the second horizontal dimension to the Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication, forming a revamped version. This revision allows the cycle of the information to flow both horizontally and vertically to continue throughout the communication process. In a word, these revisions inserted a return path from destination to source but they did not destroy the destination and make the communication process more efficient.

However, these models also have a obvious common limitation. For communication, the audience with their own experiences, attitudes, and affections help create the text's meaning. If they do not get the meaning of what they perceive, they will feel disorientated (Mgshrn, 2017). Therefore, Meaning generation is crucial to a communication model. While discussing the Gerbner's General Model of Communication, Mcquail & Windahl (1982) raised a crucial question: how well is media content understood by the media audience? The question can be understood as this model does not explain how the audience derive meaning from the information of communication product (Wright, 2008). Furthermore, the primary flaw of this model is assessed as the inability to give a clear answer to the problem of how meaning is formed, namely, the inability to respond to the meaning generation (Bak et al, 2020). When Fiske (1982) discussed the Gerbner's General Model of Communication, he believed that this model is still just an imaginative development of Shannon and Weaver' Model. It defines communication as the transmission of information, but it never directly solved the problem of how meaning is generated. However, Fiske only raised the problem but he did not present how to solve the problem in his Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication.

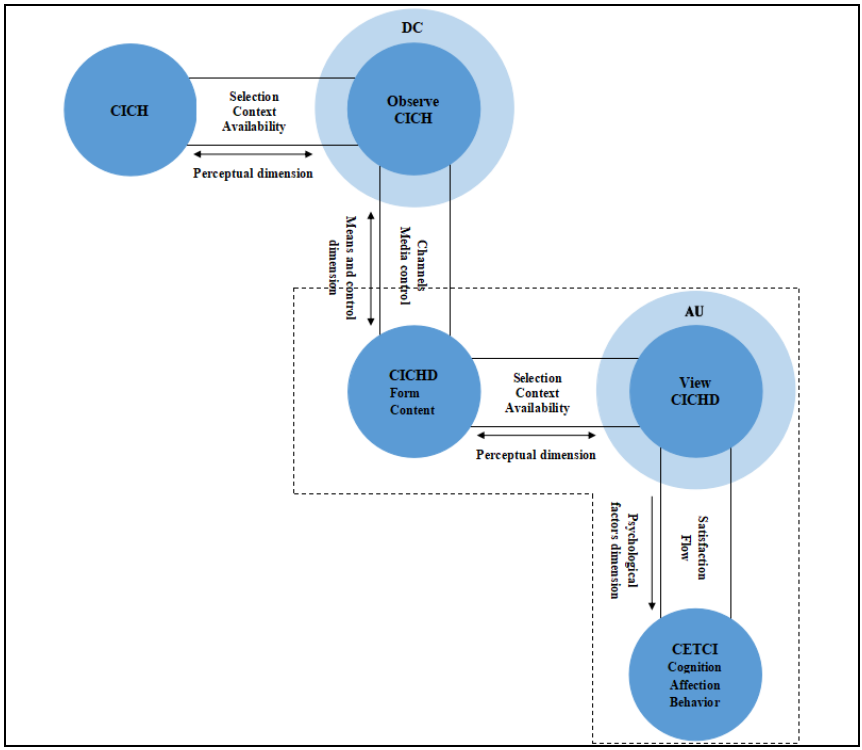
Strauch (2023) pointed out that the Gerbner's General Model of Communication does not reflect the meaning generation that the essence lies in the fact that it does not reflect the effect of communication product on the audience. For communication, the

process is important but the effect is equally important (Verleye & Reber, 2022). Although Gerbner (1956) mentioned the “effects” in the discussion about the General Model of Communication, he only emphasized the continuous transmission of information among people which is eliciting the responses from the audience (Pradika, 2023) and did not point to the intrinsic influence on the audience (Strauch, 2023). The Gerbner’s General Model of Communication has some superiority compared with Lasswell’s Model, but it ignores the tradition of effect research formed by Lasswell’s Model. In the new media era, scholars have begun to pay attention to the end of communication chain, namely, the intrinsic influence of communication on the audience (Gatarski, 2001). Srivastava & Nisha (2022) considered that trust is a method for security analysts to exchange and share tacit knowledge in the Revamped Version of Modified Gerbner’s General Model of Communication and argued that different forms of risk and ambiguity linked with the tacit knowledge transfer can be easily eliminated by trust, but they did not address how trust among security analysts can be gained. From a psychological perspective, psychological factors are the basis of trust (Dunning & Fetchenhauer, 2011), or trust is a psychological contract (Atkinson, 2007). However, they did not continue the discussion in depth, meaning that they still did not solve the problem in their Revamped Version of Modified Gerbner’s General Model of Communication

