

Conference Paper

Kabbalah, and the Popular Culture Industry: Exploring Identity and Spiritual Satisfaction

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Abstract

Today's popular culture is a part of global culture. Kabbalah, a form of popular spirituality derived from orthodox Jewish mysticism has gained popularity because of its association with the activists and celebrities in the pop culture industries. This paper examines the influence of this organization, which is still mysterious, through the public image of the spirituality of pop culture actors who became followers of Kabbalah and express their identity in the implied meanings contained in music and lyrics of the song and as the media to express those feeling, thought, or social and religious experience, also how popular culture as a criticism of religious institutions. In strengthening and deepening this research, will apply social and phenomenological approach as my theoretical framework to make a deep analysis in this topic. This study is important to give alternative perspectives to pop culture and the media as inseparable linked to identity, culture, politics, religion and gender which is related to common society nowadays.

Keywords: Judaism Mysticism, Kabbalah, Music & Song Lyrics, Media, Popular Culture

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Popular culture seem like not only persuasive but also elusive (Strinati Dominic And Wagg Stephen, 1992: 60). It seen through how this term influence modernism and have an impact in social aspect nowadays. Conceptually, based on Strinati Dominic (2004) this term often relate to capitalism, industrial production, consumption, glamorous (lifestyle) and pleasure. Popular culture has become part of political form and have role in this case (Strinati Dominic, 2004: 20). Nowadays, pop culture still maintaining and adhering that characteristics, but on the other hand, this term have wide meaning for instance in the context of religion and culture itself. Today's popular culture is not finite to common word of entertainment, glamorous, and so forth. The activist as much as the celebrities as the subject in this industry appears a new case and the meaning unintentionally of pop culture (Strinati Dominic And Wagg Stephen, 1992: 72).

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Other than that, Kabbalah coming up in the industry not only as part of religious group or religious institution, but also as umbrella organization of their follower and the activist of popular culture industry. The leader of this organization said that, Kabbalah receive people wherever they come from to be part of them to evolve and self-acceptance (Scholem Gershom, 1997: 35). It is appropriate with the meaning of '*Kabbalah*' which means of 'approve' or 'receive' (Strinati Dominic, 2004: 26). Moreover, scholars and social (feminist) activists, also political and religious institution are still debating the existence of this organization as well as the term of Judaism (Coudert P. Allison, 1999: 20). In their communities, this group still problematiced by Jews itself especially about their existence and teachings considered deviate and against the true meanings of Judaism.

This paper aims to see the role of media which is quite central and important in this case. Popular culture and the media cannot be separate, they are oneness and interdependent in the industry. It relate to the term about how traditional ideas mentioned the media and art is be one, the traditional ideas word is about the role of media, art and culture influence and drive their role in societies (Strinati Domini, 2004: 19). Futhermore, the activist and celebrities in the media popular culture industries are public figure, entertainer, and identical with glamorous. Sometimes those use song lyric, as the media to express their faith, thought and their spirital experience as well as Kabbalah. Through the media they use it as means for expressing their opinions in responding social (gender equality, women rights and son forth) political, and religious life (Craig, Carnagey & Janie, 2003: 965).

Therefore, this paper aims to find and points out the problem accompanying purpose to see by the following questions such as how activist and celebrities of popular culture using song lyric, symbol, their profesion and the media as a tool in exploring their indentity and spirital satisfaction? And how the media response Kabbalah, popular culture, and the issue of public figure become the fellower of this organization. last but not least, where is the position of media in this case, it means that, how media response the existence of Kabbalah and why media can not reveal this misterious organization on surface. In addition, it will clarifying whether mass media equalled mass propaganda and mass repression. I must be emphasize that Popular culture here will concern to the United State (Americanization) as central of this industry or known as 'Hollywood industry'.

1.2. Methodology

To support this paper I will use literature review or the theoretical framework offered by some scholars, This paper is a research literature that using analytical method which was developed by some scholars. Moreover, In strengthening and deepening this research, will applies social and phenomenological approach as theoretical framework to make a deep analysis. Scholar such Stuart Hall and Habermas who talking about this approach will support this paper. According to Stuart Hall, he criticize the hegemony of mass media and reading of audience. He offend about the characteristics of American mass media, *policing the crisis* and moral panic (Stevenson Nick, 2002: 36-37). Besides, his analysis about *Representation and the media* is relevant with this paper. Another scholars such as Jürgen Habermas more emphasize media culture which he have had an impact in social theory. With his social theory of public culture will fix up with media and popular culture which is culture and the media now become a phenomenon. On the other hand, it was part of consumption culture and Commercialised and marketised (Ibid: 47-48).

