Popular Culture And Self Identity

Abstract

Self-identity is the awareness of and identification with oneself as a separate individual. The way we perceive ourselves, our action, thoughts and interactions with one another are influenced by our identity. Person’s identity goes beyond what we are on a daily basis and can be influenced by many factors such as cultural background, religion, family and friend. However these factors are not appropriate in this evolving era. Therefore this paper attempts to explain the source of identity and how an individual get their self identity in this technological era . The current study examines popular culture as influential factor in building identity of college students. A survey questionnaire was used for collecting data. Including both the sex, a total of 30 students participated in this study. The result shows that there is a positive relationship between popular culture and identity. This indicates that popular culture has a significant effect on building the self-identity of college students.

Introduction

Identity formation, also known as individuation, is the development of the distinct personality of an individual (Caplan, and Torpey, 2001). All humankind needs to develop a personal identity that distinguishes us from others. Benbasat and Zmud state that the personal identity or the Self-identity is the sum of a being's knowledge and understanding of one’s self (2003). Components of the self-identity include physical, psychological, and social attribute, which can be influenced by the individual's attitudes, habits, beliefs and ideas. These components and attributes can be borrowed from historical culture, religion and the people around us such as friends and family. This means that the person can borrow some social trait from the society and build his or her own identity. In short self –identity is the perception or recognition of one’s characteristics as a particular individual, especially in relation to social context.

However, an individual can build the concept of self -identity by moving out of the social group. It is done by accepting and adopting the universal cultures and attributes (Goldman, Booker, and McDermott, 2008). Today popular culture has become a greatest influence in identity formation globally. Popular culture is defined as commonly known information that briefly holds the public interest. So this paper is all about the popular culture and self–identity which answers the question “does popular culture influence in building self-identity?” The focused is on popular culture because previous researchers had talked only about culture, religion, family and friends and their roles in personal development and identity formation. However with the modernization and advancements in technology people entered the cyber world. A progressing virtual world of global computers having networks of interdependent information technology has helped the speed diffusion of popular culture globally. So this paper helps us to know the influence of popular culture on identity of college students who also live in cyber world.

The study was carried out at Sherubtse College. A survey questionnaire was used to collect information from the participants. According to their respond there is a positive relationship

between the pop culture and identity of a person.

Aims and objectives

This study hopes to investigate popular culture (in the form of pop stars, branded clothes, and media) as a source of self-identity among college students. This can be fulfilled with the following objectives.

1. examining the influence of pop star on self identity formation
2. examining the influence of branded clothe on self identity among the students
3. investigating social media as a source of self identity among college student

Hypothesis

- Null hypothesis: popular culture has no effect on building self-identity.
- Alternative hypothesis: popular culture has a significant effect on building self-identity.

Literature review

Self-identity

Identity is about how individual or groups see and define themselves, and how other individuals or groups see and define them. Caplan, and Torpey, explained that identity is also known as individuation, is the development of the distinct personality of an individual in a particular stage of life in which individual characteristics are possessed and by which a person is recognized or known(2001). As per the dictionary identity is the fact of being whom or what a person or thing is. Identity is formed through socialization process and influence of social institution like family, friends, culture and mass media. The concept of identity is important because it is only through establishing our own identity and learning of others that we come to know what makes us similar to some people and different from others. Identity, therefore, fits individuals into society. The personal identity can be influenced by many factors such as cultural background, religion, family and friend.

Culture

Culture is something that surrounds us all and continues to shape our lives every day. Some aspects of culture are our identity, ethnicity, age or generation, education, occupation, and socio-economic status. Culture can also be used to describe our way of life and the values, beliefs, and attitudes that we use in everyday life. Therefore, one’s identity is a product of your personality in the context of the culture you are in (Kacen and Lee, 2002). “The concept of self is a necessary supplement to the concept of culture in anthropology and should be regarded as a human universal” (Sokefeld, 2013). In support of this Earley states that the personality of a person will be influence by the type of environment they are exposed. He further claimed that the personality or the identity of a person is the result of cultural values and norms of the society (2009).

Religion

On the other hand, religion also shapes the identity of a person. There are different religions in the world and each of them help mould what kind of person they would be (King, 2003). It shows how people think; train their thought and what they do in life (Wang, 2001). Some of the religious values that Middle Eastern people holds may be viewed wrong by the western people but it are their personal identity that defines them from the rest (Becker, 2015). A person belonging to a particular religion gets his identity from that religion. For example, a follower of Christianity will get his identity as a Christian. Religion defines us as a part of a community in which we all have the same values and identity because we follow the same religion (Machin, 2002).

