African Journal of Law, Ethics and Education [AJLEE] Vol. 9, No. 9 (2026)
https://ajleejournal.com [ISSN: 2756-6870]

ASSESSING THE EFFECT OF POPULAR CULTURE ON LAW AND THEOLOGY IN BAUCHI AND GOMBE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Popular culture falls into the literary range in its encircling features; it springs from society. This popular culture is the image of hopes and goals, uncertainties and self-doubt, and the interpersonal dealings of individuals constituting that society. It is molded by, and forms, the consciousness of the whole civilization. Popular culture is diverse in its methods and sundry in its inferences. It is an inseparable aspect of human life and a lasting effect of what societies have faith in and what they are as a people. Popular culture has an eminent and astonishing influence on legal practice, courtroom proceedings, religious activities, and the government as a whole. The aim of the study is to explore the effect of popular culture on law and theology in North Eastern Nigeria, specifically Bauchi and Gombe States. The investigation was carried out with 30 participants, 15 from each state. The participants were selected using purposive sampling. This study is qualitative in nature, and the data of the study were collected through an in-depth semi-structured interview. Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that most individuals now get their elementary understanding and knowledge of law and religion from popular culture products. This shows that music, narratives, movies, television platforms, literary collections, online games, etc. stereotypically sway impressions and attitudes concerning religion, law, and legal institutions more than the religious and legal institutions themselves.

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Keywords: Popular culture, law, theology, society, government

1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Popular culture mirrors the prevalent practices, artistic output, mindsets, and beliefs of a society at a given point in time. It habitually encapsulates the quintessence of daily life, which includes societal principles, trends, and cultural marvels. Thus, it also includes film, music, culture, folklore, traditions practiced by the people, television, arts, and other methods of communication. Popular culture may be taken to be "the culture that appeals to, or that is most comprehensible by, the general public" Edgar.[1]. Thus, "the academic concern in popular culture has immensely become fundamental within contemporary cultural studies as "an interdisciplinary or post-disciplinary field of enquiry that explores the production and inculcation of maps of meaning" Barker.[2]. Popular culture works for the enormous mass of folks. It seeks to placate as many folks as possible. It is largely allied with the societal intensities which are vital for its formation. The intensities of urbanization and industrialization have molded the formation of popular culture.

Popular culture has been penetrating into the caucus of the society by influencing and enhancing the knowledge of law and theology. The numerous ways in which law's stories and imagery travel from the courtroom to the court of public opinion, and from television, film, and computer screens back to electronic screens inside the religious courtroom. Eventually, it requests people who read to contemplate what this shared reliance means with reverence for the present position and future outcome of law, fact, and justice in the modern world, and how it has also infiltrated the churches and religious bodies by

[1] Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick, *Cultural Theory: The Key Concepts* (2nd edn, Routledge 2002) 285.
[2] Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* (2nd edn, SAGE 2003) 437.

bringing in the vices of popular culture practices and happenings. However, conveying meaning and permitting customs in daily life are not, and have certainly not been, the sole sphere of law and theology. Law and theology educe upon the substances of popular culture just as popular culture educe upon the substances of law and theology. The migration of law stories to television is burdened with outcomes for law, religion, and popular culture.

The study aimed at exploring the ways in which popular culture sways and contours attitudes, perceptions, and practices in relation to law and religion by assessing the effect of law and theology in northern Nigeria. Thus, it examines how popular culture can shape public beliefs on issues at the intersection of law and religion, such as religious laws, and the function of religion in public life and in influencing policy-making in areas where law and religion interconnect, such as religious laws and policies.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study employed Stuart Hall's cultural studies and reception theory and Stewart Hoover's religion and media theory. Cultural studies and reception theory and religion and media theory are all important methods for studying popular culture.

In cultural studies theory, Hall[3] examines how media, culture, and society shape one another. Hall argued that media messages are influenced by social factors such as class, race and ethnicity, gender, ideology, and power relations. Rather than seeing media as simply reflecting reality, Hall believed that media constructs meanings that can reinforce or challenge dominant social values. The theory posits that popular culture serves as a medium through which social

[3] Stuart Hall, *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse* (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham 1973).

meanings, ideologies, and power relations are produced and negotiated. Within the legal context, representations of judges, lawyers, courts, policing, and justice in films, television, music, and digital media shape public perceptions of the legal system. The theory provides a framework for examining how popular culture influences legal consciousness, public trust in legal institutions, and attitudes toward law and justice.