2. Result and Discussion

2.1. Understanding Kabbalah and the popular culture

Based on Gershom Scholem (1997) Kabbalah was appeared in the thirteenth century, In academic, Kabbalah appears in 20's century (Houk James, 2016: 38). As part of Jewish, Kabbalah came from Israel as a mystical (magic) flow, and historically it depends upon Muslim Sufism (Scholem Gershom, 1997: 6). Kabbalah has taken place in some countries such as Israel as the origin country, United State, Germany, Spain, or in Southern France, Provence. and other western countries, which more precisely in its western part, known as the Languedoc and its well known as the revival of Kabbalah's doctrines (Huss Boaz: 2017). Scholem, stressed out that this organization is the forms of Jewish mysticism that appeared in the Middle Ages from around 1200 under the name "Kabbalah" (2017: 6-7).

In many terms, Kabbalah have different words such as "*cabbala*" or "*cabala*" in Latin and in Rabbinical Hebrew writted "*qiblet*" means receive or accept or "*Qabalah*" means tradition (See Mathers, Mc Gregor. L.S., 2010: 11-12). Literally, Kabbalah is the tradition of orthodox Judaism (additional forms of Jewish mysticism). The characteristic of this religious movement is, they receive anyone who need spiritual desire or satisfaction whatever their background and no matter who they are. The chief and the pioneer of Kabbalah, Herz Imber (1856-1909) claim that Kabbalah is not merely about religion or

culture, its about accomplishment of spiritual satisfaction and identity or self-awareness of human beings.

Around eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Kabbalah was arrived in America, it sign with their *Orisha* worship practiced by African-American in Trinidad (Houk James, 2016: 42). In the new age of Kabbalah even there is discourse trends in Twentieth-century in some Universities mostly in western countries. This fact is appropriate with what Huss Boaz (2017) was talked about the revival of Kabbalah in periode of modernism and post-modernism. According on previous shelves, at least this paper be able to answer some questions such as what is the Kabbalah? What is it general teaching, what is it sub-division? And another question such as why is Kabbalah popular today? and why connection with Pop culture and the new media? may it will be answer in the next pages which related to popular culture and the media.

Regardless, in this case, Kabbalah is tight with culture and the situation of social culture, economic, and American political democraton (Stahl Roger, 2009: 6). On one hand, to answer the question of popular culture is it not difficult, but its challanging in the same time. The expansion of Popular culture currently has a significant changed and developed todays. Further, popular culture emerged since 20's century, based on a sociologist who discuss about the theory of populare culture, Dominic Strinati (1947-2018) in his work *An Introduction To Theory Of Popular Culture*, he argued that in 1920 and 1930 politician, elite, capitalism, and scholars was debated about the term of 'popular culture' with many terms and meanings (Strinati Dominic, 2004: 19). Furthermore, Strinati point out that, as mass culture, popular culture has become legitimate and more specific in our todays society. In his another work, Strinati explain that, there are different concepts of popular culture, one of them is whether it as a production or consumption. Culturally, it also difficult to define it and often trapped in the concept of dualism of popular culture itself (See Strinati Dominic and Wagg Stephen, 1992: 14).

In post-modernism, contemporary popular culture is consist of architecture, cinema, television, advertysing and pop music, which all of them are part of consumerism and the trick of capitalism (Ibid: 239). In cultural studies pop culture is a culture shaped by political elite, capitalism, and point of view or societies taste. It is become a global culture that exspansion in Asia, Europe such as France, Spain, and Britain especially in post-war era. Britain was in situation of americanization, this periode was known as *leisure trend* and popular culture which is supported by new technologies and media consumption (Stahl Roger, 2009: 29-34). Todays, popular culture regards as important and central for activist and celebrities not only to be popular or as entertainer but also as comodity and financial source (Huss Boaz, 2007: 13).

