

## Review Article

## Popular Culture and How It Shapes Values Today

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**Abstract:** Popular culture by definition refers to “the ideas, perspectives, attitudes, and entertainment that are mainstream and widely accessible to the general public.” It encompasses the dominant daily practices, media, music, fashion, and social trends that define a society at any given time. To understand popular culture involves taking a look at a few characteristics such as: mass accessibility, commercial drive, reflection of society, and shared identity. “It can include any number of practices, including those pertaining to cooking, clothing, mass and the many facets of entertainment such as sports and literature” (Mohammed, 2021). In the twenty-first century, popular culture makes shifts and changes that are reshaping how we experience it, where we experience it, and what our experience of it means for the ways in which we engage with our lives. Democracy is its presence or lack, its decline or enhancement which turns out to have become one of the key issues involved in conversations of popular culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With technology and globalization, interaction is high and people are close to each other due to social communication and exchange of values, opinions, and cultures are at their peaks. This plays an important role in society to understand the concept of new culturism and allows people to interact and mix with others from parts of the world. To accept other cultures, express them in a variety of ways to promote economic development and accelerate social and indigenous progress. The majority of people in society accept mass culture under the banner of popular culture. Cultural identity is a concept that exists in today’s globalized world but may have drastic change in recent decades. In this era, the youth represent the main idea of cultural identity as they are frequently accepting new values and cultural patterns. Modern culture is a component of social development and the impact of globalization and the development of the information society has given social capital a new direction. The effect of changing faces of people especially the youth is well marked in their expression as a popular culture, popular culture acts as a primary component of daily life, influencing cultural identity, language, and fashion through digital interaction. Smartphones and social media platform culture, enabling rapid, global dissemination of trends. Traditional celebrity is often replaced or supplemented by YouTubers and influencers who leverage relatability rather than elite latent. While global in reach, popular culture has fragmented into numerous niche subcultures, reducing the “monoculture” of previous decades. Audiences take lead in cultural production, creating memories, TikTik trends, and content that define the era’s aesthetic. Popular culture is inseparable from everyday consumer behavior, where brand interactions and online purchasing trends shape identity. It reflects a mix of globalized trends and local adaption, particularly among youth who use new media to express identity and social standing. This dynamic fast-paced environment means popular culture is constantly evolving with “viral” content becoming the dominant form of shared social experience. (Notes the international journal of English Literature and Social Sciences).

**Keywords:** Popular Culture, Values, Media, Globalization, Identity, Social Impacts, Trends, Consumer.

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## INTRODUCTION

Popular culture today is an all-encompassing, participatory, and digital-first environment that

constantly shapes identities, social values, and commercial landscape. Studies have emerged as a powerful phenomenon. The author examines how media

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is the main player in promoting and reinforcing popular culture. It illuminates the cultural shift with urbanization and industrialization. The piece of research confers different sources of popular culture such as movies, TV programs, online video gaming, politics, music, sports, advertisement, e-commerce, and mobile applications and describes the significant role of the media in popularizing and endorsing it. Popular culture is dynamic and the media plays a crucial role in promoting popular culture (Coban, 2016).

While popular culture often acts as a bridge for connection and a shared language, it is largely failed to deliver substantive nourishment often functioning as “fast food for the soul” that leaves communities and societies hungry for deeper meaning.

Culture in the sense of investigation is not high culture, it is anything learned and elaborated within a form of life. Thinking about shared language leads us to popular culture and its role in human education. What means is confronting culture’s criteria with one’s words and life (Cavell, 1979). This led Cavell to regard movies as moral education. It is a matter of the philosophical education of public; an education provided in modern times by TV series which have taken over for cinema in the task of educating adolescents and adults. Popular culture as art forms integrate the ordinary lives of people allowing them to check their own experience to find the words to express it, and in this way to assess everyday experience.

Cavell devotes time in the *Claim of Reason* to language of learning. Cavell followed Wittgenstein in his claim to be subverting the hierarchies of the importance by calling human attention to everyday situations, to games that look childish or unimportant. Attention to ordinary and domestic life, everyday life, undermine the usual hierarchies whether intellectual, moral, or social importance and of what matters. Cavell comments that: “the investigation is a work that begins with a sense of inheritance, the child’s inheritance of language; it is an image of the culture as an inheritance, one that takes place, as is fundamental to Freud, in the conflict of voices and generations” (Cavell, 1989).