Hall's Reception Theory was developed in his 1973 essay, "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse." The theory has two main stages: encoding and decoding. The encoding stage states that media producers create messages; their messages are shaped by their own beliefs, institutional practices, and cultural values, and they often encode a preferred meaning into the text. The decoding stage emphasizes that audiences interpret those messages; different people may understand the same media text differently because of their backgrounds, experiences, education, culture, and beliefs. Hall identified three main ways audiences decode media messages: dominant (or preferred) reading, where the audience accepts the intended message. Negotiated reading, where the audience partly accepts the message but modifies it based on personal experience. Oppositional reading has to do with the audience rejecting the intended meaning and interpreting the message from a different ideological perspective.

Stewart Hoover's[4] religion and media theory was developed in 2006; the theory is based on the idea that media and religion are deeply interconnected. Rather than viewing religion as separate from media, he argues that media have become important spaces where religious meanings are created, debated, and experienced. The key ideas of the

[4] Stewart M Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age* (Routledge 2006).

theory are: media as a site of religious meaning; television, films, social media, music, and digital platforms are places where people encounter religious ideas. Individuals learn about spirituality not only in churches, mosques, or temples but also through media. Secondly, the "media age" and religion that is modern society has entered a "media age," where media influence nearly every aspect of life. Religious institutions no longer have exclusive authority over religious knowledge because media provide alternative sources of information and interpretation. Thirdly, individualization of religion shows how people increasingly construct their own religious identities by combining beliefs from different traditions and media sources. Faith becomes more personal and less dependent on religious institutions. Fourthly, Media as a cultural environment, states that media do more than communicate religion—they shape culture itself. Religious symbols, rituals, and values are often represented, transformed, or challenged in popular culture. Lastly, audience agency shows how audiences are active interpreters rather than passive consumers, and people decide how media messages fit into their own beliefs and experiences.

3. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative study was employed in this study in order to suit the nature of the problem addressed, which was to explore in depth the effect of popular culture on law and theology. Firstly, this study predicted the possible effect of popular culture in Northern Nigeria, particularly Bauchi and Gombe States. The investigation was carried out on 30 participants, 15 from each state. The participants are religious scholars, choir members, church band members, and some members of the church, and they were selected using purposive sampling. The data for the study were collected through a semi-structured interview. The interview questions that were administered to the participants were open-ended. They focused on participants'

knowledge, perceptions, beliefs, and understanding regarding popular culture's effects on law and theology.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies highlight the problems leading to this study. There are several related themes which are connected to the issues related to the area of popular culture in law and religion.

4.1 Popular culture

Gupta[5] In his article, he attempts to locate the concept of Popular Culture and its significance in a society that is very dynamic. The study is endeavoring to throw some light on the misconceptions about the works of Popular Culture and, at the same time, reflecting upon its significance in the changes it brought in society. Moreover, the article also discusses how Popular Culture has been and still is a location for a biased and highly sexualized representation of women.

Dharwadker[6] "has stated that India has 125 major languages which belong to four different language families; they are written in a dozen script systems.2 1961 Census data shows that 3000 speech varieties are used in India daily". The number of languages makes many types of high and popular culture to a great degree troublesome. While multilingualism and multi-ethnicity in India increase India's social diversity, this amount concentrates on such customary well-known social subjects as Religious Nationalism, Sports, Music, Dance, fashion, Advertising, Comics/Cartoons Cinema, cinema, television, and Theater.

[5] Aditi Gupta, 'The Representation and Significance of Popular Culture in Modern Society' (2022) 10(1) *Research Journal of English Language and Literature* 117.
[6] Gary Gang Xu and Vinay Dharwadker (eds), *Greenwood Encyclopedia of World Popular Culture: Asia and Pacific Oceania* (vol 6, Greenwood Press 2007).

Manchura[7] Explore "the role of character development in law-related popular culture and how it conveys messages about the legal system and societal standards". The representation of characters in law-related popular culture frequently mirrors their development in response to challenges, transmitting messages about societal customs and the legal system. Thus, the narratives aid viewers to comprehend multifaceted legal subjects by means of relevant characters and their ethical quandaries. However, in numerous products such as movies, television operas, or series, the character of the leading role advances in reaction to challenges. By seeing this progression, viewers are led to a communication on the essence of the law, legal employees, and legal institutions.

