



SOCIAL MEDIA: SHAPING AND TRANSMITTING POPULAR CULTURE

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Abstract: Communication is the bedrock of any culture. In fact, language, dressing, music, lifestyle, taste, values of life, and whatever that constitutes any given culture are expressed through communication. Accordingly, the media through their several stages of development and transformation have always played the role of transmitting a people's cultural heritage across generations and borders. In contemporary society, much of media communication finds expression in various social media platforms. Social media have also become embedded in our everyday lives that they largely fashion our perceptions, understandings, construction of meanings, and general view of reality or the world. It is against this premise that one wonders if social media have maintained this responsibility of shaping and transmitting culture. It became crucial, therefore, to investigate specifically what role social media play in the construction and transmission of popular culture. Evidence from the study sustains the thesis of the Reflective Projective Theory that the media, in this case social media, replicate societal values and norms, yet those societal inputs are defined and shaped by the same media.

Key words: Culture, Communication, Social Media, Popular culture, Reflective Projective Theory.

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of the Internet has facilitated the rapid emergence of complex interactions of dispersed groups of people with shared interests, or at times contradictory goals, across the globe. Ultimately, it has led to the formation of the online community or virtual world, which serves a variety of purposes and exhibits a wide range of cultural characteristics. Online community

is a cultural aggregation that emerges when people, machine, and animal bump into each other often in cyberspaces (Rheingold, 1993). The uniqueness of the virtual world lies in its dynamism and weird compositions; its profound interactions and intimacy often blur the boundaries hitherto existing. This makes the virtual world a powerful site for cultural production; and several ethnographic studies suggest that

such productions completely constitute culture in their own right (Bolestuff, 2008; Hine, 2000). Thus, this study explores how mediated popular culture in virtual world shapes and is reshaped by real community. It analyzes how popular culture propelled and animated by communication in online community remakes and is remade by society.

Whether in offline or online setting, the concept of communication has been widely delineated; although in its simplest form it merely denotes the exchange of meaning. This research limits it to Carey's (1975) description in Baran (2009) as a "symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed" (p. 9). Baran argued that this definition links communication and reality, projects communication aptly as a process entrenched in our everyday lives, which informs our perception, understanding and construction of reality and the world around us. Hence, communication is not only the foundation of culture, but has become a primary podium for the debate about any culture.

The mass media are the key conduits through which communication flows. Their role in cultural transmission has long been established as one of the traditional functions of communication. Through socialization, the mass media make individuals learn and imbibe the values and behaviour of

a group. This learning process is done through watching, listening and reading what others do. With the emergence of some new media of communication such as the Internet and mobile phones, these researchers are inquisitive to investigate if the new media also play the same fundamental mass media role of helping people express their cherished values and lifestyles. Since much of communication in contemporary society takes place in various social media platforms, the nucleus of this study is therefore, identifying specifically if social media play any role in the transmission of popular culture. It is also vital here to examine if and how social media interactions influence people's language/slang use.

Based on the foregoing, we anchored this study on these three premises: an acknowledgment that culture cannot truly be discussed outside the realm of communication; a conviction that the traditional role of the mass media in the transmission of cultural values is nonnegotiable; and then recognition that the central place of social media in contemporary mass media is also invariable.

To ensure the reading of this discourse from a common stance, it is essential to draw at this point a lucid picture of our understanding of the prime concepts: social media, virtual world and popular

culture, especially as they apply in this research. Many scholars have attempted to unveil the meaning of social media from very comparable perspectives. For example, according to Tobin and Baziel (2008) social media are digital technologies “that allow people to share content, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives and media among themselves” (p. 13). The ability of any technological device to allow its users share messages with other users qualifies the tool as a social medium. In Dominick (2013), “social media are online communications that use special techniques that involve participation, conversation, sharing, collaboration and linkage” (p. 24). Dominick also stressed that because they allow users to share data, they are highly interactive. In his words, “social media are media for social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable communication techniques. Social media is the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogue” (p. 94). In Straubhaar, LaRose and Davenport (2013), the term is an elastic one that accommodates any medium “whose content is created and distributed through social interaction” (p. 20). The common denominator in these illustrations of social media lies in the ability of the user to share digital outputs with other users. Besides sharing, related notions such as

participation, interaction, collaboration and building relationships through conversations are other qualifying features of any medium to be rated as a social media device. As Dominick (2013) observed, the first tool for social media was the telephone until the dawn of the Internet, which rolled out many new channels for social media. In addition, today “social media are popular because they can be accessed on a variety of platforms – PCs, laptops, netbooks, tablet computers, and smartphones” (Dominick 2013, p. 94). Examples of social media sites on the Internet include, Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, Twitter, You Tube, Blogs, Message boards, etc.

