HIP-HOP DRAMATICALLY CHANGED THE IDEA OF THE CONSUMER
INTO AN ACTIVE PRODUCER OF POPULAR CULTURE
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ABSTRACT
The people of The United States of America have been influenced by the existence of Hip-Hop culture. Initiated by a community movement in the late 1960’s, it plays significant roles in the development of music, television, fashion, and lifestyles. This article examines Hip-Hop phenomenon from the perspective of Popular Culture and Remix Culture by exposing several case studies. The writer provides examples from each aspects of the development throughout the U.S.A. It is found that the phenomenon of Hip-Hop re-shifts the scheme of the consumer into a producer. The four elements: DJ, Rap, Break Dance and Graffiti created a new chain in the continuous production of Popular Culture.

Keywords : Hip-Hop, Popular Culture, Remix Culture

Music genre varies from alternative, jazz, blues, rock, and punk to hip-hop. Hip-hop culture is widely known in conjunction with the existence of African American working-class people. It was emerged in mid 1970’s in New York when rock and alternative music genre dominantly popular in the USA. However, Its popularity rose around a decade later not only from the music, but also from the contribution of movies and art scenes. (Meghelli 2013, p. 97).

Hip-hop showed a power to shift world’s perspective on community movement, from only self-expressing the reality of the working-class into art forms with multi billion dollar music industry. Although hip-hop music artists tend to compose music by consuming and remixing existing music materials, they contributed to expand the cultural existence to enter universal business environment. Many artists produce more art forms with their creativity in collaborating its four essential elements, which also has an impact on popular culture, fashion and lifestyles.

The phenomenon of Hip-hop started in the area of the South Bronx, several music artists such as Afrika Bambaatta, Kool DJ Herc and Grandmaster Flash created this turn table and spoken-word music. The teenagers of the Bronx, Brooklyn and Harlem altered songs that came out from their parents’ vinyl records into new instruments. Moreover, it led to the arrivals of new art forms such as DJ (deejaying), MC (rapping), b-boy (break dancing), and writing (graffiti).

Those four elements of hip-hop originally discovered to dedicate peace, love, harmony and having fun. As mentioned by Adams and Adler (2008, p. 10), “And why not? Unlike punk rock, its sub cultural contemporary, hip-hop was not animated by anger, nor was it anti-fashion. Hip-hop was friendly and party oriented and liked to dress up”. Although it derives from the desire of only having fun with creativity, the practices of hip-hop visual art form, graffiti, as an example, are considered as vandalism action and outlaw by most governments in the USA. In addition, break dancing sometimes associated with gang fights and misinterpreted as an act of violence.

This condition did not allow hip-hop enter the glamorous of music industry until the late 1970’s. The appearance of “Rapper’s Delight”, produced by Sylvia Robinson, made hip-hop known around the world since then. Not only hit the Hot R&B singles in America, the song became the first rank on the pop charts in Canada and Holland. It was also a music breakthrough in England, Germany, South Africa and Israel. (Adams and Adler 2008, p. 10)

Related Theories
A. Popular Culture

Although there are many ways in defining Popular Cuture, Storey classified it into six definitions to knowledge the studies. As mentioned by Storey (2009, p. 6),
'Therefore, all I intend to do for the remainder of this chapter is to sketch out six definitions of popular culture that in their different, general ways, inform the study of popular culture.' Nevertheless, to begin the discussion and to utter the general idea of Popular Culture, he particularly defines with a culture that is broadly approved or preferred by many people. (Storey 2009, p. 6)

Relating to the phenomenon of hip-hop music in the U.S.A, begun with the people’s movement, which then will be discussed further on this paper, the writer thinks that the fourth definition is more connected. Storey (2009, p. 9) stated that, “A fourth definition contends that popular culture is the culture that originates from ‘the people’. It takes issue with any approach that suggests that it is something imposed on ‘the people’ from above. According to this definition, the term should only be used to indicate an ‘authentic’ culture of ‘the people’. This is popular culture as folk culture: a culture of the people for the people". This statement is also inline with the Bennet’s statement (cited in Storey 2009, p.9), “As a definition of popular culture, it is often equated with a highly romanticised concept of working-class culture construed as the major source of symbolic protest within contemporary capitalism”. It reflects the Hip-hop movement, which is provoked by the South Bronx people with the content of protest through their lyrics, audio and visual form of delivery.

B. Remix Culture

In composing the music, Hip-Hop musicians tend to combine few elements of music, which is derived from other musician’s works. This action of mixing songs and even lyrics is known as remix. Navas (2009, p. ) stated “Remix has its roots in the musical explorations of DJ producers; in particular, hip-hop DJs who improved on the skills of disco DJs, starting in the late sixties. DJs took beatmixing and turned it into beat juggling: they played with beats and sounds, and repeated (looped) them on two turntables to create unique momentary compositions for live audiences”.