Our experience as spectators comes out of an ordinary, shared culture, the “physiognomy” of the ordinary. The idea that the highest culture is shared culture is one of the fundamental values. Cavell defends in “film in the university,” the appendix to *Pursuits of Happiness* (Cavell, 1981). Cavell teaches us that an ordinary aesthetics of cinema must defend not the specificity of the individuals who created a work, nor the singularity of a work, rather our common aesthetic experience, for example, the experience of a movie viewer who goes to see a movie for the actors in it, whom he or she liked in earlier films and now wants to see again in new incarnations. The experience of cinema is at once mysterious and ordinary. We touch on the very finitude

of the experience of film, which is always repeatable but also always circumscribed. In spite of now viewing conditions that have been established over the last several decades (first videos, then DVDs, and now streaming), the temporality of film is always the temporality of finitude. There is always a moment when it stops, and this feeling is part of the experience of a film, making it a type of ordinary experience of life. The ending of a TV series an important and difficult moment for its viewer (Game of Thrones when the series ended, 2019, and Comments in Laugier 2019).

### The Gaps

Popular culture primarily reflects our immediate desires and trends, rarely providing lasting moral absolutes on deep philosophical virtues. While it excels at entertaining and connecting us globally, it is yet to instill genuine empathy, delayed gratification, and unconditional respect, often favoring surface-level engagement over profound human growth. The gap between what popular culture currently offers and what it is fundamentally “yet to give us” highlights the difference between entertainment and genuine societal wisdom.

1. Popular culture frequently consumes trauma and systemic issues for aesthetic or narrative appeal, rarely leaving the audience with the tools for actionable empty. It often fails to translate viral social awareness into sustained, real-world compassion.
2. Driven by algorithms and short-form content, popular culture heavily incentivizes immediate validation and instant gratification. It is yet to successfully model the value of long-term patience, quiet perseverance and the deep satisfaction found in slow work.
3. Popular culture often relies on western, mass-produced narratives it is yet to offer equitable, globally decentralized storytelling where underrepresented regions contribute equally to the mainstream global consciousness without being exoticized or stereotype.
4. Rather than just providing escapism, popular culture has the potential to help individuals to check their everyday experiences and find the words to navigate real-word dilemmas.
5. The true value is yet to be unlocked when popular culture breaks free from media conglomerates that feed passive audiences standardized, commercialized trends.
6. It is yet to fully achieve its role as a universal unifier that transcends political and social boundaries without watering down genuine artistic intent.
7. Much of modern media is often characterized for prioritizing instant gratification, materialism, and passive consumption over authentic human connection. The promised value lies in evolving past mere consumerism to determine cultural products that challenge the

mind rather than just entertaining it (Taylor, 2009). <https://www.drjimtaylor.com>).

8. Popular culture frequently acts as a surrogate for traditional storytelling and philosophical growth. Its true value is yet to be realized when everyday media such as films, television, and music consistently provides a shared ethical framework that helps people evaluate their daily lives and build empathy across divides.
9. While it serves as a bridge, popular culture has historically centered a narrow range of dominant western narratives. The true unreached value is a universally recognized cultural landscape where diverse regional experiences are celebrated as global standards rather than niche additions (National Commission on Culture, 2020).

To dive deeper into how contemporary popular culture shapes society and influences cultural identity, you can explore academic discussions on mass media and entertainment through resources like Archive Ouverte Hall or learn more about the sociological impacts of global media on the Ghana Culture platform.

Popular culture remains a tool for mass distraction and consumerism. The ultimate value it is yet to give us is a shift from passive, shallow consumption to a catalyst for genuine, independent thought, critics argue it often trades profound human truths for marketable trends and instant gratification. The following missing values represent what popular culture has yet to fully realize for society (Taylor 8, 2009).

1. Bringing marginalized voices and regions into the global spotlight authentically, rather than just extracting localized aesthetics for commercial profit.
2. Shifting churning out sentimental, mass-produced content to producing art that actively challenges people to question and improve their social realities.
3. Evolving from dictating passive trends to helping individual accurately access their everyday experiences and express deeply held convictions.

