

Chapter 3

Sharing Bites on Global Screens: The Emergence of Snack Culture

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ABSTRACT

Snack culture is the new phenomenon that shrinks media cultural products and can be easily shared on social networks of the Internet. Thus, it can be consumed in a reduced amount of time circulating instantly all over the globe. These tiny and snappy materials are changing people's habits, transforming passive viewers into active users, and promoting equal access to all, and requiring no professional skills. Viewers now can also produce cultural and social content in widespread virtual communities (based on the Web 2.0) that are increasingly interactive. This chapter presents and analyses a variety of media snacks that form and circulate as snack culture; it also elucidates some of those current changes that are shaping today's relationship between society and media.

INTRODUCTION

In April 2007 I was interviewed¹ by *Folha de São Paulo*, one of the most influential Brazilian newspapers, regarding a new phenomenon on the Internet called *snack culture*. The term appeared the month before in a dossier entitled *Snack Attack!* in the celebrated magazine *Wired*, an American publication specializing in new technologies and electronic games. Pop culture—movies, TV shows, songs, games—according to their *minifesto*

was now coming packaged like cookies or chips, in bite-sized bits for high-speed consumption. Snack culture or *snack media*, as I prefer to call it, involves making small “portions” of information and entertainment available in a great variety of forms and for multiple uses. The formation and consumption of these bites has become a habit, as much as is the time that we individually spend on blogs and on viewing streaming videos.

Sharing content over the Internet is a new and fast way to distribute and to consume culture and media via *snacks*. Those tiny and snappy media products are easier to create, to send, to receive, to

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collect, or to consume instantly at any computer in any part of the world. Microblogs, such as Twitter and Jaiku, and social networks, such as Facebook and Orkut, are taking place of traditional media and imposing a new form of networking in global society. In the last decade, the superabundance of cultural and media productions (e.g., film, video, music, texts) has proliferated in the digital global environment. We could ask, has the globalization of culture, media, and art brought us any closer to understanding the particular and varied experiences of people in diverse parts of the world? At the very least, viewers have created a new form of communication where they comment and respond to each other via screens, where, in many cases, translation or professional audiovisual skills are not required. Thus, viewers are forming global, multiethnic cultural, media, and artistic production scenery on the World Wide Web.

Snacks can be original productions or a recycling and scattering (part, piece, or portion) of any media such as films, songs, or books. They don't require the viewer to spend as much time in front of just one single product on screen; instead viewers can enjoy a greater amount of entertainment and a greater number of diversified sources of information. Thus, like consuming any snack, the viewer can become addicted. In accumulating an impressive record of sharing and consuming snacks, the viewer ultimately expends more time than ever in front of a screen. The extent to which people are mediating their daily experience through screens is almost impossible to know, but it is considerable. What is relevant, however, is to identify and to understand what kinds of images and stories are emerging in this new "virtual" reality of experience.

In this chapter, I aim to present and analyze some of these contemporary forms of media production, sharing, and consumerism, and discuss their role in today's society. I then aim predict and, ultimately, to foresee what the media representations of specific cultural discourses tell us about the contingent nature of notions of global

culture. Global media, as seen by snack culture, interprets, and corresponds to, an intermedial approach, a multifaceted intertwining of forms finally interfering and altering their discourses.

SHRINKING MEDIA

Small, Short, and in Motion

Complex intermedial relationships of digital media and the transformation of distinct cultural forms and practices are important issues in understanding the changing fabric of our society. New technologies, digital screens, and computer networks comprise important tools of communication, art and cultural experience within screens. Culture and media are being consumed as well as services are being provided via all kinds of screens and in diverse formats at the same moment all over the world.

In the mid-1950s screen culture was restricted to cinema and television, but now it has become an integral part of modern society on a global scale. We are living in a world saturated by mass media linked by images and texts through all sorts of screens. Individuals are being converted into screen-viewers—books, films, official documents, as well as banking, government, and many other services are being mediated through screens. Screen culture is transforming cultural habits and values and also influences our ways of telling stories and of creating cultural identity. We are living a new conception of the social community—one that is technologically mediated.

Clearly screens have been changing and transforming our sensory experience of ourselves and of social space. In part, thanks to the Internet, instantaneous entertainment comes from the proliferation of small doses of amusement and information called *snacks*. Media snacking is a new and fast mode of cultural and media consumption in the form of "bites." Originally from Middle Dutch, the term *snack*, that means to snap

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