



Uses and Gratification of Spiritual and Religious Music in Egypt: A Descriptive Analysis

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Abstract

Media is one important constituent of the culture in a society. Its importance is reflected in the contents it presents especially in religion and music. The way both religion and music are blended and used as a medium to gratify certain needs is the interest of this study. In this context, the relationship between religions and music is examined, how music was perceived historically by religious figures, what disputes the music provoked, and how spiritual music is used as an intrapersonal, interpersonal, or a mass communication tool to influence the audience cognitively, behaviorally, and attitudinally. Accordingly, a descriptive survey was conducted on a purposive sample in six academic institutions in Egypt: the American University in Cairo, the British University in Egypt, the German University in Cairo, Cairo University, Ain Shams University, and Al-Azhar University. The Uses and Gratifications and Social Identity theories helped to interpret the data that were collected from 383 respondents. Based on the results, 66.8% of 337 participants use spiritual and religious music for the purposes of emotional therapy. However, using the medium as emotional therapy did not encourage cultural activities such as attending concerts, buying or selling related products, or reading books.

"Whenever the soul of the music and singing reaches the heart, then there stirs in the heart that which it preponderates" Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali

(Al-Ghazali, 2005; MacDonald, 2009)

Introduction

Because of its universal language, music has been an important medium throughout the ages. The means and purpose of consumption have a role to play in understanding audience characteristics as music represents an intrapersonal, interpersonal, and mass communication tool.

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Islam, on the other hand, is often talked about in academia in reference to terrorism, ISIS cyber recruitment, and the like. Muslims were negatively perceived after September 11th, and then again to a lesser extent after the Arab revolts that began in 2010. Some religious groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and the Salafi movements appeared in the political arena and expressed their views in arts and music. Nevertheless, the appearance of meaningful art “al fan al-nadhif” and religious channels contributed to the popularity of Islamic songs. (Nieuwkerk & Ebrary, 2011)

Why is it important to study Islamic music?

Unfortunately, the scholarship in Egypt focuses on religion and communication as two separate disciplines. Differently, the Western literature investigates how religion impacts music and consumption behaviors for the market to produce consumer-oriented products. Such studies were merged with other disciplines to understand the different uses and gratifications of religious music such as medical and psychological studies, which focus on the therapeutic effect of music for pain control and emotional healing.

While the West has advanced this field of study, the East has had its own experience. Music during early Islam was part of the culture of early converts, and it advanced with the renaissance that Muslims witnessed, especially during the Abbasid era. (‘Āmir, 1988; Bearman, 1960) This does not imply that Muslims were at peace with the arts, adversely, there has always been a dispute over the permissibility of music. Regardless, the practice of religious music continues.

Egypt and Morocco have a unique spiritual experience and, in the case of Morocco, they have an annual sacred music festival that attracts thousands. Through my visit to Morocco in 2017, I was introduced to Sufism, spirituality, and literature in this regard.

Arguably, the song *Almū’allem* by Sami Yousef¹, which was videotaped in 2003/4 in Egypt, pushed the popularity of this music genre. The albums revived Muslim identity and pride after the shaming of September 11th. (BBC, 2009) In addition to having a top10 song and concerts that attract upwards of 25,000 attendees, Yousef sold 34 million albums. In 2015, he collaborated with UNESCO to produce a soundtrack for a film starring Omar Elsherif². (1001Inventions, 2015) His popular song “Supplications”, was used by the Afghani Golden Globe-nominated movie *The Kite Runner*. (“Sami Yusuf Official, 2017”)

¹ This British singer and musician, who descends from Iranian-Azerbaijani origins, gained momentum after the release of his album that was produced in Egypt. In 2009, BBC described him as “Islam’s big rock star and his music comprises of songs about being a Muslim in today’s world”. (Hassan, 2018)

² The movie song was viewed over 1,618,000 times and liked by 11,000 users on YouTube. (Andante Records, 2015)



