

Rationale

Hiphop is a contemporary religion for youths

Hypothesis: “Hiphop is a contemporary religion for youths”

I intend to carry out this research based on my hypothesis that “Hiphop is a contemporary religion for youths”. The reason for this research is due to my interest in music and how music influences the behaviour and attitudes of an individual. My friends and family members have characterized me to be under the influence of hiphop music because of the way I dress, my hairstyle (plaited) and the piercing of my ear, all of these are seen as features of hiphop culture. I believe that young people who listen to hiphop music are influenced in various ways mainly the dress code and language. Patricia McBroom (American Public Affairs) stated “ many middle class parents thought it was just a fad when their teenagers started wearing jeans that sagged below their hips in imitation of hiphop culture.” Hiphop culture has been seen as a culture that has been adopted by many youths who listen to hiphop music around the globe. According to Michael Eric Dyson a professor of religious studies and an expert in youth culture at the DePaul University in Chicago claims “ hiphop is an extraordinary cultural development. It is unquestionably the most important popular cultural phenomenon to hit in quite some time, and its reach is now global. The Japanese wear dreads and rap about Compton, while the polish play the ‘F**k tha Police’ while celebrating their liberation from tyranny.”

Objectives: In order to test my hypothesis that “Hiphop is a contemporary religion for youths”, my aims are:

1. To define Hiphop.
2. To give a brief history of the evolution of hiphop
3. To give a sociological definition of religion
4. To investigate if hiphop can be related to as a religion.
5. To investigate why youth turn into hiphop for identity.

I am of the belief that hiphop culture can be seen as a form of resistance from the wider society which belief and values are generally accepted in the society. Hiphop being a form of resistance from the wider society can be seen as a religion because it holds it’s own values and beliefs from the wider society.

In this research, I will be taking a statistical measure by giving out questionnaires in order to collect quantitative data. My hypothesis may show that I have a preconception

about the topic because of the way my hypothesis has been structured and because I have a positive view towards my hypothesis

Context

Referring to my second objective (*to give a brief history of the evolution of hip-hop*). Now almost 31 years after hip-hop got its start in the black urban scene of the 70's, this complex mixture of sounds, rhythm, dress code and attitude can now be seen as a universal "underground culture" for youth resistance around the world. According to a study of hip-hop culture in Berkeley University in the USA, it proposes that hip-hop has become a global culture. The study claims that "hip-hop began in black and Latin American communities, but you can't go to any youth culture in any city around the world today where you won't find hip-hoppers talking about their lifestyle using similar lyrics, similar music and similar dress code". For example, in Paris poor Jewish, Middle Eastern and Western African youths use hip-hop styles and rap to talk about their poverty and police brutality. This can be seen in a French video called "La Haine" (hate).

Referring back to my first objective (*to define hip-hop*), hip-hop is a type of music that incorporates rapping (*fast vocal words*), scratching (*music created by spinning disc on turn tables to make a rhythmical counterpoint to the music on the track*) and the mixture of complex sounds. This type of music started in the Bronx in United States of America, it was spread and made popular by Djs and rappers. Hip-hop has become a global culture that has been adopted by youths to express their view about the society they live in. Youth expression can be expressed in the lyrics like the one below:

*"You were put here to protect us
But who protects us from you?
Every time you say "That's illegal"
Doesn't mean that that's true (Uh-huh)
Your authority's never questioned
No one questions you
If I hit you I'll be killed
But you hit me? I can sue (Order! Order!)
Lookin' through my history book
I've watched you as you grew
Killin' blacks and callin' it the law
(Bo! Bo! Bo!) And worshipping Jesus too
There was a time when a black man
Couldn't be down wit' your crew (Can I have a job please?)
Now you want all the help you can get
Scared? Well ain't that true (You goddamn right)...."*

Artist: Boogie Down Productions
Album: Ghetto Music: The Blueprint of Hip Hop
Song: Who Protects Us From You?

What is a religion? A general definition of religion can be defined as the belief in supernatural power. However, sociologist like Malionswki defined religion as “the process of reinforcing social norms and values and promoting social solidarity within a culture”. Malionswki identified specific areas of social life, which religion is concerned and to which it is addressed; these are situations of emotional stress, beliefs, and views that threatens social solidarity. Following functionalist view about religion, Emile Durkheim (1912) explains that, “society needs a certain degree of social solidarity, value, consensus, harmony and integration between its parts”. Durkheim explains that the functions of a religion are the contribution it makes to meet such functional prerequisites for example its contribution to social solidarity. This is my third objective.