Burkhard (2005) reputed that communication is not about the object with fixed identity but about subjective perception. For the audience, the information transited by communication product is formed based on their selective psychological image, or the psychological representation in the information is the basis of communication. Hu & Dong (2018）believed that communication is the process in which the communicator send the information to influence the audience’s psychological state. Çeşmeci (2023) emphasized that under the situational dimension of communication, it needs to pay attention to the psychological factors that influence the effect. Therefore, academia should fully integrate modern communication phenomena based on new media technologies to continue to in-depth research the Revamped Version of Modified Gerbner’s General Model of Communication to overcome its limitation. Only in this way can the Gerbner’s General Model of Communication be truly applicable to various communication situations from interpersonal communication to mass communication (State et al, 2015; Saidani, 2022).

Recommendation

The Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication and the Revamped Version of Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication continuously enhanced the potential of the Gerbner's General Model of Communication to explain modern communication phenomena, such as Modern Audio-visual Communication (Pradika, 2023), Social Media Communication (Bielska, 2023 ; Saidani, 2022), Artificial Intelligence Communication (Oyedokun, 2023), and so forth. However, none of their revisions to this model overcame its inherent limitation. Therefore, academia should continue to research the Revamped Version of Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication. It can try to add an effect link to this model, that is, add a second vertical dimension so that it can reflect the effect link of communication product on the audience to solve the problem of its meaning generation. For example, In the research field of Modern Audio-visual Communication, the authors of this paper are conducting a study named "Exploring an Effect Model of the Audience's Viewing Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage Documentaries" (Figure 5). This study integrated the Revamped Version of Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication, the New Stimulus-Organism-Response Model and the Cultural Identity Model to explore the influence of the audience's psychological factors from viewing Chinese intangible cultural heritage documentaries on their Chinese excellent traditional cultural identity to help overcome the limitation of this model.



Note:
CICH = Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage
DC = Documentary Creators
CICHD = Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage Documentaries
AU = The Audience
CETCI = Chinese Excellent Traditional Cultural Identity

Figure 5: The Effect Model of the Audience's Viewing Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage Documentaries (Self-Compiled)

It can be seen from the Effect Model of the Audience's Viewing Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage Documentaries, in the first horizontal dimension, documentary creator observe Chinese intangible cultural heritage based on selection, context, and availability. In the first vertical dimension, documentary creators produce and communicate Chinese intangible cultural heritage into Chinese intangible cultural heritage documentaries including the form and content through all possible channels, media and controls. In the second horizontal dimension, the audience view Chinese intangible cultural heritage documentaries

including the form and content based on selection, context, and availability. In the second vertical dimension, the audience have Chinese excellent traditional cultural identity including the cognition, affection, and behavior through psychological factors including their satisfaction and flow from their viewing Chinese intangible cultural heritage documentaries. This dimension reflects the process by which communication product has the effect on the audience. This study adds a one-way arrow to this dimension, which hypothesizes that the audience's psychological factors from viewing Chinese intangible cultural heritage documentaries have a one way influence on their Chinese excellent traditional cultural identity. In this model, it is recognized process that documentary creators observe Chinese intangible cultural heritage and produce and communicate Chinese intangible cultural heritage documentaries, which is not the focus of this study. Its focus is the effect of the audience's viewing Chinese intangible cultural heritage documentaries.

The purpose of this study is to continue to develop the Revamped Version of Modified Gerbner's General Model of Communication to reflect the effect link of communication product on the audience to solve the problem of its meaning generation. It uses qualitative research and phenomenological methodology to conduct the study, which has already made important research progress. The full paper containing all the works will be completed in February 2025.

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