Afterwards, Egyptian pop stars such as Hisham Abbas, Amr Diab, and others produced songs of this genre. Hisham Abbas's song (*Asmaa' Allah Al-Husna*) became the most commonly played to commence weddings and other songs were used as ringtones for mobiles. Moreover, Sufism became trendy and influential in other spaces. One example is the book *Forty Rules of Love (Qawa'id al-'eshq al-Arba'un)*¹ that has become a best-seller. Another example is Azza Fahmy² jewelry brand for gold and silver objects with Sufi quotes and verses from the Quran. Other industries were motivated too and produced Sufi-related products or established shops with spiritual decorations and concepts. On the other hand the ambience that spiritual and religious music create make them very appealing and encourage the audience to learn about Sufi culture. (*Shoroukenews*, 2015; Mona Elshazly, 2016)

Therefore, this study will examine the effect of this music genre on users in relation to their activities within the context of Islam and religiosity, covering music popular in Egypt, Morocco/Andalusia, and USA, however the sample will be limited to the Egyptian population. The research will attempt to clarify the difference between spiritual and religious music, however, in the primary data they will be dealt with as one. To identify what needs people look to fulfill, the Uses and Gratification and the Social Identity theories guided this research. In addition, sociology directed the study with respect to the sense of belonging and identity construction. The secondary data examines cultural practices driven by interest in spiritual and religious music such as the interest in a certain book genre or marketing trends among youth through survey research. The lyrics of the music occupy part of the study to see how different meanings and messages are expressed in song.

Currently, there is a knowledge gap represented in the ignorance about the importance of this music genre in liberating and modernizing communities. Unlike mainstream music, it works on the individual's inner-development and self-morality aiming at transcending to achieve community goals. This should match bigger aspirations for a more liberal and modern society that fights for the purity of the soul and the thoughtfulness of the intellect through the soft power of the music in the age of information and communication technology (ICT). Hence, the research will try to bridge this knowledge gap in the context of Egypt's vision for modernization and development.

¹ The book is about sincere love and a strong relationship between two friends *Jala al-Din al-Rumi* and *Shams al-Din al-Tibrizi*

² Fahmy studied theoretical aspects of designing through her fellowship in England, but when she came back to Egypt, she studied Islamic history and literature and her jewelry collections were inspired by them. The exhibited jewelry depicted Arabic proverbs and calligraphy, verses from the Quran, and Sufi quotes in ascetic calligraphy. (Azza Fahmy, 2017)



Literature review

Background: sacred, spiritual or religious?

Is music sacred, spiritual, or religious? *Sacred music* is linguistically similar to “religious” but conceptually different, as it might be primed by belief but not particular to a certain belief. Similarly, *spiritual music*, which is universal because it is neither restricted to a particular belief nor a music genre. It appeals to different audiences from different backgrounds and religions. Besides being universal, it provides an individual experience to its listener by the mood and realities it evokes. Beyond the ambience it creates, it attracts audiences through the connectedness among the listeners, borrowing from cultures, it sustains identity and a sense of belonging. (Anderson, 2015)

Differently, *religious music* is “public, communal, institutional, exterior, intellectual, and objective. It is very relevant to traditions and beliefs of communities, while religion itself is identified as an adherence to a particular belief that this belief is concerned with the communal practices and morality.” (Anderson, 2015)

Despite the aestheticism attached with the latter music genre, the term “religious” is sometimes in place of “spiritual”. Some musicians fear to be associated with religiosity and preaching as they will be expected to address socio-economic problems seen as inseparable of religiosity. (Pinn, 2003)

Music in Islam and the Arabian Peninsula

During and before the rise of Islam, singing and poetry existed, but in a simpler form than modern days. As the use of instrument developed, Muslims and Arabs developed different sound techniques and tunes. For example, al-Farabi mentioned, in praise, the improvement in musical tunes before and after Islam. And as poetry is the art that they excelled at to the extent that the greatest poems were hanged on the walls of the *ka'ba*,¹ it accompanied music to make words sound better. Ibn Khaldun said that Arabs and two other great empires, the Turkish and Persian surpassed in music. (Bearman, 1960 & Amir, 1988)

