

Redefining Popular Culture

* Piya Sinha & **Dr. Koyel Paul

*Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Birbhum Mahavidyalaya, Suri, India.

**Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, Birbhum Mahavidyalaya, Suri, India.

Abstract - This paper is an effort on the part of the researchers to evaluate the popular culture in this age of digital media. Culture is supposed to be the lifeline of any society. As the culture changes, so also the society. The paper seeks to analyse culture, its different elements including cultural traits and of course the categories of culture like folk and popular. With the interpretations of the two subtypes, the researchers shift their approaches toward changing dimensions of culture, with special emphasis on digital technology particularly internet acronyms and emoji. How these two are redefining popular culture thus become the main concern of the paper. The positive and negative consequences of digital communication have also been given their due weightage.

Index Terms - Culture, Popular Culture, Folk Culture, Internet Acronyms, Emoji.

I. INTRODUCTION

Society has its life water through culture. The standard, sustainability and longevity of the society are very much dependent upon the strength of their culture. A well integrated, equipped with power of adaptability and the potentiality of acceptances help to increase the strength of culture.

The intensity of cultural strength is very much obvious from the evolution of two well known countries, i.e. Japan and Afghanistan. The former one is devastated through the atomic explosion in 1945 and the later was repeatedly attacked from 1990 to till date. The only difference is that Japanese survived with their very own culture which helped them to get rid from the physical damage, and make their way for the future. But in Afghanistan, their society, their culture has been collapsed so brutally, that they have to struggle very hard to regain its original form, but it is too far from the reality now.

So, it is only the cultural potency that can play the most important role for the sustenance of the society not only for the crisis point of view but also for keeping the pace with the progressive world. It has to be updated accepting new ideas, new traits and new customs to broaden the horizon and portray their distinctive signature in the map world.

The present paper is an attempt to focus on the innovative aspects and elements of culture which can modify their whole substance in a holistic approach.

II. LITERATURE SURVEY

While doing this research several books and articles have been consulted for refined output. Literature survey has been immensely useful. Since this research is based on secondary data, different literatures have provided interesting inputs. Books like, *The Human Mosaic: A Thematic Introduction to Cultural Geography*, *The Cultural landscape: an Introduction to Human Geography*, *Human Geography*, *Landscapes of Human Activities*, *Human Geography: Culture, Society and Space*, *Information Please: Culture and Politics in the Age of Digital Machines* have been very important. Articles like *How Cultural Change Equal Behavioural Change*, *The Role of the Technological Change in Culture* have also helped in this research work. These are only a few to name. Several other books and articles have helped in the broader understanding and the analysis of the topic.

III. METHODOLOGY

As the present study is solely based on the secondary data and perception regarding the changing behavioural pattern of human being, the work is truly pragmatic. The available data from social media and different apps have been considered to justify the present work.

IV. CULTURE AS AN INTEGRATED FORM

Culture has a versatile nature to explain its milieu and arena. For writers and media, “culture” means the art, i.e. literature, painting, music and like. To social scientist, culture is the specialized behavioural patterns, understandings, adaptations, and social systems that summarize a group of people’s learned way of life.

Culture is regarded as historically transmitted code of acquired beliefs which supplements instinctive behaviour of human beings. It is a pattern of meanings, endlessly copied and persistently updated, through which people communicate and develop their knowledge about their life and their attitudes towards it (Goodall, 1987).

As a scientific term, culture refers not only to the music, literature and arts of a society but also to all the other features of its way of life: prevailing modes of dress; routine living habits; food preferences; the architecture of houses and public buildings; the

layout of fields and farms; and systems of education, government and law. Thus culture is an all encompassing term that identifies not only the whole tangible life styles of people, but also their prevailing values and beliefs.

Cultural differences over time may present contrasts as great as those between the Stone Age Ivory hunters and modern urban Americans.

Anthropologist E. Adamson Hoebel defined culture as “the integrated system of learned behavioural pattern which are characteristic of the members of a society and which are not the result of biological inheritance...culture is not genetically predetermined; it is non instinctive..culture is wholly the result of social invention and is transmitted and maintained solely through communication and learning” (Blij and Murphy, 2003, p.21).

With Hoebel’s strong emphasis on communication and learning anticipated the present concept of culture as a system of meaning, not just the set of acts, customs or material products.

