

Finding The Connection of Internet and Popular Culture in 21st Century: a Descriptive Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The evolution of the internet and digital devices has significantly transformed cultural dynamics, subtly intertwining cultural and technological aspects. Popular culture, heavily influenced by trends emerging from digital platforms, shapes modern lifestyles and mindsets. This study explores how digital advancements facilitate the global spread of popular culture, examining the complex relationship between culture, technology, and societal identity. Employing a qualitative approach through literature review, the research dissects the historical context of popular culture, its proliferation via digital means, and its impact on global societies. Popular culture, often elusive and multifaceted, challenges scholars with its conceptual complexity. The internet acts as a catalyst for cultural exchange, enabling the creation, consumption, and dissemination of cultural content in global aspect. The paper underscores the need for heightened awareness of cultural invasion and its potential to reshape national identities. Understanding the dynamic interplay between popular culture and digital platforms is crucial for navigating the cultural landscape of the 21st century.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The development of internet and digital device has brought a dramatic change in almost every sector of our social life. Danesi (2012) revealed how the intertwined relation between cultural and technological matters sometimes goes unnoticed due to its natural and mutual influence. The correlation between cultural and technological aspect are subtle yet impactful. The production or creation process of cultural content in modern days heavily depends on the trend and issue that is develop and spread around inside the online platform, as people nowadays interact with each other through mobile devices in almost 24 hours (Cross, 2011). Danesi (2012) also emphasized the possibility that urban and modern community might not realise that the current lifestyle and mind set they adopt now actually affected by popular culture penetration into their daily life through the digital vehicle.

The topic of popular culture has been brought into lights by a few scholars before, some of them stated the importance of ICT development in helping a particular cultural value penetrate different region or continent, even the one with the opposite lifestyle and cultural tradition. Without doubt, internet and online media took a big role in shaping the society cultural identity in modern era. The term 'what's the buzz about' nowadays became an important reference or inspiration for the cultural content production, such as the music and movie production (Askin & Mauskapf, 2017). It translates to what kind of trending issue and discussion going viral on the digital platform, as the 'buzz' always changing day-by-day although the main theme might remain the same. It is often claimed also that culture, sociology and technology aspects had a tight causal relationship with each other in 21st century, inherently merged into one particular term 'popular culture' (Danesi, 2012).

According to Parker (2011) study, the topic of popular culture in digital age almost become an understudy area, triggered by its vague nature which rooted from the belief that popular culture study does not belong to one specific academic interest, makes the attempt to investigate and disseminate the subject much harder than any other topic. In addition to that, Cross (2011) also acknowledged the special characteristic of popular culture, which cut across many areas; communication, cultural, sociology and media studies. Popular culture does not belong to only one legitimate intellectual terrain. The popular in 'popular culture' after all stands for the trending areas submerge altogether into a part of everyday culture that became popular. Popular culture special characteristic makes it a sensitive and sometimes -confusing- topic to examine, as the literal definition of popular culture until now is still wrapped in fiery debate (Rodman, 2016).

One thing we can be sure about, in the 21st century, the popular culture and internet are like an inseparable repertoire. Both of it are entangled in the special connection which draw a common picture of today's global society. Therefore, taken up the challenge to try to understand the modern popular culture and its effect on global society will be considered as an important and meaningful discourse for modern people.

2. METHODS

This study was utilising the qualitative approach, as qualitative approach was often used to disseminate and analyse complex phenomenon in a deeper level. The research method was carried out in a thorough observation through literature review which then resulted in a few descriptive theoretical analyses to further understand and pinpoint the connection between internet and popular culture.

Descriptive analyses in this paper was divided into three sections; the first section highlighted the history behind popular culture and the current meaning behind it, the second one for the correlations between internet and digital device to the rapid spread of modern popular culture and last but not least, the impact of prominent popular culture on the global societies.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In Search of Popular Culture

The most exhaustive effort to wrap one's arm around the whole body of popular culture knowledge will inevitably fail, as popular culture works better as conceptual understanding rather than a solid body of knowledge (Rodman, 2016). Parker (2011) described how determining the popular culture ultimate definition is more like grasping on water with bare hands, it spills over the minute we thought we had it. The challenge of determining the definition of popular culture is reflected in the diverse ways the scholars have conceptualized it for analysis. Every scholar defines popular culture through a different approach, thus made the journey to the ultimate meaning of popular culture a very colourful one (Deng & Deng, 2017). Parker (2011) also agreed with that statement, the concept of popular culture is more like a melting pot of confused and contradictory meanings which capable of misdirecting people into numerous blind theoretical alleys. These comprehensions should be the reason why the term 'popular culture' bears many faces and identity.