Philosophically, music was dealt with as a branch of science by the Muslim culture. In chapter five of the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwan al-Ṣafa*)², it was referred to as a practice of the people of wisdom that used to recite the holy

¹ A square building in the heart of Mecca that Muslims gather around to perform their minor and major pilgrimage and it became the direction of their prayers, after the direction was towards Al-Aqsa mosque.

² A group of Muslim philosophers who concealed their identity and published epistles under that name. Their epistles were meant for purifying the soul and finding happiness in this world and afterwards. One of the 51 epistles they wrote was a chapter on mathematics that covered and discussed music.



books like Prophet David when reciting the Psalms. (Bearman, 1960) Moreover, the chapter described musical instruments and how they were made and repaired. Since music captivates the soul and heart, people of wisdom use it during prayers to prime the sense of sorrow and regret over committing a sin seeking God's forgiveness, or the happy feelings when a good deed is done. Not only that, but music had a motivational role to play as people used it to enthuse themselves or animals like cows to produce more milk, something that is used these days in Holland's farms. For (*Ikhwan al-Ṣafa*), the best music that believers will ever hear is when they see their Lord in the Hereafter "Their salutation on the Day they meet Him will be "peace!": and He has prepared for them a generous Reward". (33:44). (Qūr'ān - Recite, 2017; 'Aṁir, 1988)

The dark ages of the West coincided the Mamlūki period in Egypt that had the greatest hospital at that time with its physical and mental illness divisions. The (*Pimaristan*) or hospital of Sultan Mansour Qalawun played instruments and recited Quran to lessen stress for patients, help them sleep well, overcome loss, and heal quickly. (Gibran, 1981)

Hujat al-Islam, Al-Ghazali, considered music as the indulging desire for the ear and called it Sama'. For him, music moves still emotions and captivates hearts. In his book *Ih̄tā' 'ulūm al-Din*, he discussed the debate over the permissibility of music and blessed its permissibility. (Al-Ghazali, 2005) Likewise, Ibn Khaldun wrote that music is one indication of the development of society because when people meet their basic needs, they develop means of luxury and entertainment. An example is the advancement that poetry and literature witnessed during the flourishing reign of king Soliman al-Qanūnī of the Ottoman dynasty ('Aṁir, 1988)

Contributions of religious scholars in music

During the Abbasid Caliphate, even in Mecca and Medina, lyrical ballads flourished. They attracted poets as well as religious scholars (*fūqaha'*) like Abdullah B. Outba in Medina. Al-Kindi was the first philosopher to put rules and theories for music and this is why he is considered the founder of the first music school. He wrote books that guided all the scholars who came after. One topic discussed in his book is composing music and 'Oud' playing. Then his disciple, al-Farabi, published a music book titled *al-Mūsīqah al-Kabirah*, where he defined principles of learning music. Avicenna also dedicated a chapter in *Jawame' 'elm al-Mūsīqah* to distinguish between music as an art, profession, and science. Although those scientists translated the works of the Greek philosophers, who wrote in music, they had their own contribution that is evident by the principles of music they put and were dissimilar to the Greeks. One distinction is highlighting the distinguished Arab listener's taste. This is why even when Arab musicians borrow from other nations, their music is still eminent compared to other types. For example, al-Kindi stated in

¹ A famous Arabic musical instrument



his writings that people differ in their taste of music according to their nationality, so the Indian and Roman nations do not like Persian mandolin, and the Persians like using the bell in their music. ('Āmir, 1988)