V. ELEMENTS OF CULTURE: CULTURAL TRAIT AND CULTURAL COMPLEX

It is very necessary to make a special study to identify and isolate the fundamental cultural variables that give structure and spatial order to societies. The smallest distinctive item of culture is known as ‘cultural traits’. It is the assemblage of learned behaviour ranging from the language spoken to the tools used or the games played. A trait may be an object, a technique, a belief or an attitude. Such traits are the most elementary expressions of culture, the building blocks of the complex behavioural pattern of distinctive groups of people (Fellman, Getis and Getis, 2003).

When individual cultural traits are inter-related functionally that comprises a culture complex, its existence is universal. Both the cultural traits and complex have areal extent. When they are plotted on the map, the regional characters of the cultural component are revealed, and so the differences.

VI. CATEGORIES OF CULTURE: FOLK AND POPULAR

Culture is basically of two types carried by two distinct groups of people, i.e. the popular culture, consisting of large masses of people who conform to and prescribe ever changing norms, and the folk culture, made up of people who retain the traditional way of living.

The word folk conjure up many images for the citizens of the urban, industrialized world. A folk culture is a small, isolated, cohesive, conservative, nearly self sufficient group that is homogeneous in custom and race, with a strong family or clan structure and highly developed rituals. Order is maintained through sanctioned based on the religion and family, and interpersonal relationships are strong. Tradition is paramount and changes come infrequently and slowly. Individualism is generally weakly developed in folk cultures as are social classes.

Popular culture is a large heterogeneous group, often highly individualistic and constantly changing. The hallmark of popular culture is its dynamic nature. Interpersonal relationships tend to be impersonal and pronounced division of labour exists, leading to the establishment of many specialized professions. (Jordon and Rowetree, 1990, p.491).

Popular culture implies the general mass of people primarily, but not exclusively urban based, constantly adopting, confirming to and quickly abandoning ever-changing common modes of behaviour and trends of material and non material culture. Popular culture most probably substitutes for and replaces folk and ethnic differences.

The most significant geographic characteristic that distinguishes popular from folk customs is the degree of interaction. Unique social custom arises because of lack of communication among the social groups; each groups develop unique customs as a result of a particular social and physical characteristics experienced by the group. In contrast popular customs are based on the ease of interaction in the world, because of rapid communication and transportation.

The communication and transportation systems are helping to create a convergence of different social customs, with dominance by popular customs and a loss of unique folk characteristics. The dominance of popular customs threatens the survival of folk customs that traditionally helped to provide a unique identity to particular groups. Further, the unique identity derived to a considerable extent from distinctive features of the local landscape, lost by the universalizing trends of popular customs (Rubenstein and Bacon, 1983).

VII. CHANGING DIMENSION OF CULTURE

Now the point is what do we mean by ‘cultural change’? Precisely by cultural change Sociologists mainly refer to the ways of how the society is changing either rapidly or slowly. The society accepts new cultural traits, behavioural patterns and includes newer social norms which ultimately lead to new social structures. One of the main characteristics of culture is that it is always changing, i.e. it’s not static, rather dynamic always. The rapid pace of globalization leads to greater cultural changes. Here, we can refer to Globalization as a series of processes that work transnationally to promote change in a world in which nations and people are increasingly interlinked and mutually dependent.

Along with globalization there are three main mechanisms of cultural change: diffusion, independent invention and acculturation.

Diffusion: It can be referred to as the borrowing of cultural traits between cultures, either directly or through other intermediaries.

Independent invention: it is the process by which human innovate creatively finding solutions to the problems.

Acculturation: it is an ongoing exchange of cultural traits between groups that has continuous first hand contact. Although both groups may experience change as part of their contact with each other, they actually remain as two distinct cultural groups.

Here, it is also pertinent to refer to the role of technology as technology and culture are two forces that greatly influence one another. As newer and newer technologies are introduced in the society, the existing cultures react and respond in a positive or negative way and thus is changed forever. Again as the cultures change, so also the technology redesigns itself. It is interesting to note the processes of cultural change through technological innovations. We are precisely limiting ourselves to digital platforms that too internet acronyms and emoji to analyse the cultural changes taking place in the society. The benefits provided by new digital platforms are already having huge impact on our societies.

Now, precisely coming to the issue of how internet acronyms and emoji are leading to cultural changes.