If related to the Kabbalah, both cultures have changed towards a wider direction and challenging world. Yet, popular culture is not only influenced by one culture but also by other such as Kabbalah, politic, and social theory. Although those grew up in same place, but both of them still have different characters and concepts both in meanings and histories. But the question then why Kabbalah is famous among Hollywood activist and celebrities? And why these public figures consider Kabbalah as a right place for their spiritual satisfaction. What makes Kabbalah different from other religious group?

I argue that this is a big question that must be answered and solved. The development of the issue of popular culture activists, adhering the Kabbalah might not something new for some people. But for the majority of Americans in particular and globally it is something new and raise various questions. In social theory, as developed by Karl Mark or well known as marxism, he saw that as a form of social structure, even though this theory and statement was denied by anti-marxism. Gusti A. B. Menoh (2015) quoted from a German sociologist, Jurgen Habermas, he said that 'this is a critic of oppressive social theory' (Menoh B. A. Gusti, 2015: 53).

2.2. Media in the popular culture industry

Jurgen Habermas (1929), in his work *The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article* (1964, Pp. 49-55) he argued that nowadays all media such as newspaper, radio and television are consumed and addressed for the public sphere and people can access freely. And today's it is difficult to separate the media and culture, in social theory such post-modernism suppose that 21's century is the postmodernism era. In this era human civilization has through advanced even beyond that era where media, technology, social life (structure and system), culture, economic, ect, are become more prosperous (Roberts, Foehr & Rideout, 2003: 15-17). Therefore it is interesting to see the position of the media in popular culture industries nowadays.

Dominic Strinati (2003) explained that popular culture as a place to fight where this term has broad meaning in the context of today's community life. Pop culture is not only a complementary material to the system of capitalism and patriarchy but also as a place where the meanings and ideologies are disturbed and debated. Further Strinati stressed out that the problem is, there are impact in social, culture, religious and political fields, such as between markets and ideology, capitalists and workers, financiers and producers, women and men, feminist and masculine, heterosexual and homosexual (gender inequality), white and black people, bourgeois and proletarian, political elites, religious institution and so on (Strinati & Wagg, 1992: 45).

In practice the media has broad meaning both conceptually and functionally. 1), the media functions as a provider of public and personal identities, as a model of behavior that encompasses morality, attitude, and style. 2), as self-identification with values in the media as values outside of human being itself because, the media have and create the value of life which is then consumed by the audience. 3), the media function as a point of view to find self identity, it means that media can be a instrument where someone can find his/her identity (Wuryanta & Handayani, 2006: 56-58) and another functions of the media are as time fillers and emotional channeling (Tanudjaja B.B. 2007: 2).

Moreover, United State is the nation that institutionalized media technology in public and private life and equated with new Jerrusalem (marketplace) as Quentin (2003) said that:

“Most americans use such evangelistic and moralistic rhetoric to make sense of mass communication, regardless of their religious or secular background” (Schultze Quentin, 2003:3).

If we relate to the case of Kabbalah it is possible as a democratic state that upholds freedom, including how whole societies harmonize with the new media (or social media) including religious group and institution. The definition of freedom of religion in a cultural and political or statehood perspective more or less have similarities and difference. In United State, the first document of freedom of religion mention that religion freedom guaranteed as nature right to accept and acknowledge each other and with other religious groups. Nevertheless, the weakness of this policy is when that rule as a legal standart for other religious communities or religious movement such Kabbalah as a new religious group that is currently popular and have influence in the pop cultre industry nowadays. (Habermas J. 2006: 3). Further, Habermas said that ‘religious right is not traditionalist because it unleashes spontaneous energy for religious revivalism’(Habermas, 2005: 99).

2.3. Music and song lyrics as new media

Based on Quenting (2003), she said that the role and the existence of the media and religion in America appear to be at odds with one another, wich is cultural forms, rhetorical styles, and message strategies that reflect shared modes of understanding the world. regardless, situation and condition of the pop culture industry today's bring up various methods, concepts, and ideas as a medium to express people thought, feeling, and behavior both in cultural, religious and social behavior (Robinson, Wilde,

Navracruz, Haydel, & Varady, 2001: 18-20). Based on the result research show that youth generation such in Europe, and America, they have habitual to listen Music or song and spend their whole time 10.55 hours every week and some are spend 1.5 untill 2.5 hours everyday (Roberts, Foehr, & Rideout, 2003:). This fact show that, nowadays music and song become a necessity and media that is very important to fulfill today's society needs, in the same time, the media become dominant ideological to compel consumer to create new needs and desires (Stevenson Nick, 2002: 216).