On its part, virtual world refers to the formation of online community whose members engage in non-physical interactions and intimacy with one another, which often distort other boundaries previously existing among them. With its unique dynamism and composition of people from across the globe who exhibit a wide range of cultural characteristics, virtual world is accepted as a viable place for studies on pop culture.

Culture, on the other hand, is socially constructed or learned behaviour. In the words of Dominick (2013), it is a “complex concept that refers to the common values, beliefs, social practices, rules and assumptions that bind a group of people together. Hence, it

is possible to identify a street culture ... or even a college student culture” (p. 47). Harris (1983) cited in Baran (2012) described culture as the “learned, socially acquired traditions and lifestyles of the members of a society, including their patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling and acting” (p. 8). It is “historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (Geertz cited in Baran, 2012, p. 8). One basic notion here is that culture is a learned and repetitive behaviour, which is imbibed through regular exposure to others’ lifestyles and shared with others who also adopt the same values. This notion of culture can be narrowed down to popular culture or pop culture, as all socially acquired traditions and lifestyles learned and made popular through the media. Components of popular culture considered in this work are: linguistic styles and slangs (language).

Language is an important component of popular culture that formed the base for this research. According to Dominick (2013), “Language developed about 200,000 years ago and led to the development of an oral culture - one that depended on the spoken word” (p. 54). Today, culture does not depend only on the spoken word or on the printed word but also on expressions that take place

in other media of communication such as online interactions. Again pop culture spans far beyond language whether spoken, written or digitalized. Straubhaar, LaRose and Davenport(2013) noted that: “Besides language, other aspects of culture are important in defining audiences: jokes, slangs, historical references, political references, gossip about stars, and remarks about current people and events are often culture - and even nation - specific” (p. 502). However, this research is delimited to linguistic styles and slangs used by social media users as a benchmark to measure the possibility of cultural construction and transmission on social media.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

As earlier noted, this research is designed to ascertain the role social media play, if any, in the construction and transmission of popular culture in the virtual world. Another study objective is to investigate if and how social media shape popular culture. It is also our goal to examine if popular culture influences social media contents.

The following questions were addressed:

RQ. 1: How do social media interactions contribute to the transmission of popular cultural outputs in the virtual world?

RQ. 2: In what ways do social media contents shape

popular culture? In other words, do social media contents influence social media users' linguistic style and slang use? If so, how does this happen?

RQ. 3: In what ways does popular culture influence social media contents?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review:

The study is anchored on the Reflective - Projective theory. The major thesis of this theory as put forward by Lee Loevinger is that the mass media 'mirror' society, reflecting an ambiguous mirror to the society by reproducing societal norms and values. The mass media seen thus are mere reflections of the society. The theory further posits that the society in turn echoes or reflects the media. The society conversely assimilates and replicates the values and virtues presented by the media.

Applying the two dimensions of the theory specifically to social media are both relevant to this research. First, social media posts, comments, shares, overall experiences and expressions are reflections of media users' perceptions of reality and the society. On the other hand, beyond being shaped by the users' cultural expressions and general worldview, social media in turn shape most offline expressions and behaviour since people export their social media experiences into real

life situations. Consequently, while social media contents hypothetically shape and transmit popular culture, conversely social media contents are also influenced by cultural expressions. In a discourse on the reflective nature of the media, Hanson (2005) using the movie example argued that:

movie makers claim that they don't shape society, they just reflect it. But this ignores the fact that movies are a central part of society, and even a mirror has an effect... movies have been an immensely powerful social and cultural force... they have produced social changes – in ways of dress, patterns of speech, methods of courting. And they have mirrored social changes – in fashion, sexual mores, political principle (p. 224).

Irrespective of the channel through which movies are delivered to the audience, whether in cinema theatres, on television screens or computer screens, the power of movies to mirror or shape social and cultural changes remains immensely powerful. The same can be said of other media contents transmitted through social media or mainstream media. Discussing the cultural implications of Loevinger's postulation, Ohiagu (2010, p. 638) observed that:

although the media can actively influence society, they also mirror it, and

scholars constantly strive to delineate the differences. If the media reflect the societal values as propounded by Lee Loevinger in the Reflective-Projective Theory, then the influence of media content (ICT) on the society would be that of cultural reinforcement rather than cultural definition.

