

## Current Research

**Introduction.** My current research explores the roles, functions, and influences of popular visual culture on the interpretation and construction of visual representation. It seeks to examine whether popular visual culture, via the Internet, has become a globalizing force catalyst for the homogenization of people's interpretation and construction of visual imagery (Delacruz, 2009a; Desai, 2008). Using online data collection methods and content analysis, this study addresses the following issues: *Through the study of people's graphic representation of words, what influences from popular visual culture can be seen that link visual communication across geographic boundaries? This study also intends to explore the potential that image-based data collection holds for furthering research on visual culture and its applications in traditional educational settings, in addition to highlighting relationships that emerge between images created within a global and online context.*

**Context.** Globalization can be understood as a force which dissipates international boundaries and homogenizes economic, political and cultural values held by individual persons and nations (Delacruz, 2009a; Desai, 2005). The Internet has played an increasingly important role in globalization due to the digitization and dissemination of information such as mail, photo, videos, books, newspapers and television (Beaudoin, 2008). Imagery forms an integral part of the Internet, further speeding the consumption of information and popular culture through a multimodal form of delivery, via smart phones, tablets and public screens that appeal to learners through visualization of information rather than plain text (Beaudoin, 2008; Harris, 2006). Media theorists claim that people continually shape and redefine their identities through the vehicle of popular visual culture (Giroux and Pollock, 2010; Tavin, 2005, 2003; Duncum, 2002, 2001, 1993). This emphasizes the need for further inquiry into the links between these two forces.

**Theoretical framework.** Informal learning and knowledge gained through lived and shared experiences often has a far greater impact than traditional institutionalized learning with the Internet now being recognized as the largest informal learning community in the world (Smith, 2008; Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner, 2007). Critical social theory frames the design of this study by drawing out associations between construction, deconstruction, image representation and meaning making online (Kincheloe, 2005; Leonardo, 2004; Calhoun, 2007, 1995). Critical social theory examines underlying power structures and flows in society and culture, helping to place the image-meaning relationship within a social-historical context and serves to explain how popular visual culture concretizes our understanding of the world (Carrington, 2005; Leonardo, 2004).

**Methodology.** The study will be comprised of participants from diverse geographic backgrounds and data will be gathered through the use of Amazon Mechanical Turk (Mturk), a web-based (crowd sourcing) application that allows anyone to recruit people to complete tasks by advertising them in their database. My task will ask participants to visually represent their interpretations of 10 words in the form of drawings. A short online survey will be used to collect demographic and other information. Up to 1000 participants will be recruited and no cultural group will represent more than 25% of the data. Areas of interest within the data will be identified using content analysis and follow up interviews/surveys will be conducted with selected participants. Content analysis is a method of studying documented human communication and is used in social sciences as a tool to analyze interactions across a range of media (Babbie, 2009; Lutz and Collins, 1993). Coupling this approach with image-based research methods provides an alternative form of data collection which values imagery as a cultural signifier supplying artifacts that symbolize understanding and identity (Prosser, 1998). The analysis will focus on linking geographic and cultural similarities as they relate to popular visual culture and the construction of knowledge to determine the extent to which globalization and the Internet have had a homogenizing effect on visual representations.

**Implications.** The study looks specifically at the role of technologies and media and their effect on learning and understanding in a global context. Exploring new methods of collecting image-based data and conducting educational research using new technologies such as Mturk can help to recognize and inform the complex relationship between the digitized content of images, text and popular visual culture. Analyzing how geographically distinct peoples represent information visually can provide insights to develop strategies for

learning and cross-cultural communication through art. This can aid educators in translating informal learning experiences online into strategies for the inclusion of popular visual culture in formal educational settings.

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