Its have a tremendeous influence not only for the listener (audience) but also for the singer itself. this effects are inclined toward thought, feeling, and behavior then became a boomerang to criticize and express their opinions on social, cultural, religious, and political condition (Greitemeyer T, 2008: 8). Based on General Learning Model (GLM) research described by Greitemeyer in his work that, Prosocial songs increased the accesibility of prosocial thoughts and action. And in popular culture industries, there are phenomenons of singer and celebrities from various music genre such as Rock, Jazz, Punk, country, or Pop to express their thoughts and feelings through music and song lyrics (Robinson, Wilde, Navracruz, Haydel, & Varady, 2001: 26).

Song lyrics are not just a tendency but rather a phenomenon used as a tool and new media in conveying the thoughts and feelings of the singers, and in contemporary societies, media (in common) cultures became a form of individual and social powers (Stevenson Nick, 2002: 217-218). But the hypthesis is why the activists or celebrities using music and song lyrics as the tools?. In religious perpspective based on the reality in America Today's, there are many Americans as well as Hollywood stars including non-observant Jews as well as Christians are seeking the method (music and song lyrics) to fulfill the spiritual satisfaction of the worshipers who experiencing a crisis of faith in the Church then become part of Kabbalah.

In phenomenology and in social perspective its claimed as *cultural wave* and *moral panics* which those who involved with Kabbalah used music and song lyrics as media to express their feeling, thoughts, even their social, religious, and spiritual experience. Stahl Roger (2009) show that the media is not only limited to the noisy technology, television, radio, newspaper, or magazine but also another instrument and what has been created by the media culture. Music and songs are part of the media culture inseparable that will always exist. Meanwhile, the interesting thing here is, when there are notable celebrities or songwriter claimed as the followers of Kabbalah such as Madonna, Demi Moore, Breatny Spears, Ashton Kutcher, Mick Jagger and other (Colin Jensen, 2018).

2.4. Who is the users?

A Hollywood star like Madonna was known as one of the first celebrities who followed Kabbalah in the beginning and, she is directly a student of Rabbi Philip Berg, founder and guiding force of the Kabbalah Learning Centre in New York, United States. In fact, on Madonna's album, *Ray of Light* she presented and thanked her album to Rabbi Philip Berg and the Kabbalah Centre for "creative guidance" on the album's Credits (Stacy Stukin, 1998: 94-96). In social or online media such as Rolling Stone, it is claimed that largely the album is about Madonna's 'spiritual transformation' (Walters Barry, 2018). She uses her song as the way to present and express her social and religious experience through her own way (music).

Another pop star who follows this religious group is Ariana Grande. She is the new celebrity in the industry who follows this religious group to show her solidarity because her brother is gay. In her interview with Daily Mail, as quoted from that media, Grande argues that she does not believe in church when the Pope of Roman Catholicism said that LGBT, gender equality, and also when the Pope accused her favorite cartoon characters (SpongeBob) and the character (movie) of Harry Potter as sinners (Mapstone Lucy, 2014).

Things opposed by the Church above are precisely recognized by Kabbalah. In Kabbala's teaching, they are accepting and supporting LGBTQ because it is contrary to the teaching of the Church also in some religions such as Christianity and Islam. Further, Jewish mystical teaching has translated some issues like LGBTQ and feminine or gender equality (*feminine plural by a masculine singular*) in the case of the word Elohim (Mathers Mc Gregor, L.S. 2010: 16-20). Popular culture itself is concerned with political culture, feminism (women studies) then intertwined with popular media culture (Stacy Stukin, 1998: 17). Besides, Grande's song lyrics such as "*Problem, love harder, and god is a woman*" are considered as her spirituality, illuminating as well as her own faith and its about her spiritual journey (Mapstone Lucy, 2014). I argue that on one hand, these songs are used as the media to criticize religious institutions as well as the Church (religious institution). This phenomenon indirectly can be a criticism of the institutions especially religious institutions consider ignore personal stuff of community. Means that institution specifically, Church and religious leaders should not be ignored the interest of their people especially about spirituality.