4.2 Popular culture and religious studies

Religious studies, as a field in recent years, has managed to shift its emphasis beyond the bounds of investigating religions as nonconcrete practices of sacrament and faith, or from examining the systems of religious leaders, to exploring how religions operate in quotidian contexts. Popular culture has to do with the environments, means, and systems of daily life. Thus, this development has led those researching contemporary religion to engage it with popular culture. Forbes [8] refers to this as the study of "popular culture in religion."

Romanowski's[9] article "Evangelicals and popular music: the contemporary Christian music industry" explores the growth of the

[7] S Machura, 'Character Development and Legal Message in Popular Culture' (2025) 45(1) *Zeitschrift für Rechtssoziologie* 5, 5–21.
[8] Bruce David Forbes, 'Finding Religion in Unexpected Places' in Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H Mahan (eds), *Religion and Popular Culture in America* (University of California Press 2000) 1.
[9] William D Romanowski, 'Evangelicals and Popular Music: The Contemporary Christian Music Industry' in Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H Mahan

Christian Gospel music scene in America starting with the 1970s onwards, which attempts to merge explicitly Christian lyrics with contemporary techniques of popular music. He discovers how what was envisioned to be a system of evangelistic outreach centered on popular music in lieu turns out to be an organized, profit-oriented music scene that is tailored to an Evangelical subculture. The making of the music scene for financial gain came to be viewed as an issue by a good few who were devoted to a "purer" fathoming of this system of musical agency. Thus, similar strains were further seen once Christian gospel artists, such as Amy Grant, who was able to attain cusp triumph in the mainstream pop market, had to drop all explicit religious references from his lyrics. This study therefore finds some of the multifaceted issues that occur when religious groups, in the case of Evangelical Christianity, try to find suitable systems and customs present in extensive popular culture.

Subsequently, another study conducted by Morgan[10] analyzes the role of mass print media in nineteenth-century American Protestantism. Though Catholicism has in history been more obviously allied with the diverse usage of visual media for imparting theology, he argues that mass-produced printed pamphlets played a vital role as a vehicle of religious expertise not only for devoted Protestants but also their budding converts. Thus, the tracts were powerful because they were not just simple biblical and religious texts that were included there, but also included sketches that exemplified the depravities of consumption of alcohol or failing to observe the Sabbath, along with the sanctifications of the Christian existence. Morgan offers a variety of narratives of converts explaining how these tracts help them to

(eds), *Religion and Popular Culture in America* (University of California Press 2000) 105.

[10] David Morgan, *Protestants & Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production* (Oxford University Press 1999).

experience divine encounter in how they are living their lives and provoked them to repent from their former habits. The annexation of a specific innovative popular cultural system, print media, therefore swayed Protestant methodologies to mission along with the types of ecclesiastical experience that religionists and converts recounted.

Wagner[11] studies the diverse responses of Christian groups to the Harry Potter books and movies. She portrays how Christian responses to Harry Potter have taken extensively diverse shapes, even inside the limitations of traditional Evangelicalism. She remarks on exceptions where the Harry Potter books and movies inspire youngsters to partake in activities that are occult and inspire disdain for the rules that were established and appropriate authority. Thus, Wagner notes other Christian writers proposed that the Harry Potter book signifies an imaginary assimilation of magic that is somewhat distinct from modern Wicca and that the books' ethical structure inspires virtues like love, self-sacrifice, and loyalty. This discussion has established a specific, intense focus, as materials for teaching centered on Harry Potter are progressively used in public schools in America, and certain traditional groups of Christian have enthused to attempt to veto them. She notes that this emphasis heightens some rudimentary questions regarding the relationship between the church and nation in America, and what standards they can use to discern which religious books can or cannot be inculcated in American classrooms.

Her study helps emphasize certain presuppositions that are capable of steering religious responses to popular culture; that is, if a child reads anything pertaining to witchcraft, he/she is probably going to utilize it. It likewise finds some of the extensive issues that materialize out of the religious discussions on specific issues; for instance, what are the

[11] Rachel L Wagner, 'Bewitching the Box Office: Harry Potter and Religious Controversy' (2003) 7(2) *Journal of Religion & Film* art 5.

healthiest and most harmful systems of popular culture? And how do we judge what is healthy or not? Revising religious responses to popular culture can thus help in making us more cognizant of the guiding premises and approaches that religious bodies use in the way of engaging with popular culture, and likewise the outcomes of the nature and influences of popular culture may be of additional extensive interest within the broader general public.