### **Authentic Shared identity**

Instead of a genuine, organic, shared experience, much of modern popular culture is deemed “synth culture” an artificial, corporate-driven product designed for consumption rather than community. Rather than uniting people through shared values, today’s popular culture often contributes to fragmentations, polarization and a sense of “false needs” that keep audience distracted. It has largely failed to provide lasting meanings, frequently substituting it with a “diet” of empty calories that result in a “relentless and seemingly futile search for fulfillment.”

Instead of encouraging critical thought, popular culture can be a “opiate” including passive reception rather than critical questioning of social life. While it connects, it is also accused of promoting materialism, instant gratification, and misplaced priorities. In short, the ultimate value yet to be realized is its capacity to act as a deliberate, decentralized engine for global social transformation and tangible systematic change, moving beyond its traditional role as merely commercialized entertainment. While popular culture currently serves as a connection, participatory force, its latent potential lies in harnessing this mass engagement to bridge profound societal divides, drive ethical action, and shape a more equitable future. The main aspects of this unrealized value are the following:

- 1) Collective action which popular culture is shifting toward participatory engagement, where audiences co-author content and culture. The untapped value is in mobilizing these communities to solve systemic issues for example, in climate, inequality rather than just consumption.
- 2) True democratic influence which as popular culture becomes more modular and decentralized in 2026, its ultimate value is offering a platform for diverse voices to override top-down cultural narratives.
- 3) Bridging global divides is that popular culture already unites people but its untapped power lies in creating a “global sense of belonging” that actively disrupts divisive political or social ideologies.
- 4) Empowering individuals’ identity and empowering that popular culture should act as a tool for personal empowerment and social connect particularly for younger generations seeking inclusivity and purpose.

According to top cultural trends identified for the day, is the “future tradition” involves merging deeply personal cultural identities with technology to make authentic human centered connection, demonstrating a move toward “widow fixing” rather than just superficial trends. Popular culture influences personal growth and identity. One person said popular culture has strong influence on her personal growth particularly in how she expresses herself and interacts with others (Tipay, 2025).

An authentic shared identity yet to be provided by popular culture because commercial media often prioritizes surface-level trend and consumption over deep personal cultural, meaning social bonds. Rather than fostering genuine connection, mainstream culture frequently creates “synth culture” that leaves people searching for a more grounded sense of self (Taylor, 2009). Modern entertainment often focuses on wealth and status, shaping identities based on what we consume rather than who we are. Many critics note that popular culture is controlled by economic forces that homogenize values and dilute genuine, independent thought (Taylor,

2009). When popular culture fails to deliver, people naturally build authentic shared identities elsewhere. Individuals often find validation and a sense of community by connecting with others who share a specific passion.

Mass-produced media and commercial algorithms often prioritize trends over genuine human connection, leaving a void for an authentic, universally shared identity. True belonging currently stems from local, grassroots participation rather than the passive consumption of manufactured cultural products. Mainstream culture often pushes homogenized consumerism, example chasing wealth, status or digital fame. This creates a superficial environment where people adopt aesthetic personas rather than discovering foundational values. An authentic culture should offer a true sense of meaning, purpose and solidarity that transcends geographic and socioeconomic boundaries. Corporate ownership of media and entertainment dictates what becomes popular prioritizing marketability storytelling. The rapid blending of cultures can lead to loss of unique, localized traditions and historical roots. Because popular culture has yet to fully provide this that society relies on, on different avenues to build meaningful shared identities.

### **Deep Social Cohesion**

Popular culture acts as a powerful bridge connecting diverse populations across socio-economic, political, and generational lines. It fosters social cohesion by providing a shared set of symbols, narratives, and digital phenomena that give individuals an inclusive sense of belonging and community, even when others civic ties are strained. The relationship between popular culture and deep social cohesion operates on a few main mechanical points:

1. Globalized media, viral internet trends, and music break down barriers, offering millions of people a collective vocabulary and common emotional experiences. This shared frame of reference allows individuals to connect with one another regardless of their physical, economic, or geographic backgrounds (Gareeva, 2024).
2. Entertainment and the arts give marginalized or minority groups a platform to broadcast their experiences to a broader audience. This visibility can cultivate deep empathy, counter stereotypes, and build a more inclusive, appropriative society (Moleka, 2024).
3. Online platforms and fandom communities allow people to find peers with similar interests, combating the isolation and disconnection reported by parts of population. (Eriksson, 2023).
4. Popular culture figures and athletes frequently use their massive platforms to highlight societal issues. These actions unite fans around shared societal goals and constructive engagement,

turning passive entertainment into active social movements.