2.5. Theoritical perspective

Based on this case show that music and song lyrics as part of media and, the media culture is strong enough to prosocial, though, behavior, and in prosocial and religious life. Music and song lyrics as new media are not mere figments, in theoretical perspective, Anderson, Carnagey, & Eubanks (2003) argued that even though music and songs can affect (positive or negative) especially for the singer in the pop culture industries, but in the same time, this media have tendency to be used as resource of criticism through critical lyrics. Roberts, Foehr & Rideout (2003) points out that, since 1960's, Jazz and rock 'n' roll are types of music that routinely criticize morality, race, and gender through critical lyrics. It is related to Bushman (2002), Bushman, Baumeister, & Stack (1999) explained that the experience and expression can decrease people emotions, thoughts and feelings (Craig, Carnagey & Janie Eubanks, 2003: 1).

Theoretically, it is a difficult thing differentiated popular culture and art in depth and various aspects (Strinati & Wagg Stephen, 1992: 29). Kabbalah considered as the heart of Jews mysticism have a role in the industry (Daniel C. Matt, 1995: 100-101) this religious group then became one of the "reason" and "cause" even as a weapon of the hollywood stars to help them in channeling what those think, feel and what should they do. However, the most important point in this case rather than saying music and song lyrics as new media is, how the activist, celebrities or the singers who involve in the industry consider Kabbalah as a place where those can express and show their thoughts both about religion, social, political, policy, chaos, conflict and etc. Both Kabbalah and song lyrics are the facilities and the medium (Greitemeyer, Tobias, 2002: 16) for the celebrities to exploring their identity as well as spiritual satisfaction by studying the teachings of the religious group.

According to John Fiske (1989), identity in this context inclined to the term of *freedom*, in the common meanings, free or freedom is "free to be my/yourself" and it contains with behavior, morality or identity (Fiske John, 1989: 2). For those who follow Kabbalah (especially public figure) of course they have found what they are looking for about the meaning of identity and spirituality, the true meaning of an object (identity, religious spiritual, thought, and feeling) and how it is presented in the media (Hall, 2005: 4-7) that is song lyrics. On one hand, it becomes a critical method of Habermas and Stuart Hall theories which media does not merely talk about the issues of Capitalism, markets, political hegemony, post-modernism and how elites can change the pure meaning of media and also popular culture itself. Nowadays, every thing can be a media based on the context of the problem itself, through song lyrics the follower (public figure) of

Kabbalah can express and explore their thoughts, feelings and their spiritual journey to the institution and government.

In the other hand, critically I agree with Stuart Hall (1932) perspective, which he doubts to communication scholars because those cannot answer the challenges and phenomenon of the media/new media. Hall asking about empirical theory discovered by scholars consider do not able to answer the challenges and to analyze the ideas and the concept of media. For Hall, The media/new media have all things such as ideology, meanings, and paradigm. Media have role and opportunities to make discourse, argumentation, and also can form and lead the meaning, issue, news, and so on. However music and song lyrics affects as new media that used by celebrities as “*new media of language and the media of spirituality*” also holding the music and song in the popular culture industries.

3. Conclusion

Basically the understanding and meaning of the media is not limited to the media such as media technology, mass media, or communication media. In theoretical perspective, the media has wide coverage whether visible or not. And the fact that, music and song (lyrics) has all the criteria and potential. It can be the best communication media, the best delivery media, and etc. In the context of popular culture industry, music and song lyrics, take and show that role that is presented and used by hollywood celebrities from another music genre as a media to channel their critical thoughts, feelings, and what they have seen and experienced in their social and religious life. And the celebrities in this case are the follower of Jews mystical teachings, Kabbalah/Qabbalah. Mathers and Mc Gregor (2010) argued that the characteristic of contemporary Kabbalah consider as part of the term of “postmodern spiritualities” appears in the late twentieth century. I argue that both Kabbalah, popular culture, and new media are the response of social, political, religious and economic situation. For some scholars acknowledge that Kabbalah marked as heretical and anti-hegemonic and not only as culture, and religion but also as gender ambivalence (Brenner A. david. 2008: 50). Eventually, music and song lyrics have exceeded the original meaning and become a new media in different context and unusual concept, which these used and and driven by pop culture activist and celebrities which those are the follower of the heart of mystical Jews (Kabbalah).

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