Findings of this study are expected to sustain or jettison this argument of a reflective social media that mirror societal values and are influenced by the society, which they influence.

Conceptual Review:

In modern society, it is hard to imagine the Internet without the social media. Besides, social media are so embedded in our daily lives that we cannot truly discuss any segment of life without referring to social media. Even most of our offline social activities and events are now linked up to one social media site or another. We create online social networks where we share with others, information and experiences that are vital to us. Jue, Marr and Kassotakis (2010) observed that various reports reveal that year over year, the use of global social media tools has increased fourfold and greater; there are various types of social media everywhere and we cannot escape them. Similarly, Tobin and Baziel (2008) have supported social media usage blast and revolution

when they asserted that: “every other person in the world using the Internet is using social media sites” (p. 7). Confirming this with statistics, a Jue, Marr and Kassotakis’ (2010) research cited in Ohiagu (2012) revealed, “25 percent of the global online population has joined social networking sites” (p. 119).

Describing the social media growth, Dominick (2013) cited the *Facebook* example, that with a population of more than 500 million users in 2011, *Facebook* would rank third in the world, if it were a country. Although *Facebook*, *LinkedIn*, *Twitter*, *MySpace* and *YouTube* are more easily recognized, in contrast to many other unfamiliar social media sites such as *travelocity*, *StumbleUpon*, *Friendster*, *LiveJournal*, *Hi5*, *Xanga*, Evans (2010) made a more comprehensive listing and grouping of social media into nine classes. They are: (1) social networking sites (*Facebook*, *LinkedIn*, *MySpace*, etc.); (2) social news sites (*Digg*, *Reddit*, *NewsVine*, *Kirtsy*, *BallHype*, etc.); (3) social bookmarking sites (*Delicious*, *Magnolia*, *Diigo*, etc.); (4) social sharing sites (*YouTube*, *Flickr*, etc.); (5) social events sites (*Eventful*, *Meetup* and *Upcoming*); (6) Microblogging (*Twitter*); (7) Wikis (Wikipedia); (8) Blogs; (9) Forums and message boards.

The use of all social media sites is on the increase for several reasons. For example, *Flickr* and *YouTube* mean a lot of ease in sharing pictures and music or videos respectively. However, of these nine classes of social media, social networking sites are more popular than the others are. The reason is not farfetched as Ohiagu (2012, p. 89) underlined thus:

Social networking sites allow community members to upload photos and videos, tag their friends, post comments on each other's walls, create groups, add fans, invite friends to events, post bulletins, and integrate applications. Physical and virtual events can be promoted by using free sites for social events like Eventful and Upcoming.

In one sentence, social media have taken the centre stage in the communication arena, and may not be easily relegated to the background even in the future. Therefore, any such discourse about the place of the media of communication in cultural construction cannot be properly concluded in isolation of social media.

One of the arguments of this paper, which will be refuted or supported by evidence from the study, is that social media interactions play significant role in the production and circulation of popular cultural

expressions leading to a global culture. Social media users irrespective of other geographical, religious and ethnic affinities now share some common ways of expression understandable to most of them, often to the exclusion of those who do not use these media. For example, slangs such as swaging, sagging, don, flex, etc; or tendencies for abbreviations like OMG (oh my God), UWC (you are welcome), HBD (happy birthday); LOL, (variously interpreted as laugh out loud, lots of laughter, laughing out loud, lots of love), TGIF, (thank God it is Friday), WULLIP (wishing you long life and prosperity), LLNP (long life and prosperity), etc.; and even use of different icons to depict various emotions are all acceptable and understandable expressions on social media. Without any formal training on these expressions, many users get to know and adopt them by their interactions with others on social media, irrespective of other existing differences.

However, critics of global culture consider it utopian that people who are different in many other ways will for sheer virtue of being interconnected by new communication technologies share the common assumptions of any single culture. They perceive no possibility of individual cultures and national identities disappearing; neither do they envisage the emergence of a one culture for the world community.