The study intends to provide a selection of recent insights into the study of popular culture from law and Christian theological perspectives, thereby contributing to current debates around the popular within contemporary cultural studies. Dealing with issues that have to do with the depiction of popular cultural production and consumption or religious identity construction, this collection includes diverse varieties (e.g., film, television shows, music, etc.) in various contexts by using a number of popular culture studies-oriented methodological and theoretical orientations.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study were thematically analyzed using content analysis.

Theme 1: Popular culture influenced public perceptions of the legal system

Subtheme: The vague misinterpretation and misrepresentation of the legal system. People react or operate based on the information they possess on issues. Fortunately, popular culture makes information available on virtually every issue.

Subtheme: Perception formation; beliefs; attitudes; public opinion. For instance, the information people encounter through popular culture can shape how they understand and evaluate the legal system.

Subtheme: Crime narratives; wrongful/undeserved outcomes; escape from punishment. This also sparks debates about issues that could result in swaying people's insight into the legal system. For instance, movies with narratives where the perpetrators of crimes are set free or go at large could affect people's beliefs about the legal system, thereby shaping their view of the legal system.

Theme 2: The visual idolization and misrepresentation used by popular culture in the legal system.

Subtheme: Popular Culture's Misrepresentation of the Legal System. Popular culture frequently idealizes or misrepresents the legal system, depicting legal practitioners as either champions or villains, and reducing multifaceted legal ethics to entertaining plotlines.

Subtheme: The Influence of Popular Culture on Christian Perceptions of Justice. Media portrayals can shape how the general public, including Christians, understands and evaluates justice and legal practitioners. This molds the general public's, including Christian's assessment of justice. For instance, in Scripture, justice is tied to righteousness and equity (Proverbs 21:15), but popular culture may portray justice as revenge or subjective triumph, which clashes with biblical justice that lays emphasis on mercy and truth (Micah 6:8).

Theme 3: The modeling of the legal system

Subtheme: Theatrical Representation of the Legal System**.** Popular culture really models how individuals see the legal system. Thus,

diverse Television shows and films make the legal world look more theatrical and fast-paced than it is in reality.

Subtheme: Unrealistic Expectations of Justice and Legal Professionals. It leads individuals to believe that justice is always prompt or that attorneys have superpowers, when in reality, legal procedures are much slower and, in addition, multifaceted.

Theme 4: Popular culture reflection and challenge on traditional theoretical values and beliefs

Subtheme: Questioning the established norms used in Christendom. Popular culture can challenge traditional theological perspectives by presenting alternative viewpoints, questioning established norms, and exploring complex issues. Television shows like Big Brother Nigeria (BBN) challenge traditional Christian theological perspectives and also show that discussing topics like abortion, same-sex marriage, or religious nudity brings those subjects into public conversation.

Subtheme: Changing and Reinforcing Religious Interpretations through Media Exposure. The more individuals watch or listen, the more their interpretations can change or become stronger.

Theme 5: The showcasing of doctrines and ideologies that are in contrast to the theological perspectives.

Subtheme: Popular Culture as a Challenge to Conservative Theology. Popular culture often challenges conservative theology by endorsing ethical doctrines, modified spiritualities, or profane humanism. It shows how popular culture promotes ethical doctrines, modified spiritualities, self-worship, and secular humanism that may conflict with traditional Christian theological perspectives.

Subtheme: Biblical Themes and Opportunities for Religious Reflection in Popular Culture
This sub-theme explores how popular cultural works can also reflect biblical themes such as hope, sacrifice, redemption, and faith, creating opportunities for religious reflection and engagement with the gospel. For instance, melodies that reveal self-worship or shows that pseudo-religious devotion imperceptibly foster reverence for God. Though some content deliberately or ne'er can mirror biblical subjects like optimism, immolation, and redemption (e.g., The Lord of the Rings, Les Misérables), proposing a tie for religious or credo reflection and gospel rendezvous.

Theme 6: The Blend of theology with popular culture spirituality
Subtheme: Popular Culture as a Challenge to Traditional Theology. Popular culture frequently mirrors, queries, or redefines theology. Gospel music and television shows like Lucifer or The Good Place use comedy and viewpoint to defy concepts about heaven, hell, and morality. Movies like Thor or Eternals elicit discussions on the subject of gods, creation, and immortality from a theological lens.