Through music, people voiced their morals and beliefs; for them, it is a representation of their culture and moods. The nature and geography influence the taste and preference of music and musical instruments. Moreover, the number of strings (*wataryat*) represent people's beliefs, for instance, the Indo culture used instruments with a single string (*watar*) as they believe in the concept of singularity. In contrast, the Athenians believed in the three powers (Goodness and Evil, Day and Night, and Stagnation and Movement), so they rely on the three *wataryat* in their instruments. Interestingly, al-*Kindi* saw a relation between the seven musical notes and the seven planets; each *watar* in the musical instrument attracts a certain horoscope. Ikhwan al-*Ṣafa* also mentioned the cultural roots of music, and in a metaphysical sense, they believed that the dwellers of the heavens will be pleased by fine music played by the Angels, and this is why music reminds people of the pure and spiritual world. ('Āmir, 1988).

Andalusian music and Sama'

Andalusian and Sama' music are two familiar terms especially in Morocco, where they are commonly practiced. The Andalusians¹ had a unique genre called (*mowāshaḥāt*) and during the ninth century *Andalusian* music, which was born in Baghdad. It later settled in *al-Maghrib* in Cordoba and Andalusia, which were the cultural centers at the time. Music schools were established and called *Nambah* or *Naubah*. (Touma, 1996). *Mowāshaḥāt* became very popular and then another type inspired by it became popular among the common people that is called *Zajal*, which does not abide by the rules of syntax. ('Āmir, 1988)

Linguistically, *Sama'* means the sound heard through the ears. For the Sufis, *sama'*, the main gate of the intellect (*al'aql*), what the ears hear goes to the mind to be thought of. The singer communicates to God while invoking his name, which also reaches the listeners. Listening empowers the heart and brings truth closer to it. According to Mohi al-Din Ibn Arabi², *sama'* happens through the attention that

¹ An Arab and Islamic territory located in southern east Europe, now known as Spain. It was conquered by the Muslims in the second/eighth century. That area maintained a cultural, political, and economic hegemony until the Christian conquest started to occupy the land to its complete fall. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_30661

² Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Muhyi al-Din al-Hatimi al Andalus; known as Muhyi al-Din Ibn Arabi or Ibnul Arabi. He was born in Murcia in Spain and was influenced by Sufism, which was a tradition in the place he resided in. He visited several Arab and Muslim countries, but in Syria and Mecca he wrote his most notable books *The Meccan Revelations (Al-Fūṭūḥat al-Makkiyah)* and *The Bezels of Wisdom (Fūṣūṣ ḥikam)*. He wrote on several topics such as Sufism, poetry, Quranic commentaries, philosophy, and theology. He is considered one of the most controversial figures in mysticism as he claimed himself after his book of *Bezels* to be the seal



the heart bears to whatever is blessed by God to enlighten it. This has to be done only through the master or guide (*mūrshid*). Another Sufi scholar *Abu Yacoub al-Nabrjouri* said that music is the path to divine love. Listening to music is blessed for it brings one closer to his lord. Music in Sufism strums on the heart's chord and moves still emotions. For Sufis it is, indeed, the stairway to Ultimate truth and spiritual knowledge. (‘Āmir, 1988)

Sama’ is used by different religions to revive the goodness of the heart and Sufis use music to express what is in the heart for God. Sufi singing starts by invoking that there is no God, but *Allah* (La ‘ilah Illa Allah) followed by themes related to love poems, abandonment, connectedness, or love. All the topics reflect the love of the creator. They use metaphor to reflect the eminent meanings that they cannot explicitly express. Therefore, music is a lawful (Ḥalal) medium for the Sufis, but it has to be used within the religious context not for entertainment. Their remembrance gatherings (*majlis*) contain Quranic recitation and remembrance (*Dhikr*). But the non-Islamic practices and entertainment activities that people see in some (*majlis*) are far from the orthodox Sufi traditions. In fact, the (*majlis*) was the reason that great pop stars, classic music singers, and *mūnshids* are well-known such as Sayed Darwish and Um Kulthum in Egypt. (‘Āmir, 1988)