Social cohesion built by popular culture is not without its modern challenges. Algorithms and AI heavily curate the modern cultural landscape society risks ideological fragmentation where individuals are placed into “echo chambers” rather than building a unifying universally shared cultural fabric.

### **Positive Cultural Transformation**

Popular culture acts as a dynamic mirror and catalyst for societal transformation. By harnessing the reach of music, film, and digital media, it normalizes underrepresented identities, challenges systemic prejudices, and drives progressive social change by making the revolution both visible and irresistible (Sachrajda, 2021). Popular culture drives positive cultural transformation by acting as mirror and megaphone for society. Through inclusive media representation, fandom communities, and viral advocacy, it shifts public consciousness, normalizes progressive social norms, and bridges generational or socioeconomic divides. Media franchises that spotlight diverse characters challenge traditional stereotypes, deeply fostering empathy and understanding (Ironsides, 2017). Online spaces and “fandom” mobilize millions to participate in charitable giving, mental health awareness, and social justice activism. Social media platforms allow global audiences to coordinate grassroots campaigns, turning internet trends into tangible societal changes.

### **Popular Culture: We Are What We Are**

Popular culture operates as a mirror, shaping and reflecting our identity. The media we consume, the trends we follow and the stories we share build our collective social worldview. We participate in it and in turn, it dictates who we are and how we connect. In its consumption effect, music, films, and social media bridge geographical and political divides, uniting large groups of people under shared experiences. Television and digital platforms don't just entertain, but they heavily influence societal norms, values, and behaviors. Some psychologists argue that genuine pop culture fosters a healthy community, whereas artificial or hyper-commercialized media can replace true connection with mindless consumerism (Taylor, 2009).

Sociologists note that pop culture often serves as the “bottom-up glue” holding diverse communities together. It breaks down stereotypes and builds social awareness, while simultaneously allowing individuals to gain prestige and bond within their immediate peer groups. Popular culture often reflects and sometimes challenges existing social norms and behaviors. Through the portrayal of different lifestyles, relationships and conduct, it can normalize or challenge certain actions and values.

Media plays a significant role in portraying popular culture through movies, TV shows and dramas. We often watch these famous movies without realizing that we are slowly absorbing that culture which eventually influences our actions and behavior in real life. BTS fanship is a celebrity. The level of dedication and support they show towards BTS is insane. This is why it is often said that we become what we see, watch, listen to, eat, and drink. An example of a K-pop trend and how it affects the values and beliefs of teens and youngster. When people get addicted to a group of stars like K-pop, they recommendations. start searching for and adopting popular food choices, clothes, beauty standards, dating, and health and fitness. It also influences those value systems and beliefs that their parents wants them to follow. Popular culture has the potential to make you both dumped or wise.

Popular culture is followed by millions of individuals who start to get engaged with everything when they like something, it affects people's lifestyles, behavior, principles, and ethics. It highly contributes in shaping an individual or the entire nation. Popular culture including movies, music, and social media, plays a significant role in including movies, music, and social media, plays a significant role in shaping our values and beliefs. It influences our perceptions of societal norms, beauty standards, and lifestyles. By portraying certain ideas and behaviors as desirable or acceptable, popular culture can impact our attitude, aspirations and even our moral compass. It's essential to engage with popular culture critically and thoughtfully to understand its influence and make informed choices about our values and beliefs.