Subtheme: Music and Entertainment as Expressions of Spirituality and Religious Identity. Diverse artists such as Beyoncé (Black Is King) or Kanye West (Jesus Is King) blend theology with Black spirituality, remodeling adoration and identity. Harry Potter: Argued in Christian spheres for promoting witchcraft versus subjects of sacrifice and resurrection. Thus, entertainers like Lecrae have dared the church's racial and political muteness, sparking theological discussions.

Theme 7: Popular culture effect on the development of laws or policies related to religion

Subtheme: Popular Culture as a Tool for Public Opinion and Policy Development. Popular culture affects the development of laws related to religion. Popular culture is for the masses, and in cases where certain policies do not suit the masses, there could be a revolt.

Subtheme: The Negative Influence of Religious Stereotypes in Popular Culture**.** A widespread reaction, either positive or negative, to a television series, movie, and social media events could be useful to ascertain the position of the masses as regards policies related to religion. Unfortunately, popular culture also creates stereotypes which are harmful for development.

Theme 8: The contradiction of legal policies as regards the religious norms.

Subtheme: Legal Policies and the Protection of Religious Freedom**.** The rising cultural impulse for inclusivity, often progressed via media, has swayed laws about religious expression. For example, Christian business owners have been sued for refusing services for same sex weddings, citing their faith.

Subtheme: Christian Faithfulness amid Changing Legal and Cultural Norms. Christians are challenged to remain faithful to biblical convictions while responding respectfully and graciously to evolving laws and social expectations. These legal advances frequently feed back into traditional impulses, prompting the Church to uphold veracity with grace while traversing ever-changing legal milieus (Romans 12:2).

Theme 9: Popular culture catalyzes policy debates on moral legislation, religious freedom, or censorship.

Subtheme: Popular Culture and Religious Censorship**.** Controversies around films or music that defy religious standards (like Lady Gaga's

early videos) have steered the call for government regulation or civic debates on the restrictions of free expression as opposed to spiritual standards. **Subtheme:** Popular Culture as a Driver of Religious and Social Change**.** Popular culture is not just a reflection of society; it also shapes it. It can bring marginalized voices into communal discourse, embolden religious reform, or question laws that are obsolete.;

Theme 10: Popular culture affected the development of laws or policies related to religion.

Subtheme: Religious Beliefs and Fertility Testing in Marriage**.** This can be seen in the aspect of fertility testing, where some Christian denominations believe in testing the fertility of their members before marriage. This developed law contradicts what the Bible says (Genesis 1:28).

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, not only does popular culture influence the aspect of law and theology, but it deeply creeps into society and instills the culture of the moment. This kind of culture affects the lawful and religious way of life of the people because its target is what the masses want, not what will help society to evolve. It gives ambiguous interpretations, where a not-so-knowledgeable believer will counter with the correct laws, doctrines, and theologies of their religion. Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that most individuals now get their elementary understanding and knowledge of law and religion from popular culture products. The findings of the study highlighted the diverse effects of popular culture that affect the religious law, principles, and guidelines of the Christian faith. This study concludes that the government and Christian religious bodies should look for prevalent ways to curb the menace that comes with popular culture. This will help sanctify and safeguard religious law, principles, and doctrines.

7. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the continuing defiance, policymakers may consider augmenting a channel of communication between Christian religious leaders and state authorities. They should also help with the regulation and restrictions of some content that is disseminated through the use of popular culture. Solidifying legal defenses against the invasion of popular culture that contradicts Christian religious practices and clarifying guidelines for religious accommodations that promote social unity and legal lucidity.

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ON ASSESSING THE EFFECTS OF POPULAR CULTURE IN LAW AND THEOLOGY

Below are the interview questions for assessing the effects of popular culture on law and theology:

1. How do you think popular culture (e.g., music, TV shows, and movies) sways people's insights into the legal system?
2. Can popular culture shape public opinion on religious legal issues? If so, how?
3. Have you seen instances where popular culture has influenced religious legal discourse or policy-making?
4. How do you think popular culture (e.g., music, TV shows, and movies) reflects or challenges traditional theological perspectives?
5. Can popular culture influence people's spiritual or religious practices? If so, how?
6. Have you seen instances where popular culture has shaped theological discussions or debates?
7. Have you seen instances where popular culture has affected the development of laws or policies related to religion?
8. Can popular culture have influenced thoughts on legal or theological issues?