In the 19th century, popular culture has been tightly related with 'low culture' rather than 'high culture', as the words popular refers to it being enjoyed by the average civilians from middle to lower class (Parker, 2011). Popular culture does not belong to the elites and thus makes whatever 'popular' lose its shine for the people from higher class at that particular time. Deng & Deng (2017) revealed how the popular culture or cultural industry is actually an embodiment of the German Nazi ideology, as explained also in Theodor Adorno's infamous argument that the Nazi made use of the popular cultural value and

modern tools to influence both the German citizen and the Jews. The German authority just takes the advantage of the innocent belief in popular culture or cultural industry at that time, performing a massive project of brainwash and barbarity (Cook, 2014). From Adorno's argument, popular culture is a rude and sadistic tool, which is the opposite of Benjamin Walter's argument, an optimist in popular culture concept. Benjamin supported the spread of popular culture as a helpful mastermind behind the birth of new types of cultural art or entertainment content (Deng & Deng, 2017). In the 21st century, popular culture concept has been seen as a popular cultural content that is received by people and acted on as a 'lived experience' (Choi & Yi, 2012).

Popular culture always served with a big question mark, and yet, it is one of the most interesting research subjects since forever. Rodman (2016) explained how some of the cultural theorist unable to draw the line for popular culture definition not because of its fuzzy characteristic, but due to its ever dynamic and flexible nature. Their concern is reasonable, as the literal meaning of popular culture might ruin the whole body of philosophical understanding and unwritten agreement which has been built over popular culture comprehensive and extensive history in the global society. Deng & Deng (2017) also agreed that the notion of popular culture will contribute more as a life experience in a universal concept, rather than as a suggestive empirical understanding or a line of grounded theory waiting to be discovered. Popular culture might not have literal description or official definition, but as Parker (2011) stated, we may not be able to define it yet, but we will know it when we see it.

Popular Culture in Internet and Digital Age

As the discussion of culture and technology correlation getting emphasized in modern norm, there has been a strong belief that the spread of popular culture across the world was brought by mass media and communication technologies (Danesi, 2012). The spread and appeal of popular culture went as fast as lightning today due to the internet, followed by profound social, political and cultural repercussions. The importance of Internet and Communication Technologies (ICT) played in the rise and spread of popular culture cannot be stressed enough and must be brought into lights, as the modern societies nowadays does not seem to realized that their particular urban mind-sets, lifestyles and personalities were affected by the popular culture (Cross, 2011), which brought by online media from other particular area or event, or born inside the online sphere and then spread around through the wide use of digital and mobile devices. It is due to how subtle and natural the relationship is, as the same with many other life aspects that directly mingled and related with online sphere.

The advent of internet and online platform not only affected the effectiveness of communication and makes the distance seem irrelevant, it changed the whole global societal system into a free marketplace of ideas, where everyone can be the cultural content creator, producer, consumer and audience altogether at one time. Without doubt, the primary vehicle for popular culture in 21st century is the electronic or digital global village which is built over the ICT development.

In the 21st century, we are already living in a global village online, grouping ourselves out into tribes of opinion, lifestyle, ideology and preferred culture (Cross, 2011). The advances in digital technologies and in telecommunication networks has led to the emergence of new-internet based lifestyles (Danesi, 2012). Digital natives like teenagers and young adults adopt new 'buzzwords' or a new vocabulary or idiom generated from the internet slang words on the online platform which transform the language in itself, like the term YOLO (You Only Live Once), which commonly used to express youth spirits and to encourage the freedom to do things; or the term BAE (Before Anyone Else), which commonly used as an endearment title for boyfriend or girlfriend by youngsters across the

world. That kind of internet buzzwords appeared also in the popular artists' song lyrics and in the other cultural products like movies and show, mostly emerged in United States of America (USA) which possess a huge power of cultural hegemonic influence across the world (Chiang, 2014). Therefore, it solidifies the reign of a new kind of language which will soon become integrated as a part of local culture, although it might not be relevant with that particular cultural sphere before.

Chiang (2014) describes how Adorno's argument that popular culture can be the supporting tool for domination is strongly reflected in this global era, as seen from how the online platform helps the foreign cultural products like the American cultural products to dominate over the local cultural products on the other countries due to its ubiquitous nature. This kind of cultural hegemony tweak and alter many important variables in which had a role in shaping the mind-set and attitude of the global society. The subtle penetration of foreign cultural products can readjust and reorganize the cultural policy inside the nation and will eventually affected the economic, social and political climate, thus made the cultural hegemony as something to be concern about.