Sufi music

Sufism is a source of empowerment for its followers. In Morocco, Sufi chanting took three directions in relation to geo-historical events. The northern Sufi direction was influenced by the movement of people. Intellectualism and philosophical complexities influenced their comprehension and the practice of chanting. Mohi al-Din Ibn al-Arabi is their major Sufi reference. Later, Ziryab took a special place Moroccans’ hearts. He originally comes from Baghdad to perform and sing both Arabic and Persian poetry and later moved to Andalusia to establish the art of *mwasbahat*. Importantly, he had significant contributions to the therapeutic art; for him, there is a linkage between art, body, and earthly components. The musical modes are directly connected to human modes such as happiness or anger. On the other hand, the eastern Morocco is characterized by the individualistic Sufi experience that was influenced by *al Hallaj*¹ and *Dbu’l Nun al-Misri*. Their dogma is characterized by the strong belief in the power of love. The Southern Sufi chanting is characterized by political and spiritual activism, where *al-Moravids*² used to gather in a place for spiritual and political charging. (Salhi, 2013)

of saints just like Mūḥammād is the seal of the Prophets. He also claimed that the Bezels was revealed to him by God and it is God’s message to people through Ibn Arabi. (Landu, 2008).

¹ His name is AlHussein Mansour Alḥallaj and was born and raised in Iraq. He was not only a Sufi figure, he was a poet, and a political and social activist, which was the cause of his death.

² A religious political movement appeared in the fifth/sixth century in Morocco. The movement consisted of large tribes that constituted an armed, political, and economic unity that soon controlled the *Maghrib* region and Sahara to Andalusia. Their political movement was influenced



Sufi music in Egypt: The Egyptian Mawlawiyah

The Egyptian *Mawlawiyah* is part of the Sufi heritage that was first introduced in 1994 by Amer Eltony and his team, which is meditation through whirling in the company of chanting or love poetry. The performance relies on improvisation as its tool to create the spiritual ambiance of the show. This is an attempt to delve inside the audience to explore the meanings of beauty and liberate them in the atmosphere of the show while the dancers are whirling in an excursion that sometimes carries the audience to larger spaces, and sometimes the excursion is to the audience's inner selves to explore its goodness.

Flutes symbolize the human torment and longing for his origin. The harmony between dance and music is symbolic of the unity of both earth and the universe. The dancing dervish, through whirling in his red robe, seeks unity with the cosmos by neutralizing the earthly gravity in a representation of dislocating the self from the material world and liberating it from worldly desires to the infinite. The Egyptian *Mawlawiyah* became one of the recognized *Mawlawi* groups in the world, and they are invited to perform in international festivals. Locally, they have a monthly performance. (Almawlawiyah Almasrya Official Facebook)

Sufi Music in Morocco

In Sufism, the Moroccans saw an authentic form of Islam and the chanters are the heirs of this spiritual path. *Bourda*¹ chanting was adored by the Berbers (*Amazigh*), while seeking the saints' (*awlyaa*) blessings (*karamat*) has been common in chanting as they enjoy special powers. (Salhi, 2013) Even before the French occupation, spirituality and Sufism have been part of the palace rituals like the annual celebration of Prophet Muḥammad's birth in the palace. (Bu'asrīyah, 2006)

Lieu de mémoire, the place of memory, or Fez is where the most influential Sufi philosopher Ibn Arabi had a vision and many Sufi orders exist. There, the Sacred Festival in Fez brings multi-faiths all united by music spirituality. As audiences get exposed to different musical tastes, the careful listening (*Sama'*) for the Sufi is a self-disciplining act and uplifting experience, which sustains the spiritual gnosis. Pop stars also perform during the festival such as Majda Al-Rumi from Lebanon, Sabah Fakhry from Syria, who sings the Arab-Andalusian poetry *Mowāshahāt*, as well as Berber's (*Amazigh*) music, and Sufi performers from Egypt like Yasin Al-Tohamy, and the Turkish Dervishes with their skirts and long turbans. The Kingdom gives attention to the aesthetic Sufi rituals during the festival and the King and some of his administration like the Minister of Religious Affairs and the President of the festival Dr. Faouzi Skali are fellows of the Sufi order Qadiri *tariqa*. (Otaib, 2017).