Rapidly developed, remix it self has becoming a discourse, whereas also as a musical culture, or widely known as Remix Culture. Navas (2012, p. 65) came up with the definition of Remix Culture, “Generally speaking, remix culture can be defined as a global activity consisting of the creative and efficient exchange of information made possible by digital technologies. Remix is supported by the practice of cut/copy and paste. The concept of Remix that informs remix culture derives from the model of music remixes which were produced around the late 1960s and early 1970s in New York City, with roots in Jamaica’s music. During the first decade of the twenty-first century, Remix (the activity of taking samples from pre-existing materials to combine them into new forms according to personal taste) is ubiquitous in art and music; it plays a vital role in mass communication, especially in new media”.

Discussion

A. The Elements of Hip-Hop

One of the elements, DJ, abbreviated from Disc Jockey, is a practice where artist use turntable as an instrument to create the unique sound of ‘remix’ from existing music. The remixing technique of the DJ was already practiced before the hip-hop ‘birthday’. Nevertheless, ‘turntablism’ term was introduced to represent the scratching and sampling techniques. (Tate Liverpool 2002, p. 13). A disc jockey was normally accompanied by an MC or ‘rapper’ when performs the record’s technical manipulation. However, unlike in the early birth of hip-hop, it is now very common that DJ performs individually, has his/her own albums and even performs live single particularly in rave and other occasional party sessions.

The world of music now listens to popular DJs such as Tiesto, Skrillex, Swedish House Mafia, David Guetta, Steve Aoki, and many others. According to Forbes, they are five of the world’s top twelve highest earning DJs. (The World’s Highest-Paid DJs 2013 2013). Furthermore, those DJs are coming from non-African American background, which shows that hip-hop is now a globally accepted as a form of entertainment as well.

Second element, MC (or rapping) is the spoken-word music of hip-hop culture. Its lyrics often represent the issues and thoughts of the MC in his/her social life. Flores-Gonzales et al (cited in Travis 2013, p. 143) argues, “Rap music lyrics may also capture the emancipatory principles of social justice and corresponding activism”. Not only that, it is also being used as a tool to educate, empower, and critique people. Rap artists
such as D’Knowledge, KRS-One, Mos Def, and Lauryn Hill are some of the ‘voice’ of hip-hop culture. For instance, Lauryn Hill’s debut solo album, The Mis-education of Lauryn Hill, won the Grammy Awards 1999 for the Album of the Year contains lyrics that are voicing negligence and misinterpretation in the education system for the native people of the USA. (Biggs 2012, p. 162)

With a similar concept as Brazil’s martial art, Capoeira, hip-hop’s third element, break dancing illustrates dance “battle” between groups of people. Rajakumar (2012, p. 1) identify that break-dancing indicates the aspects of rivalry, sovereignty, and establishment of status with the existence of a cultural array in the Bronx’s Puerto Rican and African American youth style. The dance was initially an impromptu act of responding DJ and rapper performance that triggered audiences to keep moving and even mobbing the dance floor. In addition to that, break-dancing associated with a touch of acrobatic and pantomimes while he is dancing. Therefore, flips, glides, and freezes become essential movements of break-dancing.

The fourth element of hip-hop, writing or graffiti, exists in the New York’s 1970 political climate. Moreover, it was an outcome of gang’s claim for their respective neighborhood territory. Adams and Adler (2008, p. 16) state that the writing is to mark their area with a message: “The idea, they said, was to protect their neighborhood from outsiders. The painting meant: This is ours and if you’re not one of us, then all of us will bust yo ass, bro”.

Despite living in the era of conflicts at that time, the involvement of Frank Del Toro, or known as FDTS6, a graffiti artist who started to use trains as his workspaces generated the graffiti revolution at that time. The elaboration among other ‘Graf writing’ artists evolved graffiti as an art form. Besides, hip-hop culture penetrates art scenes in Asian countries. For example, Hisashi Tenmyouya created a unique mix of traditional Japanese letter, Kanji with graffiti art, which named Kanji Wildstyle. Also, a Japanese portrait, Mineta, combines the image of Japanese youth style with African American hip-hop pose.

B. Hip-Hop and Television Industry

Entering music and television industry in 1980, hip-hop, popular culture in music started to be introduced in one of MTV’s programs, ‘Yo! MTV Raps’. It was a huge reorientation in MTV’s presiding rock-oriented music video broadcast. Three hip-hop artists: Fab 5 Freddy, Doctor Dre, and Ed Lover were hosting the show until the end of 1988. The performance became a proof that hip-hop music amplifies as a popular culture. In addition, it displays images of black Americans are also part of the American visual culture. (Adams and Adler 2008, p. 104)

The appearance of a hip-hop group, Public Enemy in U2 rock band’s 1992 Europe tour was a massive influence in the world of music. Their slogan “Fight the Power!” buried deep inside hip-hop nation and started to come into sight on bricks around England, Poland, and Italy. In addition, most of the lyrics are representing the dominance of white people over black people, male over female, and majorities over minorities. The rap music group displayed the hip-hop’s fearless attitude of national politics and human race issues.

