# AN APPRAISAL ON INSTAGRAM'S POPULAR CULTURE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON SOCIAL BEHAVIOR OF YOUTHS IN NIGERIA

NZEKWE, Nnamdi George
EZINWA Chidi, Ph.D

Department of Mass Communication
Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu State
Enugu State University of Science and Technology

Correspondence email: mailnnamdi@yahoo.com
Ezichiditony1@gmail.com

## Abstract

*Social media such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter continuously bring contents closer to audiences globally, lending credence to McLuha's global village concept. Cultures are transmitted through digital media to susceptible audiences thereby altering societal values and influencing popular culture in unprecedented ways. This study investigates how western popular culture portrayed on Instagram influences social behavior of Nigerian youths. The study was anchored on cultural norm theory and media dependency theory. Survey Research was adopted for this study and copies of questionnaires were used as the primary research instrument for this study. A sample size of 384 was drawn from a population of 4,411,100 using Wimmer and Dominick sample size calculator. The researcher adopted multi-stage sampling for the study. Findings of the study revealed that youths in Enugu State are highly exposed to popular culture on Instagram, it also revealed that they perceive western popular culture negatively but still imitate such behavior so they do not feel left out. The researchers recommend relevant stakeholders to ensure that youths limit the long hours they spend on social networking sites and also Nigerian government should establish a regulatory body to monitor and limit content that harm traditional values of the Nigeria society.*

**Keynote words:** Media, Instagram, popular, culture, youth

## Introduction

The accessibility of the Internet based apps may be radically transforming the way people receive the information (Trifiro, 2018), as online channels such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and so on now combine the immediacy of broadcast media with the in-depth coverage of newspapers; making it a preferred channel for information and entertainment especially among young people (Haddon, 2015).

Instagram is a photo and video sharing app with more than 400 million monthly active users, 80 million shared photos and 3.5 billion likes daily (Treitel, 2019). Evidently, Instagram has become a significant virtual community used to influence social behaviors for political purposes, sensitization or even setting societal agenda as is recently seen in the online advocacy against rape in Nigeria or the call for justice in the anti-racial rhetoric on the murder of George Floyd in the United States of America. With these massive engagements on Instagram, one cannot help but wonder if there are negative behavioral influences that

may occur from constant use of this app, especially as users are free to upload contents as they see fit.

Social networking sites are a gateway for individuals to fit into digital communities where cultures may be shared and new behaviors learned. In his publication in 1964, Marshall McLuhan coined the term "global village" to describe a phenomenon where cultures could be instantly shared through digital media (Grffin, 1997); (Dixon, 2009); (Gibson & Murray, 2012). He described digital technologies or the new media as an extensions of human physical and mental capacities (Gibson & Murray, 2012). Although McLuhan's concept acknowledged the struggle for supremacy of identity in the global village concept, it also recognizes a society without boundaries making it possible for cultural integration through digital media.

The most popular social networking sites among young people are image and video based social networking sites such as Instagram and Snapchat (Anderson & Jiang 2018), and studies have shown that Instagram has become increasingly popular among teenagers (Rostam, 2020). With high number of active users on this medium, it is no doubt several opinions and ideas are shared on this platform regularly. Udensi (2015), posits that people on SNS share what interests them and other users on the platform can read these stories and share them as well. Research on media effect have shown the media play a mediating role between social reality and personal experience; hence, they have the ability to re-construct perception, interpret social system and help make sense of the real world (Nzekwe, Ngoso, & Onyewole, 2017) for its users. Popular Instagram profiles or influencers like @symply_tacha @efia_odo with no fewer than one million followers and massive views and likes on their pages are likely to influence the behaviors of other Instagram users who pay close attention to their posts and are constantly on Instagram. The researchers observed that it is not uncommon to see these Instagram influencers wear heavy makeup, blonde wigs, use vulgar language or appear unclad online. Such behavior may be imitated by thousands and millions of young Instagram users who eagerly engage in media content for leisure (Trifiro, 2018); (Nzekwe, Ngoso, & Onyewole, 2017).

It is no news that the media is attributed with the power to influence attitudes however when this change in attitude manifests in behavioral ways that seems to relegate traditional value systems for western culture especially among young people, one can arguably claim that media imperialism has taken place. Young people spend long hours on their mobile devices and most of this time is spent on social media. This study investigates the extent to which prevalent popular culture portrayed by Instagram influencers affect behavior of Nigerian youth who spend hatful time on Instagram.