Yet, some scholars in the past were so concerned about cultural erosion and imperialism to demand for a New World Information Order as far back as in the 1980's. These scholars feared, as Baran (2009) observed, that protecting the integrity of local cultures in our increasingly, mediated world may not be an easy task especially with the intrusions of direct satellite broadcasts and the Internet. Straubhaar, LaRose and Davenport (2013) also captured that growing apprehension among people. In their words: "One of the fears in many countries is that unbalanced media flows will diminish national sovereignty, reducing countries' cultural autonomy, and governments' abilities to support and protect their cultures" (p. 526). They further described national sovereignty as: "the policy of keeping domestic forces in control of a nation's economy, politics and culture" (p. 526). These concerns resonate with those of the 1980s that led to the formation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) committee headed by Macbride to find solution to Western cultural imperialism. Interestingly, the so-called dominant culture nations such as U.S. also worry about the loss of their cultural identity in the maze of the global interconnected society.

Although we make a case for a global culture being orchestrated by

social media, yet, we refrain from imagining that a global culture means that people irrespective of their differences will have a uniform worldview, lifestyle, values, and sameness of thought on all issues. This is impossible even among identical twins and is only feasible with cloned beings. Selective exposure and perception theories made us understand that people respond variously to the same media messages because of their other differences that also play out in the communication process. Uses and gratifications theory confirm that the audience use the same media content to gratify different needs. Therefore, it would be misleading to "assume that because people are exposed to the same mass media messages, that their lifestyles, worldviews, habits, beliefs, etc. would all be 'electronically uniformed' by the media, irrespective of all other variables" (Ohiagu 2010, p. 636). Rather Straubhaar, LaRose and Davenport (2013) suggested that: "an alternative vision of the global future is that media and information technologies will decentralize the global village, so that information and culture will flow in many directions, from a variety of sources, with many different messages" (p. 526). Hence, our stance of global culture vibrates with Straubhaar, LaRose and Davenport's (2013) perspective of globalization as: "reducing differences that existed between

nations in time, space and culture” (p. 501) and Wilson’s (2005) definition as “media presentations in which cultural inputs are drawn from different countries and cultures in this global village” (p. 165).

Such a middle ground position which neither projects an absolute erosion of national sovereignty nor a fixation with the demise of native cultures allow us better accept the emergence of new dominant and subcultures in our super interconnected society. Bennett (2004) in Baran (2009) observed that while “geographically based identities blur and fade, new sub cultures, based on shared tastes in music or literature or obscure hobbies, grow up” (p. 812). This research is expected to provide evidence to help us invalidate or accept such arguments for a global culture.

Therefore, despite our argument for the emerging global culture through social media platforms, of course, we are not oblivious of the fact that Internet users bring diverse meanings to social media messages arising from their different backgrounds such as educational status, experiences, age, gender, social and ethnic affinities, religious beliefs, philosophies, etc. The resultant diversity of message interpretation certainly means that the same message achieves different effects on various people. Social media users like all other

media audience through selective exposure and perception actively shape received messages to fit their own values and viewpoints. “Audiences typically seek messages and produce meanings that correspond to their own cultural beliefs, values and interests” (Campbell, Martin and Fabos 2009, p.11). Yet cultivation effect of the media over years has made us accept that “heavy viewing of television leads individuals to perceive reality in ways that are consistent with television portrayals” (Campbell, Martin and Fabos 2009, p. 534). If this theory supposedly holds true in social media communication, then continuous exposure to diverse emerging online slangs and linguistic styles—would similarly lead users to perceive reality in ways that are consistent with social media contents, even when these may differ from their own cultural perspectives.

Cultural studies scholars such as Morley in Straubhaar, LaRose and Davenport (2013) postulated that both the media producers who create texts and their audience who read (interpret) such texts do so through the lens of their own social class, culture, significant groups and personal experience. Campbell, Martin and Fabos (2009) argued that whether denoted as high, low, popular, mass or better still, striped of these adjectives and worn-out labels, contemporary culture cannot easily be characterized as one thing

or another. In their words, “binary terms such as liberal and conservative or high and low have less meaning in an environment where so many boundaries have been blurred, so many media forms have converged, and so many diverse cultures coexist” (p. 31). Similarly, “visionaries of the Internet have long heralded the new online world as one without traditional geographic, political or legal limits. Media theorist Marshall McLuhan wrote in 1972 that the wired planet has no boundaries and no monopolies of knowledge” Campbell, Martin and Fabos (2009, p. 40). The wireless planet is certainly far more borderless.