A) Internet Acronyms:

Internet acronyms or internet slang (also known as internet shorthand, cyber slang, netspeak, digispeak) is a non standard or unofficial form of language used by people on the internet to communicate with one another. It is actually tough to give a proper definition of internet acronyms as these are fast changing. Examples can best explain the idea like- 'LOL' - 'Laughing Out Loud', 'CU' - 'See You', 'OMG' - 'Oh My God', 'BTW' - 'By The Way', 'GJ' - Good Job, 'HAND' - Have a nice day etc.

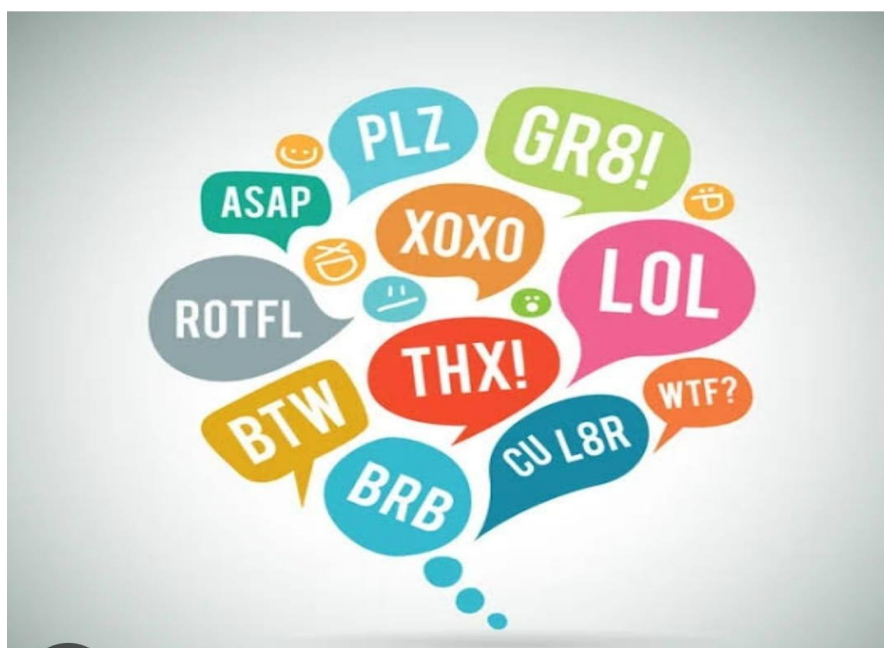


Image 1: Internet Acronym

Source: <https://images.app.goo.gl/gNiWAHzjCEtFgmi1A>

Though on the prima facie, these internet acronyms are time saving and a bench mark of small users of digital platforms but actually these acronyms are often abusive to the listeners. They are not only confusing but they are also 'culture-threatening'. Our culture of face to face communication with warmth and heartfelt concern is eroding away faster with the rapid usages of these internet acronyms. The regular usages of these acronyms decreases our ability of formal or at times informal communications, makes us lazy as we lean on shortcuts and miss out the bigger pictures. We often hurt the personal relationships because of our unwillingness to communicate or the loss of personal touch in communication. Even, if we communicate and particularly through the internet acronyms, we fail to communicate meaningfully. These short cut acronyms at times eat away our understanding and mutual bonding. It is obvious that technological shortcuts cannot replace 'humane' interactions as the languages (including body languages) have tremendous positive effects on personal and public communications.

B) Emoji:

Generally, emoji are depictions of human emotions, living beings, objects and even certain symbols. Emoji are particularly seen in various chat-based apps by tapping on an icon denoted by 'smiley' face. These are also present on the keyboards of major operating systems. There are several emoji, which are divided into several categories like-smiley and people, animals and nature, food and drinks, travel and places, activities etc.