## Statement of the Problem

Contemporary research has shown that youngsters generally use new media to explore identity, behavior and lifestyles that might remain inaccessible to them offline (Hiller & Harrison, 2007; Pascoe, 2011; Craig & McInroy 2014), therefore constant exposure to contents that portray nudity, indecent behavior, illicit drug use and so on may result in inappropriate behavior. Zhukova (2018), explains that consistent and long hours of exposure to media can create a false sense of connection to reality and may also lead to decreased productivity.

Celebrities, socialites and influencers alike appear to be creating a shift in behavioral patterns from conservative norms to liberal, recalcitrant and westernized behavior through

the content they upload on their Instagram timelines. Instagram accounts like @nairamarley, @symply_tacha, @efia_odo, bobrisk222, @sydneytalker, @wf_jamesbrown and many more constantly upload contents that suggest deviant sexual behaviors, tolerance to illicit drugs, flamboyant lifestyles that is supported by crime and nudity. All the mentioned Instagram accounts have not less than one million followers as at June 23, 2020 (except @wf_jamesbrown who has one hundred and eighteen thousand followers) and there's a likelihood that the numbers will increase.

This study examines how constant exposure to western popular culture on Instagram may and encourage deviant behavior that relegate traditional norms for western popular culture among youths in Enugu State, Nigeria.

## Research Questions

The main purpose of this study was to find out if frequent exposure to popular Instagram handles caused young people to adopt western popular cultural behaviors. In order to achieve this, the researcher raised the following questions:

i. To what extent are youths in Enugu State exposed to western popular culture through popular Instagram handles?

ii. How do youths in Enugu State perceive western popular culture on Instagram?

iii. To what extent do youths in Enugu State imitate the popular culture they see on Instagram?

## Review of Related Literature

Rostam, F. A. (2020), conducted a study on *the negative impact of social media on youth* and found that Instagram and Snapchat have the most negative impact on the health and functioning of young people's minds.

Jin, S. V., Ryu, E. (2020), through their study on *I'll buy what she's wearing: roles of envy towards parasocial interaction with influencers in Instagram celebrity-based brand endorsement and social commerce,* revealed that Instagram influencers moderate the effects of envy and parasocial interaction towards buying products Instagram influencers wear, influence customers perception, and compulsive buying tendency and envy on brand trust.

Pilgrim and Bohnet-joschko (2019), in their study on *selling health and happiness; how influencers communicate on Instagram about dieting and exercise* found that influencers on Instagram gain trust and friendship of their followers by designing visual content and targeted communication techniques. They further explained that minors identify with the roles and ideals demonstrated by the influencers and their needs satisfied on several different levels, thus creating a dependency between influencers and their followers.

Trifiro (2018), in studying *Instagram use and its effects on well-being and self-esteem* revealed that intensity of use rather than usage patterns determines user outcome, and also that users who engage with Instagram more intensely exhibit higher levels of self-esteem and well-being than users who do not use the application intensely. Arino, L. V. C., Flavian, C., Sanchez, S. I. (2018), in their study on *influencers on Instagram: antecedents and consequences of opinion leadership* found that opinion leadership influences behavioral intentions.

Veirman, Cauberghe and hudders (2017), in their study on *marketing through instagram*

*influencers: the impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude* found that Instagram influencers with high number of followers are found more likable thus resulting in a perceived opinion leadership by followers; while Nandagiri & Philip (2018), in their study on the *impact of influencers from Instagram and YouTube to their followers* found that followers perceive influencers as credible sources of and are thus willing to try out products they review and endorse.

Olorunsogbon, & Olalekan (2017), in their study on *effects of social media on the socio cultural life of students in tertiary education in Nigeria*, found that majority of undergraduates in Nigeria use social media, social media influenced the socio-cultural life of young people and affected academic performances negatively. Nzekwe, G. N., Ngonso, B. F., Oyewole, P. O. (2017), in their study *Celebrification and Blogosphere. A Narrative of Social Media Portrayal of Celebrities* found that there is a significant positive relationship between social media portrayal of celebrities and audience perception. Dion (2016), after studying the *effect of Instagram on self-esteem and life satisfaction found that female college students* who were minimally exposed to celebrities on Instagram showed lower life satisfaction after a quasi-experiment that exposed them to celebrities (influencers) on Instagram.

### Theoretical Framework

Cultural Norm Theory is a communication theory which suggests that the media selectively presents and emphasizes contemporary ideas or values by reinforcing or changing norms (Kent, 2007). Through specific media contents, norms are emphasized which then guide the audience behavior into accepting such norms as a mental representation of appropriate behavior. Through influencers on Instagram, popular culture is transmitted to audiences who over time start accepting such behavior as appropriate until they become the new norm. Behavior such as nudity in fashion, use of illicit drug, deviant sexual behavior and so on are often depicted by these popular Instagram and by so doing they tend to influence the behavior of youth in Nigeria.