Applying Malionswki’s definition of religion, hip-hop culture according to its definition has similar features to how religion is defined. This can be explained because hip-hop is a dominant culture within youths sub-culture thus they have their own lifestyle, dress code and language which they use to express their feelings and views to the society. Dyson a professor of religious studies expressed his view about hip-hop that “in its infancy, hip-hop was doubted and ridiculed, but today hip-hop is full grown worldwide”.

In order to test my hypothesis, my fourth objective is to investigate if hip-hop can be related to as a religion. ‘KRS-One’ a famous hip-hop rapper in the 90’s claims himself a philosopher of hip-hop, and says, “His philosophy is to establish health, love, awareness and wealth in the lives of all that claim hip-hop as their ideology.” KRS-One launched the Temple of Hip-hop Culture in 1998 as a hip-hop preservation society. It involves a functioning political movement and educational centre with the hope that it will rise a generation of responsible hiphoppers. With about 25,000 members, KRS-One claimed that the temple will eventually have a school in New Jersey with a nine-tier curriculum of breaking, beat-boxing, graffiti art, Disc jockey, fashion, language and knowledge. The temple of hip-hop declared hip-hop its own religion because they believe hip-hop is divine and it proves the existence of God. Other pioneers of hip-hop music like ‘Kool-Herc’ believed that “Hip-hop was God’s answer to the forgotten youth of the seventies when a lot of youths blacks, whites, and Latinos were left for dead and forgotten”.

Investigating why youths turn to hip-hop culture for identity (*which is my fifth objective*) is because hip-hop could be seen as a culture from the wider society because the attitude and lyrics has become a universal, underground culture for youth resistance from the wider society around the globe. Sociologist such as Eisentadt emphasized that young people were seen as more likely to identify themselves with other young people and share common norms and attitudes with them. The concept of youth culture implies a group of people who share some of the norms and values of the wider culture

but who are in some sense culturally distinctive. According to Khaled Sabsabi a rapper and a youth community worker believes that hip-hop is increasing the music of Sydney's (Australia) youth culture because "they turn to hip-hop for an identity, a voice and a sense of justice.

According to Albert Cohen's concept of "status frustration", it can be linked to why more youths get into the hip-hop culture this is because they are unable to achieve status or recognition in terms of the values of the wider society. These youths turn to a delinquent sub-culture by hanging out with other youths. Cohen suggests, "The youths then will create their own sub-culture in which many of the norms of the wider society are reversed. Stealing, fighting, vandalism and rowdiness which may be condemned by the society at large become a way of earning status".

However following many criticisms of Cohen's theory, Matza and Sykes (1961) point out that "many delinquents show genuine remorse and may attempt to use what they call techniques of neutralisation to excuse what they have done". These involve justification of delinquent behaviour in terms of the wider society for example, a Rastafarian may claim that he only smokes cannabis because of his religion.

The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCC) in the 1970's argued that cultural features such as youth styles are manifestations of structural features of the society like the economic system and its associated class relations. They claim that working class youth sub-culture developed because it was working class who experienced most extreme problems and contradictions of growing up in a capitalist society. The CCC made use of Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which is the way which the ruling class secures the consent of the working class to its rule because the ruling class ideology and values are dominant. Gramsci argues that the ruling-class hegemony is never complete because there are always groups who reject the ruling-class ideology. Hip-hop sub-culture could be identified as one of the groups that reject the ruling class ideology.

Following both arguments criticising Cohen's theory, it explains that the hip-hop culture is a form of resistance from the wider society that is dominated and ruled by the bourgeoisie. The people within the hip-hop culture come together and share similar views, similar dress code, language and style, these have helped them gain their restraint from the ruling class.