### **Clarity and Confusion**

In recent post, one railed against popular culture as being an unhealthy force in our lives but Lawrence Rubin who studied the popular culture commented that "if you simply consider popular culture as banality, it certainly seems meaningless, even potentially distractive. However, if instead you recognize that it is simply an expression of our collective experiences, its importance becomes more clearer" Taylor (2009), (2009). Terry another person commented that there is nothing popular about popular culture. "We didn't demand for example, Desperate Housewives, Grand Theft Autos, or Facebook. They were created to make money and then marketed as "must have" which admittedly, the masses then embraced (Taylor, 2009). Terry also offered a wonderful metaphor for popular culture. She likened authentic popular culture to organic food which is grown and consumed by people who have deep respect. In contrast, synth culture like processed food, it is largely artificial, unhealthy, and driven by the profit motive. And entire generations are being force-fed this unwholesome diet while synth culture is sating its Own rapacious appetite. She concluded her metaphor beautifully suggesting that "popular culture is fast food for the soul." American lolol, people magazine, ipods, and Brangelina

are tasty and addictive. But extending her metaphor further just as fast food isn't healthy for the body, synth culture isn't healthy for the soul. Neither does it provide real "nourishment" in both cases, our bodies, minds, and spirits remain hungry for real sustenance.

So, what happens when a genuine popular culture is replaced by a synth culture? Well, what happens when you replace an organic diet rich in nutrients with one that is artificial, calorie intensive, and nutrient poor? The answer is self-evident yet we continue on the diet without realizing that it may very well be slowly killing us individually and collectively (Taylor, 2009).

Why would we not recognize this unhealthy diet and make a change for the better? In the face of global instability, economic uncertainty, an unsettling societal change, synth culture offers us mighty fine "comfort food," it is delicious, fills us up, and makes us feel good. Synth culture really has become the new "opiate of the masses" dulling our existential and all-too-down-to-earth against with a diet of tasty, though empty calories. And what is really scary is that the current generation of young people is the first to be raised entirely in this synth culture with no experience of what an authentic popular culture is.

Most people think of popular culture as the most common form of entertainment, whether television, movies, music, or what's on the web. But popular culture is grounded in expressions of shared experiences that are much more fundamental to our society, including the values and beliefs that have shaped it, for example, integrity, community compassion, courage, sacrifice, respect, hard work, and justice. The deepest worry, if our popular culture is no more the deeper expression of our collective experiences, then synth importance is lost. We may be entertained by the biggest loser, not up, but we also unwillingly influenced by the messages that underline this popular entertainment and which form the bases of synth culture, messages of great consumption, schadenfreude, when at any cost, and misogyny just to name a few.

Collectively, a popular culture that is an expression of a society shaped experiences has essential value and a beneficial function to that society. It is an important contributor to the formation and growth of a healthy society. Perhaps, as much as the value of low, and authentic culture as a societal truth, a shared bond that holds society together and communicate that "we are one". And may be more powerfully than the top-down government provided glue, a genuine popular culture creates "of the people, by the people and for the people" as the real balloon-up glue that unites diverse people into a cohesive society (Taylor, 2009).

## CONCLUSION

Popular culture acts as a powerful mirror for society, constantly evolving to reflect our daily interactions, values and technological advancements. “Popular culture is a dynamic force that reflects and shapes our collective identity bridging geographical divides and fostering global communities. While it occasionally risks promoting consumerism, its capacity to drive social change sparks conversations and democratize creative expression is undeniable.” In our day dominated by platforms and information sharing, popular culture and mass media are linked and no longer a top-down phenomenon, so many people worldwide are attracted to the use of technology. Popular culture is a vibrant blueprint of our social values for the younger generations. Whether expressed through music or otherwise, it provides an important framework to build community and establish an individual identity. The main point centers on media, technology and societal values. We may ask the question, “so what” of popular culture? Which ever way one chooses to answer the question, it is a catalyst and an important matter, a force to reckon. Popular culture will continue to reshape society and communities by blurring the lines between localized traditions and global internet trends. It will continue to drive social movements and influence consumers behaviors which can redefine communication and acting as mirror for issues and catalyst for future societal change (Singh, 2022).

The technology and globalization is very high and people are connecting easily due to communication and exchange of values, opinions, and cultures are at their peak. This plays an important role in society to understand new culturism and allows people to interact and mix, accept other cultures, express themselves in variety of ways to help promote economic development and accelerate social and indigenous progress. The majority of people in society accept mass culture under the banner of popular culture. Considering globalization, youth and cultural identity are linked. The effect of changing faces of people especially the youth is well

marked in their expression a popular culture (Singh, 2022).

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