by Islamic thoughts that aim at reforms through development and unity *Islah and murabatah*.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_22934

¹ A poem that highlights their pride of their nomadic identity



Other festivals are under the auspices of the King like the celebration of *zajal*, spoken poetry in dialect, Mouazzine “rhythms”, Jazz festivals, and Gnawa, which are all a good source of income to the Kingdom, but the sacred festival at Fez draws the most tourists. Remarkably, the Fez festival is the only place in the Arab region that brings not only Jews, Muslim, and Christian listeners, but also performers with other beliefs to one city. According Maurice Bejart, dancer and choreographer, “Chant is the origin of all spiritual traditions. The Qūr’ān in Islam or the Upanishads in Hinduism are sacred texts that are chanted, like Psalms. Behind this chant, the primordial sound links us to the creation of the world.” (Otaib, 2017 & Mitzman, 2017)

It has been believed that unity comes through secularization; at least by Max Weber’s¹ proponents. Nonetheless, the festival promotes sacred tourism for peace. The message of the festival spread internationally, and toured 18 different cities in the United States. (Mitzman, 2017) In 2004, Faouzi Skali² was acknowledged at France de la Legion d’Honneur by the French Foreign Minister, Laurent Fabius, as the knight for pioneering Fez Sacred Festival in 1994 and contributing to the history of humanity, spirituality, and cultural pluralism. (Finnigan, 2014 & Kapchan, 2008) Significantly, the festival has been an important source of income for Morocco besides bringing intellectuals, filmmakers, and scientists to the workshops held during the festival.

Islamic Rai

Last year, both Algeria and Morocco officially requested to enroll Rai as a music genre belonging to folklore. Each appealed to UNESCO claiming sole ownership. (AJ+Kabrit, 2016) In 1920, on the west side of Oran, Algeria, Rai was born among the middle and lower middle-class citizens, who found it a refuge from the colonialism, civil war, and strife. It later manifested itself as a music genre and was performed by Muslim men and women that were called Cheikh or Cheikha, and they introduced new topics different from the traditional music. In Arabic “Rai” meant opinion and this is why it was controversial on many levels for religious conservatives and politicians. Rai gained popularity in Morocco and Europe thanks to the King of Rai, Cheb Khaled, who is well-known for songs like “Abdel Qader”, “Aicha”, “Didi”, and “C’est La Vie”. “Abdel Qader”, which was released ten years ago, has more than 4 million views on YouTube. (Sahibet Al-Saada, 2016) Interestingly, Algerian and Moroccan Muslims in Europe found a way of resistance against unequal treatment of migrants, but they also wanted to show

¹ German sociologist, anthropologist, and political economist

² Faouzi Skali is the president of Fez festival. He got his Ph.D. in anthropology, studied ethnology, and the science of religion. He felt the urge to do something that enhances understanding between clashing cultures. The first establishment of the festival came in response to the Gulf war. In 2007, he opened the Sufi Culture festival that became an annual ceremony that also awards the most creative performance.



their “cool Islam” that is far from fanaticism through Rai. (Nieuwkerk & Ebrary, 2011)

Rai eventually crossed Europe from France and has become very popular among immigrants. Religious songs and themes were used to legitimize music; for example invoking God’s name, praising the Prophet and his *awhya*. Regardless of the singers’ piety, Islam is part of their identity and reflected in their music. (DeAngelis’ 2003)