(1150 words)

Methodology

The methodological approach I will be adopting will be giving out questionnaires, which is a quantitative approach. As suggested, some sociologists have tried to adopt the methods of natural sciences. To achieve this, they advocated the use of quantitative methods. The earliest attempt to use such methods in Sociology is known as positivism. Positivists believed it is possible to classify the social world in an objective way. Using these classifications it was possible to count sets of observable social facts and so produce statistics. For example, Durkhiem collected data on social facts such as the suicide rate and the membership of different religions. I choose to use a quantitative approach because I am more likely to get reliable information from my respondents that will support my hypothesis that “Hiphop is a contemporary religion for youths”. Using quantitative approach, data’s are seen to be reliable because if other researchers use the same method of investigation on similar material, the same result will be produced and the research can be repeated and the result checked. Quantitative approach will enable me to carry out a statistical measure and the result can be expressed in numerical form, this can later be used as a form of statistics to compare or make a general statement that can be tested.

Giving out questionnaires will enable be achieve quantitative data which can be expressed in statistics. Positivist like Durkhiem believed it was possible to classify the social world in an objective way by using this classification, it was then possible to count sets of observable social facts and statistics will be produced. I will be giving out close-ended and open-ended questions in the view to obtain statistical data. Questionnaires may be administered in a number of ways but I will be giving out my questionnaires to a certain group of people that fits into a certain age group. I will select my sample using quota sampling; this will allow me to control variables without having a sampling frame. I have decided to use quota sampling because I will know how many respondents with particular characteristics to question so that the overall sample reflects the characteristics of the population as a whole. My sample will include male and female within the age group of 14 to 25, not minding their class, race or educational background. I will be giving out 100 questionnaires to anyone that I get in contact with and that falls within the age group of 14 to 25 this will include equal number of males and females. The use of this sample method will save me time and money since it reduces the number of individuals to be studied and it is possible to generalize from it.

Having selected a research method and a method of selecting my sample, I have decided to carry out a pilot study before embarking upon the main research project. A pilot study is a small scale preliminary study conducted before the main research in order to improve the design of the research because it helps avoid time and money

being wasted on an inadequately designed questionnaire. I gave out copies of my first draft of the questionnaires to 10 people. With their response, I find out that they find it difficult to answer some of the questions I designed. I now have the opportunity now to redesign the questionnaire for easy understanding before I conduct my main research.

I have thought about using other sociological methods like observation, interviews would have been more appropriate to research my hypothesis that “Hiphop is a contemporary religion for youths”. Carrying out observation and interviews will provide me with well-detailed result that will support the quantitative method, however I have been limited to one sociological method and I decided to give out questionnaires because it the cheapest way to get information from respondents and it is quick. Also, I am more likely to get reliable information from my respondents that will support my hypothesis because my result can then be expressed in numerical form e.g. percentages, tables. Positivist sociologist will support the view that the collection of quantitative data is less prone than qualitative data to arise bias because of the subjective involvement or interpretation of the researcher.

My adopted approach might be disadvantaged because questionnaires according to interpretive sociologist see statistical data as inadequate for producing sociological explanations of human behaviour. Critics argue that despite the reliability of questionnaire data it lacks validity because it doesn't provide a true picture of what is being studied. For my hypothesis to be valid, it must give a true measurement or description of what it claims to measure or describe. For example, statistics on church attendance may be reliable but they do not give a true picture of religious commitment. To phenomenologist, assumptions on which questionnaires are based are entirely false.

(865 words)

Evidence

My first aim when designing my questionnaire was to find if there was a correlation between gender and hiphop as a religion I found that:

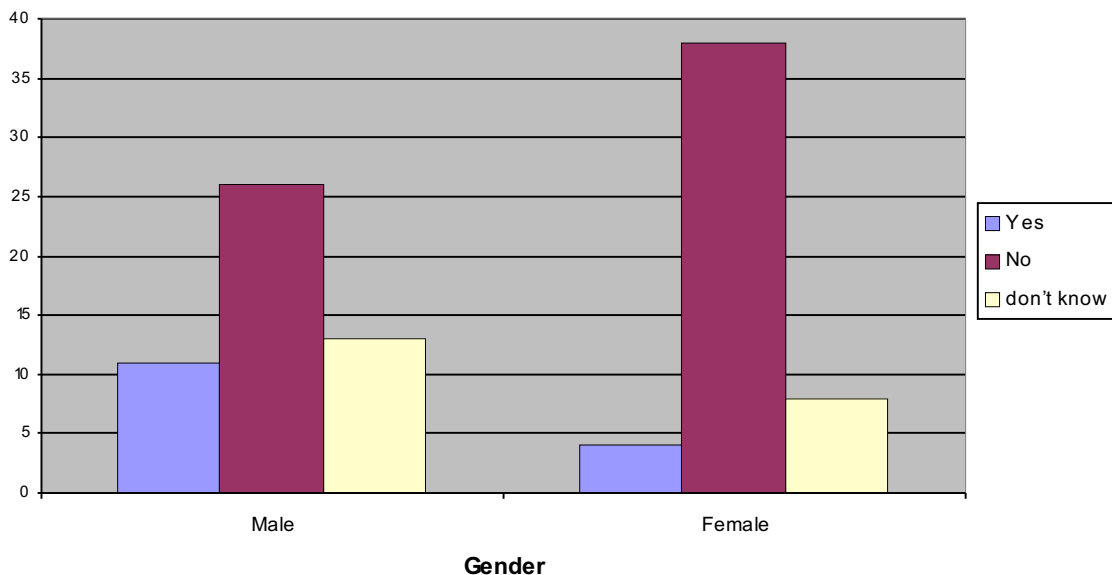
- Out of 50 males, 26 of them reject the view that hiphop is a religion, 13 of them don't know while 11 agreed to the view that hiphop should be a religion.
- Out of 50 females, 38 rejected the view that hiphop is a religion, 8 of them don't know and only 4 agreed the view that hiphop is a religion. (See below)

Is hiphop a religion?

	Yes	No	Don't know
Male	11	26	13
Female	4	38	8

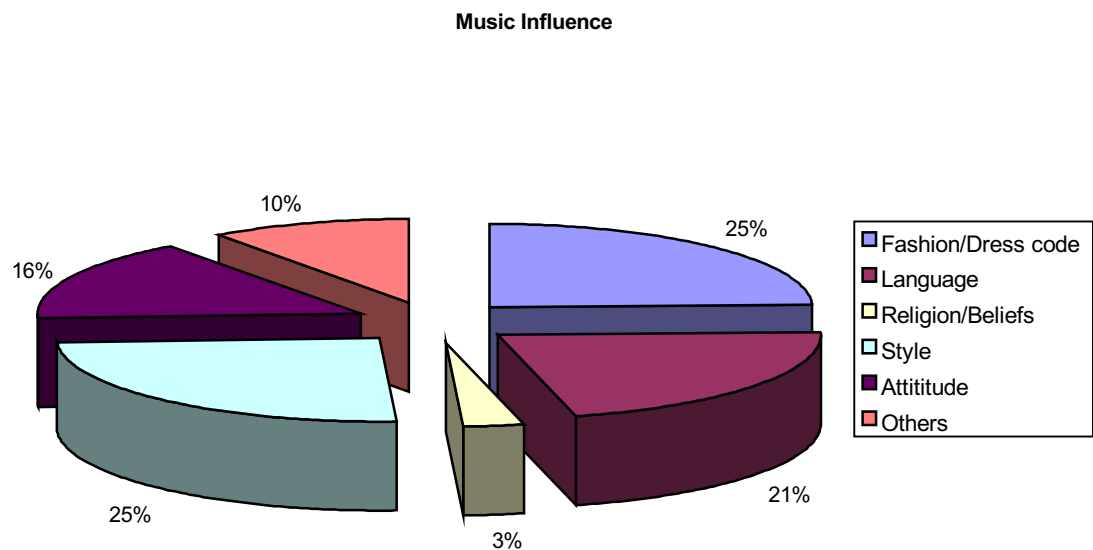
Differences expressed in graph

Gender Differences



My research proves that more males than females listens to hiphop music and would see hiphop as a religion. When asked why, most males suggested that hiphop is male dominated and it portrays issues that can be linked to male dominance in the society like sex, money, murder, drugs, and violence. All of this are associated with male rather than females and that is why more male get into hiphop than females. However in recent times, girls are getting in to sex, money more and there are more female hiphop artist in the industry and this might have an effect in the future. This can be linked to my fifth objective because it explains why youths might turn into hiphop

My second objective was to get the view of my respondents on how music influences people. In other to achieve this aim, I stated options of how people can be influenced like, fashion, language, religion, style and attitude so they could tick as many as possible. I found out that most people had the view that music can influence a person generally. Most of my respondents think music can influence a person in various ways most especially language, dress code and attitude.