The Impact of Popular Culture

The new question raised after the exponential growth of popular culture and online platform; How is our cultural understanding and assets changing because of the dawn of internet age? Chiang (2014) illustrated how the global youth across the world nowadays seem to always yearn for a new, carefree, public form of vulgarity, mostly affected by the American cultural value; the freedom of expression. The American youth found its expressive vehicle in the form of carefree music and dance that symbolizes the birth of a fresh and exciting yet explicit popular cultural product. This explicit American form of music and dance goes viral and trending worldwide through the help of online platform (Askin & Mauskapf, 2017). The longing for power and domination also influence the production of cultural content in USA, like the blockbuster movies and show which crafted for an attempt to highlight the nation's tremendous power and heroic effort over their vigilant counterpart (Ang *et.al*, 2015). At the end of the day, the popular cultural products carried more than just entertainment purpose, but also a hegemony message for the other nations.

The online platform capability to diffuse huge audiences supported this American carefree cultural product across the world. The wide spread of American cultural products has refurbished their position as omnipotent country in the global eyes, resulted in the high demand of American's cultural product export. It all triggered by the fact that the American popular culture has been considered as a 'high culture' more than the existing local culture, even in other country. This goes hand-in-hand with Ang *et.al* (2015) concern that such export of cultural value will change the whole cultural policy in the affected country. Given the present-day clashes between trans-national cultural connections and cultural practice within nations, this phenomenon of cultural invasion should be an important concern of the cultural disciplines (Ang *et.al*, 2015).

The effect of American's cultural export prominently felt from South Korea case. South Korea has a long and close bilateral relationship with USA and has long been involved in a lot of government collaboration project, as well. The export of cultural values from USA to South Korea is inevitable and has been seen as a natural conduct between two countries (Peichi, 2013). The cultural values merge into one with the local culture in South Korea, prominently seen from the music industry. The South Korean cultural product known as music genre K-pop are the solemn hybridization between foreign culture and local culture. The cultural hybridization might give birth to another new cultural form. For instance, the culture of fancy boy group and girl group in South Korea mixed with the modern hip-hop and rap genre from American music culture resulted in the massive culture

of fandom inside the country. There is a huge craze over the so-called K-pop 'idol' group and this craze creeping over to the other Asian countries through the online platform. It is familiar, yet feels new, fresh and exciting. Ryoo (2009) illustrated how the outcome of that particular occasion was a new and distinctive cultural and global space that eroded traditional forms of national culture, and at last, national identity. This kind of cultural product might be seen as a way to adapt to the modern realm, but what modern society did not realize is how it might delete and replace the whole data in their own national identity database (Ang *et.al*, 2015).

Apart from the concern addressing the matters of foreign cultural localization in global society nowadays, the popular culture domino effect also determines the degree of symbolic power possess by the involved nation. Who's the one on top of the chain and who's the one on the end of the whole trans-cultural process. Chiang (2014) illustrated how the western power of hegemony is still as strong as ever, mainly lead by USA cultural content export to the other countries across the world. Western popular culture still seen as the measurement for high and low status for the other culture. While there is a rising competitor from South Korea which shows its fang and claw lately, their popular culture is still wrapped in pro and contra regarding the status of Korean symbolic power. The debate rooted from the fact that lots of variables inside the Korean popular culture are a hybrid product from American culture, thus made its legitimacy as a symbolic power for some scholars become ambiguous (Peichi, 2013).

One thing to be certain about is how the scholars seem to be agreed that the hegemony message generates from cultural content or also known as cultural diplomacy is an effective tool to support the economic and political matters in the governmental level, a supplementary material for the other form of diplomacy. Therefore, the role and impact of popular culture as symbolic power is still considered as prominent determiner in the power rank and status across the globe.

4. CONCLUSION

The popular culture might not have a definite meaning or theory, but its ever prominent role in shaping the global society today is too bright to be ignored. With the advent of internet and digital era, popular culture from other countries found its way to penetrate the local cultural sphere, thus changing the local cultural policy that existed before. The popular culture impact gradually altered the mind-sets and lifestyles of modern global society as a result of the global village phenomenon. This gives chances and opportunities to the nations with huge hegemony power to use cultural products as a form of domination over other nation or also known as 'symbolic power'.

Nowadays, one cultural sphere become similar with the others, as the foreign and local culture keeps affecting each other in the current community practice, or also known as cultural hybridization. This form of new culture threatening the national identity in each affected region. The national identity will be buried and replaced with a new set of cultural values, give birth to a new mind-set in the society and leaving the former set of local cultural values in the dark. The concern regarding cultural invasion brought by both the popular culture and ICT development should be addressed in proper way and with utmost care, as it is affecting economy, sociology and political weather in 21st century.

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