In film and television, Hollywood recognized the hip-hop existence by nominating John Singleton movie, Boyz n the Hood in the 1991 Academy Award. It tells a story of three young brothers of black Americans who grow up in South Central Los Angeles and dealt with drug dealing gangsters, resulting one of their deaths. The title derived from N.W.A. Music track that became hits in hip-hop music history. Another example is the success of Spike Lee as a hip-hop filmmaker. Several titles such as Malcolm X, Clockers, Get on the Bus, and Jungle Fever brought a hip-hop generation into a new level of film production and made a huge footprint in the Hollywood industry.

C. Hip-Hop in Fashion and Lifestyles

Beyond music industry, hip-hop marked its culture in fashion and lifestyles. Another hip-hop culture’s extension is the endorsement of hip-hop music artists by large numbers of huge companies for their products. Some fashion brands such as Calvin Klein, Polo Ralph Lauren, Cross Colours, FUBU and Tommy Hilfiger involved hip-hop music
artists in the marketing campaign and advertising.

Moreover, it leverages the evolution from being an instrument to market products to actively perform the production itself. For example, Beyonce Knowles built House of Deroen to draw a line in the fashion market. Her brand image successfully perceived by most consumers, as mentioned by Patton (2009, p. 68), “In the process, she became a fashion icon and developed a phenomenal, top-shelf image”. Created hip-hop brand in fashion and technology, Phat Farm’s members Russel and Kimora Lee Simmons convinced Motorola to insert hip-hop music icon in their mobile phones and accessories. They built an extensive network by signing the partnership contract in 2003.

Jay Z SUV car branding was a hip-hop breakthrough in the automotive industry. General Motor Corporation manufactured GMC Yukon Denali, which specially designed by Jay-Z Blue color shading. The car was produced in 2007 as a limited edition with a character of Jay-Z as a hip-hop music icon as well as an automotive one. Moreover, this marketing strategy followed by many car manufacturers such as Mercedes-Benz, Toyota, and Daimler Chrysler who endorsed some hip-hop generation in the following years.

One hip-hop market penetration that also caught people’s attention was Starbury sneakers by USA retail clothing chain Steve &Barry's. Starbury shoes branding was inspired by the NBA player’s appearance, Stephon Marbury. Beside sneakers, the branding included different styles of jeans, hoodies, and basketball gear. The aim of marketing team was to sell the shoes and clothes with only $14.98. This strategy was taken to defeat higher prices of other athlete celebrities endorsed products. Furthermore, they set up a PR campaign to publish the Starbury Movement around the world, including Australia. Not only to market the products, but to spread the hip-hop mindset and movement with more value. “Our brand strategy was to make this sneaker launch a social movement that was inspirational. Most of the other brands were selling products and athletes for inspirational value. Based on the authenticity of Stephon’s background and his persona combined with revolutionary concept whose time had come, we knew we could market the brand on the basis of its inspirational value”. (Paton 2009, p. 127)

The series of penetration in the business markets was evidence that hip-hop actively produce culture. There is an element of Hip-hop culture that less beneficial and profitable, our even outlaw. Among others, Graffiti remains controversial and sensitive to scrutiny. Thus, the expression of writing artists in using walls, trains, bridges, or any medium in the neighborhood is considered as a vandalism action and against the law. As mentioned by Chang (2002), from time to time, governments are not supporting the graffiti existence. Police often arrest graffiti artists and pushed local business owners, schools, and communities to refuse graffiti decorating their walls. However, a number of hip-hop artists practiced this “illegal street arts” movement earned world recognition. For example, Kehinde Wiley with his painting influence on BBC sci-fi Dr. Who, Mike Giant worked with Shepard Fairey was famous for their show at the San Diego Vice 1156 Gallery, and Mike Thompson was the art director at famous t-shirt and advertisement brand, Ecko Unlimited. (Adams and Adler 2008, p. 21)

**Conclusion**

Those examples given above were only a few numbers of hip-hop’s crusade behind its utterance in delivering message of peace, love and unity. Hip-hop also successfully accomplished to restate the notion of act by transforming self-indulgence into payback. In addition, the political and urban rebellion background of Hip-hop did not crash the culture into devastation. It reshapes the image of consuming other’s products into creating more commodities. Beyond that, Hip-hop took a position in a various ground and has a remarkable impact on music, fashion, movies, automotive, and sports. In short, hip-hop alteration resulted on-going production of culture in creating valuable arts, regardless the tragic on African-American status in politic, social and New York’s economy history.
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