Another major thesis of this study is that new media and specifically social media have continued the traditional function of the mass media of transmitting cultural heritage across borders, perhaps even more forcefully than the mainstream media. Straubhaar, LaRose and Davenport (2013) consented that “the ability of social media to define culture may be eroding the power of the conventional media. Ever-growing amounts of the news and entertainment are generated by those who do not work for established ‘big media’ organizations” (p. 22). On his part, Baran (2009) subscribed that the media construct and maintain culture when he asserted that: “creation and maintenance of a

more or less common culture occurs through communication, including mass communication... When media professionals produce content that we read, listen to, or watch, meaning is being shared and culture is being constructed and maintained” (p. 10). And what happens when much of media content is produced and distributed in social media channels by many individuals who often times are not media professionals? Meaning is still being shared and hence culture is constructed and maintained. In fact, anyone who can share meaning with others has an opportunity to construct one’s own meaning and hence has the power to shape and transmit culture. In Baran’s view, mass communication is a primary forum where we debate cultural values with power to shape our definitions and understanding. In addition, this power could lie with the producers (media professionals) or the consumers (audience) of the message. Through consistent communication, messages are embedded in our minds until the learned behaviour, ways of thinking and feeling become patterned and repetitive. This is why culture is said to be socially constructed and maintained through communication.

As media *‘prosumers’* (people who produce and consume) it is our collective responsibility, in the words of Baran, “to allow mass communication not only to occur

but also to contribute to the creation and maintenance of culture” (p. 16). This echo with Ohiagu’s (2010) position that media content packaged locally could be used to reveal our capabilities, giftedness and culture to the global community rather than letting them revolve around ritual and sorcery practices or worse continue the western stereotype of highlighting Africans as poor, lazy and unintelligent people. “The choice of what media content to present to the world as news about us and entertainment that portray our way of life is ours to make” (p. 622). Therefore, both the construction (shaping) of popular culture and its transmission are achievable on social media.

METHODOLOGY

A total of 40 *Facebook* pages, 20 blogs, and 20 *Twitter* accounts were content analyzed. The following variables were the units of analysis: convenient spellings, slangs, emoticons, and acronym-generated words. To supplement the findings made through content analysis, the researchers interviewed about 12 social media users, to better understand what motivates their online use of any of the studied variables.

Limitations of the Study

Engaging in a totally online field work in a country where high speed Internet on broadband and wireless networks is still a leisure for only a few, proved to be an ordeal.

Contrary to our initial plan to study various components of popular culture such as music, movies, and dressing, we had to limit the study to linguistic styles and slangs and to fewer social media sites. Yet the findings are strong enough to drive the fundamental arguments of this study.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The mass media’s role as agents of socialization is not negotiable, however this study has demonstrated that value transmission has also continued through social media as values and experiences are passed down to others as posts, comments, on social media fora. Precisely, there is the emergence of new linguistic styles on most social media sites especially on *Facebook* and *Twitter*. For example, rather than insisting on standard spelling of words, many users guided by the sound of words (vocal pronunciation) go for either abbreviated usage or shortened version of such words without any regard for standard usage, as long as meaning is shared. For example, brother is written as broda, good (gud), message (msg), need (nid), because (bkkos), etc. Some social media users argue that this is a habit imported from text messaging on cell phones with its restriction on number of characters, which forces users to maximize space usage. This habit is also imposed on such users who access the Internet through mobile devices

such as cell phones and iPads. Strangely, even when they access the Internet on desktops and laptops, they continue such habits. This confirms that meaning and culture flow from the society to social media and vice versa. However, on blogs users conform more to standard linguistic styles and spellings than to these evolving online styles. This is understandable perhaps since blogs are not often written in a haste; besides, blogging is a more formal and serious form of writing.

Using language or more precisely linguistic style as a major parameter in this study, we could deduce that through social media there is an emergence of a new linguistic style in the virtual world. In addition, since language is an important component of culture, by extension we can assert that through social media a new culture is being generated in the virtual world, which cuts across geographical frontiers. Below are some examples of these emergent styles based on one of the study's units of analysis: convenient spelling.

