

Chapter 18

The Diffusion of Mobile Telephony in Popular Culture

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ABSTRACT

For a long time, popular culture has assumed a central place in the debate on media content and consumption. Popular culture invades the lives of people and influences the attitudes and consumption patterns. With the changing dynamics of society, individuals experience overwhelming impact of messages in form of images, texts, and sounds. Therefore, common cultures with massive appeal are cultivated and become popular, irrespective of style. This chapter on the diffusion of mobile telephony popular culture is built on existing knowledge to draw a background on mobile telephony. Related literature explained the global emergence of mobile technology and established that mobile telephones have diffused in popular culture. While considering the shortfalls and scholarship, the study concluded that technological innovations have contributed to the popularity of mobile phones, and in the same way, the consumption needs of people have made the practices a popular trend.

INTRODUCTION

Over time, technology has enormously benefited society through enhanced digital practices that have directly and/or indirectly led to cultural changes. The media have been proven to exert tremendous influences on how people get exposed either selectively or unknowingly and construct meanings of their understanding in varied manner (Storey, 2015). This justifies the extemporaneous spread of all kinds of cultures through forms of media and communication with which in one way or another people are influenced and transformed. Thus, in exploring the opulent media cultures¹, one thing is certain: technological innovations have played a very significant role.

As technology evolves, the popularity multiplies based on the originality, newness and the inclination to culture needs and demands. The cultural phenomenon² is the most prominent element of technologi-

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cal advancements because, the influences exerted by the nature of demand and use is unprecedented. To say the least, any practice that draws a global majority eventually becomes a norm, therefore, this is what has happened to mobile technologies.

BACKGROUND

Of all the information technologies, the adoption and usage of mobile telephones varies distinctively. The information society³ indicators like internet, computers and other technologically enhanced and/or driven machinery have equally boosted and even eliminated certain old practices but telecommunication is exceptional (Caron & Caronia, 2007; Ling & Typhina, 2016; Zafar, 2017). Mobile telephones today have high dimension cameras and voice recording leading to the creation of better privileges, which have eliminated cumbersome gadget handling that hitherto existed.

The high social acceptance of mobile technologies offers high value and satisfaction in domestic, corporate and other socio-cultural spaces. Through the convergence of traditional media unto the mobile phone, users can maximally utilise and navigate applications even during mobility. The entry of mobile telephony into the popular culture arena has necessitated continuous research on the influence it has on not only the people, but the society as a whole.

This chapter will explore how mobile phones as a means of telecommunication technologies, either serve as the life-wire or an alternative to daily lifestyles. Using the tenets of the diffusion of innovation theory, this chapter will assess the views about the popularity of mobile telephony within the context of media convergence⁴. The literature for this chapter is vast, however, a carefully designed outline will be used to focus on the diffusion of mobile telephony as popular culture. First of all, the global technological diffusion phenomenon is considered, to lay a background on how vast the adoption and consumption of mobile telephones have reached. Other sections in this literature are the emergence and diffusion of mobile telephones, mobile telephones as conduit of popular culture, shortfalls in the adoption and scholarship of mobile telephony.

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

The term popular culture simply referred to as pop culture is recorded to have been first used during a speech by Johann Hienrich Pestalozzi in the year 1818⁵. At that time, the term was used in the context of lower class and poor education because these contrasted the elite practices in the society. Eventually, improved economic standards and increase in literacy levels brought about (popularity of entertainment) and necessitated a growing consumer culture. In the early days, the sole element that propelled popular culture was entertainment and this has continued till date.

Over the years, the concept of popular culture has generated debates, yet no single definition is considered universally (Parker, 2011). Several accounts explain popular culture (as the name implies) is a culture that has gained widespread popularity, be it social, economic, cultural, political and otherwise. Notably, popular culture evolves constantly through inter-reliant perceptions and beliefs that influence society and its people over a period of time.

Several accounts hold that popular culture can be explained using mediated means such as music, filmic content, gaming, sports, news and other relatively stated elements to portray people (be it individu-

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