Family

Thus, the more we interact with someone, the greater chance we have to shape his or her life. The people who tend to become the greatest influencers in our lives tend to be those closest to us (Guo, 2014). When an individual is young and have not developed their own personal identity, they observe and imitate from their parents and develop their individual identity (Holden, 2002). Identity is derived from the world around us and a person is a collection of biological processes. As per Alexander (2014), children create images of how they want to see themselves through inspirational messages, assets and knowledge that they gain in the world. They then want their images to be reflected back to them through the desire of others.

Peer (friends)

However, as child grows older and continues on to school, they begin to develop a style based on other kids in the school, so environment plays a larger role. The relationships adolescents have with their peers, or the members of their social sphere play a vital role in their development. Meeus and Dekovic stated that one of the most important affiliations is that of friendship. Be it in the larger group or the smaller one, friends have influence on identity through the interaction that takes place among the members of the group and with the individual person (2010). Peer groups offer members of the group the opportunity to develop social skills such as empathy, sharing, and the development of the person. Information regarding possible identities of possible selves comes from various contexts that surround adolescents and temporal commitments are tested and practiced in interaction with others. In additional to this (Phinney, Romero, Nava, and Huang, 2001) stated that an individual's identity is influenced by the people around them and the environment in which they live.

Social media

In addition, social media plays an important role in building self-identity. Due to globalization there are network of interconnections and interdependence where various people are connected to each other worldwide (Appadurai, 2002). Magazines are especially influential to people as their main aim is to attract customers. Young girls are trying to figure out their place in the world and learning to come in terms with their newly found sexuality and their role in society. They are looking for directions and role models on how to act and dress. So, magazines include images of celebrities that people aspire to look like (Thompson & Haytko, 1997). Wearing the western fashion item that is depicted in magazines is perceived as a sign of modernity, upward mobility and superiority (Casanova, 2003).

In a similar way, television also plays a role in influencing fashion trends. The study has shown that the average American spends several hours a day watching television. So, it is obvious that if people spend this much time watching, it will start to affect how they think and what they do (Worsham, 2011). People want to be just like the celebrities in the movies (Chris, 1999). The media promotes the concept of the Perfect Woman which causes so many women to look good through dieting and keeping themselves fit (Oyserman, Elmore & Smith, 2012). For example, Marilyn Monroe's birthmark over the lip is still alive today, many years after her death because women today occasionally place a fake birthmark above their lip with makeup and call it a Monroe. Outfit worn in movies was quickly copied by the people who saw it appealing and attractive. The media advertises or gives their stands about music and movies and their audience is influenced leading to adoption of a culture. Mode of wearing, commercial products, lifestyle, language and images portrayed in the movies and music is what people adapt and assimilate into their own lives (Rantanen, 2004).

Thus, putting in products such as make up, eye shadow, dying of hair and wearing clothes associated with designer taglines is the result of influence which many people finds to be suitable. This creates the need for someone to change from what they are to what people find them to be suitable (Breward, 1995). These results in the change of an individual’s identity since one tries to identify their selves with trend for example what a celebrity wears or what a fashion media finds suitable. Gucci, Louis vuitton, Versace and Armani are some of the clothing lines that are found to be trendy, fashionable, expensive and unique. Putting on these clothes change ones identity because one becomes a talk of the day (Taylor, 2012).

Meanwhile, the media influences clothing by developing public interest and excitement in the latest styles trends through wide publication of glamorous photographs, celebrity endorsements and informative articles. Media acts as a fashion barometer, measuring the high and low point’s celebrity styles. The events such as New York fashion week, previously accessible to an elite few, are now available to a worldwide audience through ongoing postings to Facebook, twitter, and instagram which exposes them to cutting-edge runway trends that influence personal style choices (Oppong, 2002).

Branded clothes

Celebrity and co-modification indeed go hand in hand, the former being a ‘thing’ that needs to be continually produced to be consumed (Langer, 2004). Thus, the brand is being used to influence the teenager’s perceived popularity and to wrap a protective cover over his physical body that deflects attention. Brands are those that are attached to an image of “cool,” are popular among the majority of the peer group and considered to be socially acceptable. The clothes have to be Nike, Adidas, or whatever it is which has the most up-to-date versions. The brands have allowed consumers to communicate their personality, age, class, wealth, and status by simply selecting a particular brand (Mocanu, 2013). A study by EscalasCurator (2013) shows how “consumers use specific brands as a narrative text to communicate who they are.” So, teenagers start to incorporate brands into their self-concepts and use them to define and communicate their sense of self as well as judge others. Ji (2002) argues that brands have become “tools through which children grow up, gain competence, pursue the pleasure of life, fulfill their dreams, and become connected with others” (p.383).