Media Dependency Theory presents a systematic interrelationship between the media, social system and audience(s) in a context that aids the comprehension of media effects. Developed by Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin Defleur in 1976, the theory asserts that the more one's needs are met by media use, the more important will be the role of that media in the person's life and the more influence it will have on the person (Baran & Davis, 2012).

The researchers believe that Instagram has become an integral platform for entertainment for Nigerian youths who presumably seek out popular handles on the Instagram to satisfy their entertainment needs. The researcher also believe that the consistent use of Instagram by youths have become somewhat addictive and an influence on behavior as is revealed by Olorunsogbon, & Olalekan (2017); Nandagiri & Philip (2018).

### Methodology

This study examines how popular culture transmitted on Instagram influences attitudes and behavior of youths in Nigeria. To achieve this, the researchers deemed survey research method apt for the study. The data was collected personally through a well-designed questionnaire. The population of the study is youths in Enugu State. The total population as derived from 2016 population projection of the National Bureau of Statistics website is

4,411,100 (NBS, 2016). To effectively conduct the study, Anaekwe (2007), explains that the researcher needs to select a portion of the population which is studied with a view to generalize the findings from the entire population (cited in Obayi, Anorue & Onyebuchi, 2016). The researchers employed Wimmer and Dominick Sample Size Calculator to arrive at a sample size of 384.

In order to have a good representation of the population of the study, the researcher choose multi-stage sampling technique. This involved two stages, the first was cluster sampling whereby the researcher divided the population of the study into three clusters namely Enugu East LGA, Enugu North LGA, Enugu South LGA. At the second stage, the researcher used purposive sampling technique to determine youths who were exposed to popular handles on Instagram before 384 copies of the questionnaire were administered.

The reliability of the instrument was established using pilot testing. The instrument was administered to 20 respondents in Emene, New Haven and Uwani in Enugu State. The results obtained from the analysis of their response was used in computing the reliability of the instrument. The researcher distributed 384 copies of the questionnaire to the respondents in selected areas in Enugu state. They were distributed on a face to face basis, 382 copies were retrieved, while 2 copies were wrongly filled. The researcher used tables and simple percentages for data analysis and presentation, while simple descriptive analysis was used to infer meaning from the data in the table for clarity.

**Discussion of Findings**

**To what extent are youths in Enugu State exposed to western popular culture through popular Instagram handles?**

The findings reveal that 61.3% of youths in Enugu State are constantly online through smart devices and spend over 2 hours in a day browsing on popular handles on Instagram. This finding correlates with Pilgrim and Bohnet-joschko (2019), in their study that revealed influencers on Instagram gain trust and friendship of their followers and in so doing, create a dependency of followers on the influencers. It further supports Veirman, Cauberghe and hudders (2017), whose study also found that Instagram influencers with high number of followers are found more likable thus resulting in a perceived opinion leadership by followers.

Based on these findings, the researchers therefore concluded that youths in Enugu State are highly exposed to popular culture on Instagram.

**How do youths in Enugu State perceive popular culture on Instagram?**

The study reveal that 56% of youths in Enugu State perceive popular handles on Instagram as a negative influence. They agreed that contents like nudity, illicit drug use and several other harmful vices can be easily learned on Instagram through influencers. From this finding, the researchers concluded that although there is high exposure to popular Instagram handles by youths in Enugu State, they are aware of the negative contents but still seek out such contents regardless.

**To what extent do youths in Enugu State imitate the popular culture they see on Instagram?**

The study further reveal that 61.3% of youths in Enugu State imitate social behavior they see

on Instagram popular handles. The finding revealed that youths in Enugu State imitated behavior of their Instagram influencers so they do not feel left out. This finding agrees with Arino, L. V. C., Flavian, C., Sanchez, S. I. (2018) study that revealed opinion leadership on Instagram influences behavioral intentions.

## Conclusion

From the findings of this study, the researchers concluded that youths in Enugu State spend long hours browsing popular Instagram handles, and although they perceive its content as mostly negative, they imitate the behavior they see on these handles nonetheless because they do not want to feel left out from trending popular culture.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and the conclusions drawn therein, the researchers recommend the following:

i.   Efforts should be made by guardians and all relevant stakeholders to ensure that youths limit the long hours they spend on social networking sites, because through high exposures to negative contents on such sites, traditional values are eroded for western popular culture. This may be denying African societies of its true identity. Having conducted this research and analyzed the field data, the researchers recommend the following:

ii.  The Nigerian government should establish a regulatory body to monitor and limit content that harm traditional values of the Nigeria society.

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