Image 2: Emoji

Source: <https://www.google.com/imgres>

It now feel surprising that there was a time before the arrival of the emoji when human used to communicate through words. But now there are emoji for every occasion. Each emoji with a particular different meaning has entered our daily vocabulary and has almost become an easy substitution of verbal communication. When it has positive effects like saving time, it leads to negative actions like miscommunication or 'misuse leading to embarrassment'. Though in 2015, Oxford Dictionaries even declared an emoji to be the word of the year: "face with tears of joy", otherwise known as "crying laughing", a 2016 Study illustrated the huge misunderstandings that can happen when people use emoji : improper understanding or misinterpretation of the emoji, or careless uses of the emoji. Not that, emoji usages are often confusing only, but at the same time these are threatening to-- threatening to the existing societal culture and communication. Prior to the popular usage of the emoji, much of our verbal communications were value-laden, personal with humane touch which leads to grater personal and societal bonding. But now with these shortcuts we are unconsciously (or consciously) shrinking our communications paradigms. The cultures particularly, the Indian culture which highly emphasised on interactions (essentially verbal), warmth and concerns are losing way to technology. Our emotions are now technology-dependent and interactions becoming only mechanical.

VIII. EFFECTS

Now coming to the effects of these technology oriented communication, which is a hallmark of present popular culture. The effects are both positive and negative.

(1) Positive Effects:

- a) These technological shortcuts are time saving.
- b) Communications can be continued easily, even without a proper knowledge of English as these internet shortcuts are a popular substitute of face to face communication.
- c) These new cultural inclusions are easy to handle as these can fit in every situation and context.

- d) The scopes of communications have been broadened due to the easy accessibility of these new technological discoveries by most of the people across the world irrespective of linguistic differences.
- e) In these days of ‘digital era’ we as ‘smart users’ are constantly redefining and reshaping our culture.

(2) *Negative Effects:*

- a) These newer technological ideas are degrading our knowledge system as it shrinks our knowledge base.
- b) This lead to the overall deteriorations of our educational systems as using these shortcuts are harmful as these prevent us from cultivating proper vocabulary.
- c) These new cultural dimensions can’t be universally adaptable as there exist a ‘digital divide’ between the technologically rich and the poor.
- d) These technological shortcuts often bring in ambiguity in communication there by leading to communication gap.
- e) Culture and communication both have the ability to make us social and interactive. But these technological shortcuts, in the long run can make us introvert if not unsocial.

IX: CONCLUSION

One of the main attributes of culture is the communication model. With the changing cultural dimensions, the communication pattern all over the world is fast changing. Technological innovations are making the process faster. With the peeping in of technology into communication, the scenario is fast changing-- though the question remains whether changing for the good or bad. We humans are social animals. Technology can’t replace human interaction. We definitely need to blend the human and digital elements to communicate fruitfully. It is often believed that ‘communication makes magic’ and by this we mainly emphasize on face to face communication. Despite all these technological marvels we can still hope to achieve more through talking to each other in person. Thus the present digital transformation is in the dire need of ‘human touch’ in it. Thus it is a high time to take a pause and rethink about our popular culture.

X: REFERENCES

- [1] Blij, H.J.de., & Murphy, Alexander B. (2003) *Human Geography: Culture, Society and Space* (7th edition). New York : John Wiley and Sons.
- [2] Fellman, Jerome. D., Getis, Aurther., Getis, Judith. (2003) *Human Geography: Landscapes of Human Activities* (7th edition). New York: McGraw Hill.
- [3] Goodall, Brian (ed.) (1987) *The Penguin Dictionary of Human Geography*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- [4] Jordon, Terry G. & Rowntree, Lester (1990) *The Human Mosaic: A Thematic Introduction to Cultural Geography*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- [5] Poster, Mark (2006) *Information Please: Culture and Politics in the Age of Digital Machines*. London: Duke University Press.
- [6] Rubenstein, James M. & Robert S. Bacon (1983) *The Cultural landscape: an Introduction to Human Geography*. Minnesota: West Publishing Company.
- [7] Source: <https://images.app.goo.gl/gNiWAHzjCetFgmi1A>.
- [8] Source: <https://images.app.goo.gl/gNiWAHzjCetFgmi1A>.
- [9] Stevenson, Marie (21 October 2021) “How cultural change equals behavioral change”. BetterUp. www.betterup.com [Online]. San Francisco. Available from: <https://www.betterup.com/blog/cultural-change>. (Accessed 12 February 2023).
- [10] Wageningen, Richard Van (19 July 2017) “The role of technological change in culture”. Orange Business Services. www.orange-business.com [Online]. Available from: <https://www.orange-business.com/en/blogs/connecting-technology/innovation/the-role-of-technological-change-in-culture>. (Accessed 12 February 2023).