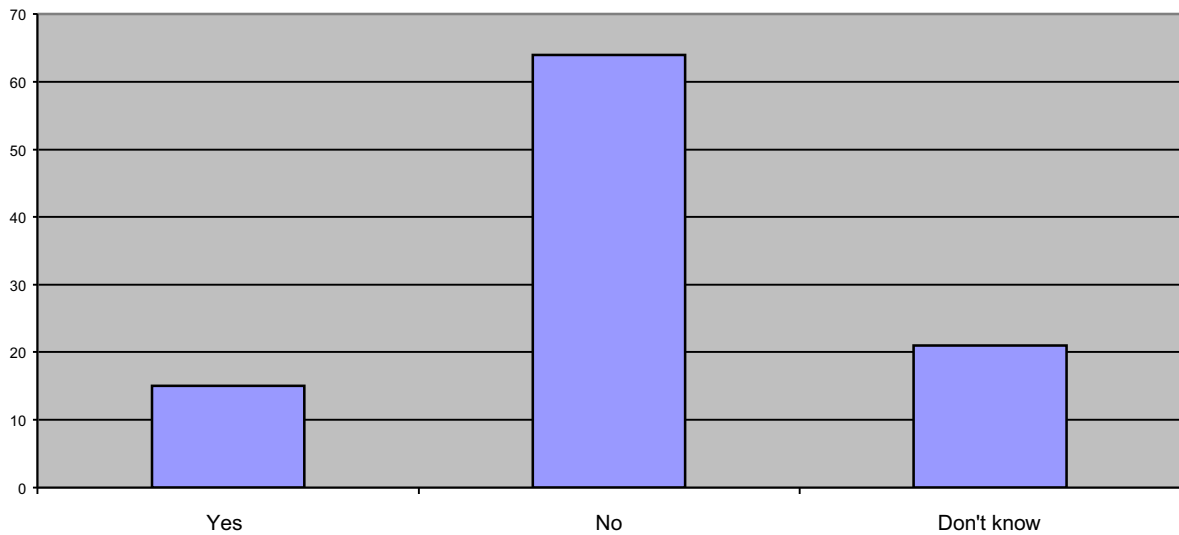
The pie chart above shows that 25% of my respondents accept that music influences their style, 16% accept music influences their attitude, and 21% accepts it influences their language, 25% accepts music influences their fashion and dress code and only 3% accepts music influences their religion and beliefs. This can have a strong link on why people might listen to certain types of music and why they aspire to the music they listen to. This can be related to my fourth and fifth objectives in the rationale section.

My next objective was to find out if people will agree with the view that hip-hop is a religion. When carrying out my pilot study this was the question my samples found really difficult to answer, so I decided to have a yes, no, don't know options. The findings are as follows:

Some people regard hip-hop as a religion, do you support the view?

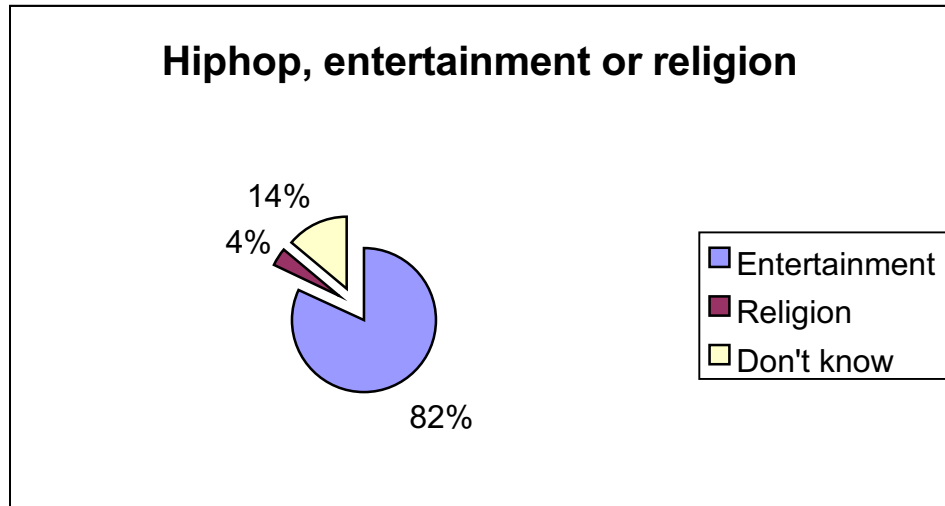
Yes	15
No	24
Don't know	21

Do you regard hip-hop as a religion?