Furthermore, it leads to the creation of a good brand. So, someone who lacks the “right brand”

can lead to negative peer judgments and the perception that the individual is of a lesser quality than one who is wearing the “correct brand” (Roper & Shah, 2007). Elliott (1995) found that the unemployed often consume excessively in attempts to restore a damaged sense of self and people, who are predisposed to feel insecure about them, are more likely to look to material goods for comfort. Rucker and Galinsky (2008) confirmed the link between feelings of powerlessness and conspicuous consumption. This suggests brands are used to combat states of powerlessness.

Clothing as communication

In the discussion of identity, Crane, (2000) states that clothes also display, express, and shape identity, imbuing it with direct material reality. According to Satrapa et al. (1992), “a picture is worth a thousand words.” The dressing is a way people want to assure their self-introduction. When a person has no spoken words to go by, they often form impressions of others based on visual cues (Cosbey, 2001). Clothing is a nonverbal tool and an expressive one (Angerosa, 2014). Nielsen & Kernaleguen (1976) refers to clothing as a part of appearance that provides data for perceptions. Basically, it is a source of information about a person’s age, sex, personality and socioeconomic status. Thus, what you choose to wear may communicate a complex display of information about you to other people around you (Dorrance, 2011). So, individuals use clothing to improve their appearance as well as to create and maintain their own identity. Davis (1994) claims that clothing communicates symbolically the social identity, namely how a person wants to appear in society.

Popstar

Pop stars, equally, are influential figures in popular culture. As Rojek (2001) has argued, celebrities are cultural fabrications that embody social types and provide role models. Pop stars can also shape the styling of children in a more direct way, namely via the release of their own-brand lines of clothing onto the children’s wear market (Hawkins, 2001). Pop stars are used by children to formulate clothing personality associations, which can then go on to structure their own consumption patterns and how they view the clothing choices of their peers (Boden, 2006). Basically, the children imitate the styles of their idols. Thus, living in a technology era, musicians, sport stars and actors are most popular role models among the youth. In Hong Kong, idol worship is a highly promoted and commercialized activity by media, under entertainment industry. There are weekly programs on radio channels and television reinforcing the norm of idol worship by asking the audience about their ways of worship. Many of these groups of fans shown on screen were students (Cheung &Yue, 2003). Sokal (2009) elaborates that identity is consistently changing with our external environment which is a standard for our identities to form and reform through our lives. Our personal interest in adolescents changes so, identity and roles are likely to vary. Due to this role models are consistently changing to support adolescents’ new interests. Thus, popular culture has become more about making a personal connection with teens. The self was organized as a result of interaction with the environment such as parents, families, and significant others. Additionally, brand conveyed buried aspect of one’s self image, as consumers often chose products that were considered appropriate images of themselves. Therefore the brand we buy and the brand we associate with often make a powerful statement about us to ourselves as well as to others. Thus, in a small country like Bhutan, social media plays an important role. Because a child’s social worlds have expanded dramatically in the last decade, from families, friends, neighborhoods, and schools to an almost-

limitless universe of people due to the proliferation of the Internet. When the child is small, they receive their identity from their parents, culture and religion but as they grow up and get exposed to the larger world, their identity tends to change. They modify their existing identity with the change they experience. Their identity gets influenced by popular culture such as pop stars, branded clothes and media to cope up with the changing environment.

Ethical issues

The ethical issue does not mean it surface only during data collection. They arise at every phase of the study. Therefore it is important to keep the ethical issue in our mind starting from selecting the research topic till the end result. We should gain permission, provide participants with sufficient information and share the purpose of our study.

So, participants have the right to know the purpose of the study and why they are participating in it. Thus, the purpose of the research is reflected on the questionnaire for clear understanding. We made sure that the interview goes on without any coercion or force, it was completely based on their willingness and we assured to keep their information anonymous. This was done in order to avoid further conflicts. We informed that the research topic is not sensitive to be scared of.

Challenges or limitation

The study was carried out in Sherubtse College where samples were randomly picked from different courses. A total of 30 students were selected for the interview and were asked to answer the questionnaire developed for it. There was difficulty in fixing the time among ourselves as most of the students were busy with their course work.

The foremost challenge we faced was to do SPSS. Since we were using SPSS in practice for the first time. It was very difficult to install SPSS software on our laptop. So, we end up borrowing other laptops. On top of that, we did not know how to use it and had to depend on others who know it, this prolonged our work.