Standard spellings	Convenient spellings used on some social sites	Standard spellings	Convenient spellings used on some social sites
things	tins tings tinz	Life	Lyf
Before	b/4	Birthday	betday bday
Are	r re	People	Pple
The	d	Work	wrk wk
Laughs	laffs	Nothing	nthing nthing
with	wt	When	Wen
Need	nid	Have	Ve
That	dat dt d@	And	Nd
Brother	broda bro bros	Forgot	4got
Thanks	tanx tnx, tx	Lovely	Luvly
Your	ur	Fine	Fin
You	u	Thank	tank tnk
Think	tink	For	4
Congrats	congrts	Great	Grt
Really	rilly	Hope	Hp

This	dis	That	Dat
Through	thru	What	Wat
Always	always	Messge	Msg
There	dere	Happy	hapi happi
The	d	Amen	Amim
Good	gud	Other	Oda
Back	bck	Love	Luv

This list is hardly exhaustive. This new linguistic style does not consider accuracy of language use; neither do the users pretend to conform to the standard usage of English language. Look at some comments/posts found online:

- 1) Luv takes in everytin!
 hate segregates! lust
 hides unda luv! luv prove
 no rite or wrong! luv
 shapes tot and attitude bt
 not behaviour!
- 2) Dis r d reasons y we v
 dis political office
 holder's, wia r our
 counsellors, local govt
 chairmen, wht r dy rili
 doin,or r dy nt supose 2
 adres dis issues?

In the first sentence, notice the spelling of the underlined words. The second sentence which may hardly be understood by people who have not been exposed to this style of writing reads thus in standard English: These are the reasons why we have these political office holders, where are our counselors, local government

chairmen, what are they really doing or are they not supposed to address these issues?

Instead of any preoccupation with accuracy, users rely on the sound or pronunciation of words, to convey meaning. Often times the basic consonants in the standard spelling of a word or its sounds are used to form words.

Apart from space maximization, users claim to prefer this emergent style for speed of typing whether on cell phones or other devices. Could this stem from this generation's usual inclination for easy and less demanding ways of doing things? Other users asserted that they enjoy the freedom of not being tied to any form of standardization in use of language. For some still, it is fun to create something new and different from the orthodox styles.

The adoption of many acronym-generated words and symbols are also very prevalent on wall posts and comments of many social media users, irrespective of their

other differences. Common examples include:

- OMG (oh my God),
- UWC (you are welcome),
- HBD (happy birthday);
- LOL, (variously interpreted as laugh out loud, laughing out loud, lots of laughter, lots of love),
- TGIF, (thank God it is Friday),
- WULLIP (wishing you long life and prosperity)
- LLNP (long life and prosperity),
- @ (used to refer to a person) etc.

On slangs, a few recurrent ones include: winks, dude, swaging, guys, sagging, babe, don, flex, etc. Online *prosumers* studied also use profusely various emoticons (icons that depict all manners of emotions and state of the mind). While the results derived from the other units of analysis in this research could be

applied only to English speaking users, most social media users irrespective of their lingua or other backgrounds use the emoticons. The emoticons thus seem to enjoy universal readings as users of all lingua background learn to know the various emotions they convey by clicking on the icons. Some examples are:

- ☺ Happy
- ☹ Sad

These emoticons are derived by writing a combination of some keyboard characters, which the processing system of the user's device automatically converts to the desired emoticon, or by simply clicking on a list of icons displayed by the device. As illustration, the following combination of characters mean:

- | | | | |
|-------------------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| :-) happy | :(sad | ;-) winking | =-O surprised |
| <3 heart | :'(crying | :-\ undecided | :-D laughing |
| o_O confused | X-(mad | :-/ smirk | :-I poker face |
| :-[embarrassed | O:-) angel | :-* kissing | :-O yelling |
| B-) cool | :-\$ money mouth | ;-! Foot in mouth | :-X lips are sealed |
| :-P tongue sticking out | | | |

CONCLUSION

We therefore, infer that social media interactions contribute significantly to the production and circulation of popular cultural expressions in the virtual world. Social media achieve this, among other ways, through the construction and popularization of slangs and new linguistic styles, which are understandable to most online users across borders, thus leading to a global culture. Through

consistent exposure to the emergent linguistic styles and slangs, members of the virtual world are indoctrinated in reading their meanings. Given that these styles flow from other offline experiences such as texting on mobile phones into social media platforms, we could also deduce that popular media shapes social media contents. In addition, since some online users also imbibe these new styles of writing and export them to

their offline situations such as mobile texting, even classroom and examination settings, as testified by some interviewed users, the study consented that social media in turn shape popular culture. Therefore, we could not but support Lee Loevinger's postulation of a reflective social media that mirror societal values and are influenced

by the society, which they influence. Again, we confirm with research findings that the social media have continued the traditional mass media function of transmitting cultural heritage across borders, if language expressed as linguistic styles/slangs is still acceptable component of popular culture.

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