Finally I wanted to find out if people see hip-hop as a form of entertainment or as a deeper religious significance. My finding proposes that more people see hip-hop as a form of entertainment rather than religious because it involved money and if it is to

be religion money shouldn't be the main priority. My findings can be expressed in the chart below.



Overall, my findings do not have a correlation with my hypothesis that “Hiphop is a contemporary religion for youths”. My findings reveals that youths don't share the ideology that hiphop is a religion, however hiphop is seen as a form of entertainment that expresses what goes around in the society and it can be seen as a universal underground culture for youth resistance and a way of protest. This can explain why youth turn into hiphop for identity. This explains my fifth objective

(600 words)

Evaluation

My main aim at the beginning of my research was to test hypothesis that “Hiphop is a contemporary religion for youths”. Not only was my hypothesis realistic but also of interest to me because of how my friends and family members have considered me to be under the influence of hiphop music and also because I believe that young people who listen to hiphop music are influenced by the music. In order to research my area of interest, I had to come up with a suitable hypothesis or aim. The first hypothesis I came up with was “to find out the effect of music on youths”, I later found that the hypothesis doesn’t portray my area of interest then I had to come up with my recent hypothesis that “Hiphop is a contemporary religion for youths”, I also had to come up with set of objectives to support my hypothesis.

Researching this topic I found difficult because there was hardly any secondary research on hiphop as a religion. I had to look into other aspects like religion, culture and music to draw a correlation that will be necessary to my hypothesis. In my context pages, I have tried to get information from different sources like the Internet, which I found really helpful because I got some information about a hiphop artist known as KRS One having hiphop, as is own religion. Also I made good use of textbooks like Haralambos and A-Z Sociology coursework handbook to help with my methodology section. The textbooks were of great use to me because I was able to find theories like Functionalist view on religion and other theories. I decided to use the positivist approach to carry out my research because I found it to be the easiest and reliable method to achieve my result.

I decided to use a questionnaire because I thought it was going to be the easiest way and the cheapest to carry out a study. However I found out that this method wasn’t suitable to my hypothesis because I needed to get individual opinions about hiphop being a religion rather than generalising from my study. For my hypothesis to be accepted as valid and reliable, it is important to note that it would have been beneficial if I was able to carry out other methodological approaches like observation and interviews but I am allowed a specific methodological approach. Carrying out observation and interviews could provide me with well-detailed result that will support the positivist view. My adopted methodological approach might be disadvantaged because questionnaires according to interpretive sociologist see statistical data as inadequate for producing sociological explanations of human behaviour. Critics argue that despite the reliability of questionnaire data it lacks validity because it doesn’t provide a true picture of what is being studied. For my hypothesis to be valid, it must give a true measurement or description of what it claims to measure or describe.

Designing my questionnaire was the hardest task faced because I found it difficult to design questions that could be linked to my hypothesis. I did design some

questions but I had to carry out a pilot study to get the view of a few samples about the questions I asked. The result from the pilot study enabled me to redesign my questionnaire so it will be more suitable to my hypothesis. The questionnaire however did not really have a direct link to my hypothesis but I was able to link it up myself.

To summarize my research and the results I gathered, I decided to test my hypothesis that “Hiphop is a contemporary religion for youths”, which I came up with five objectives that will guide me through my research and enable me achieve a good result. My objectives can be seen in the rationale chapter. At the end of my research, my findings reveals that youths don’t share the ideology that hiphop is a religion, but they can see hiphop as a form of entertainment and a way of protesting.

If I am to carry out this research again, I aim to change my hypothesis to “The negative effect oh hiphop music on youths”. I will carry out my research by adopting an interactionist approach; I will make use of interviews because I will obtain first hand information from individual who will be telling me their own personal experience.

(727 words)

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