Abdel Kader Yaboalam daq elhal 'alaya ... dany haly yabo 'alam sidi r'onf 'alya

O my master Abdel Kader Aboalam I am suffering... heal me with your clemency

Thanks to Abdel Qader, that praises the founder of *tariqa Qaddirya* Abdel Kader Aboalam Al-Jilany, Algerian identity was reintroduced in Europe and globally. When it was sung in France by Cheb Khalid, Faudel, and Rashid Taha in “123 Soliels or Three Suns” concert, it sold 5 million copies. (Sahibet Al-Saada, 2016)

Alternatively, the Moroccan Rai combined religious lyrics and modern beats. An example is the “Prophète” song performed by Rabi Youmni. Rabi’s songs introduced Islamic concepts and practices through melody. In her Islamic Rai research, Angelica DeAngelis suggested that singers and consumers of music do not distinguish between religious, secular, or Rai music. Rai connected culture and Islam to present them in an enjoyable style. (DeAngelis, 2003)

The controversy over the permissibility of music in Islam

Al Atwaneh emphasized the concept of leisure or entertainment (*malāhī*) in Islam, its development, and practice. It is reported from the Prophet that he said there should be time for religious matters and time for worldly affairs; thus, *Malāhī* is desirable for a proper practice of Islam. Ali Ibn Talib said, "Amuse yourselves for a while, for if hearts are exposed to too much strain, they become blind." The general principle in Islam is that everything is permissible (*mūbah*), unless there is a proof of its unlawfulness. Yet, the *Qūrānic* verse ‘Idle talk’ (*lahw al-ḥadīth*) was interpreted as entertainment that included music and singing; others interpreted it as evil acts including musical activities, so *Malāhī* was considered impermissible (31:6) “But there are, among men, those who purchase idle talks.” Differently, the Islamic philosopher and theologian al-Razi interpreted it as abandoning wisdom. (Al-Atawneh, 2012)

The proponents and opponents of music in Islam use supports from the texts, *Qūr’an or Sunnah*, to validate their views. The proponents are concerned about the music topics that contain anything contradictory to *Shari’a* principles rather than rejecting the music itself. (Izsak, 2013) The highest religious authority in Egypt, Al-Azhar, takes the same stance and issued it as a fatwa. (DarAlIfta, 2005)



From the writings of *kindi*, *al-Farabi*, and *Ikhwan al-safa*, music as a concept must be understood within the cultural and linguistic context of the Arab Muslim community. According to the *Encyclopedia of the Arabic Language*, *mūsīqa* in *Qurānic* intonation (*tartīl*): “is every detail of the chant serves to highlight the text, its pronunciation, and meaning.” (*Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Literature*) Islamic music is defined as “the music associated with religious practices or sentiments.” In that realm, music should match the Qūr’ānic teachings and the dogma of the Oneness of God (*tawḥīd*). In Egypt and Morocco, Sufi musicians presented art that is considered debatable when compared to those teachings. (Salhi, 2014 & Christensen, 2000)

The opposing camp argued that there was no music at the time of the Prophet and by listening to music, the Qūr’ān will be abandoned, so it is a satanic deviant act. The religious scholar Ibn Qayim al Jawzayah considered the Sufi festivals unlawful, as attendees dance, drink wine, and their gatherings have mixed gender. Another scholar said that music distracts the heart from thinking of God’s glory, and it tempts one to think about impermissible matters. This view relied on the opinion of the *fūqaha’* al-Shafi’i, Malik, Abou Hanifa, and Jama’a that music is impermissible. (‘Amir, 1988)

Some scholars deduced that what is meant by “*lahw al ḥadith*” and “*falsehood*” is musical instruments and singing depending on claimed reports to argue against the permissibility of music. For example, “song makes hypocrisy grow in the heart, as water does herbage.” “On the day of Resurrection, Allah will pour molten lead into the ears of whoever sits listening to a songstress,” and when women sing, it is a sign of the Day of Judgement. Scholars such as Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, Ibn Hazm, and Ibn Arabi argued against the authentication of these reports. The religious scholar al-Kasani said that listening to the music of the bamboo (flutes) or good singing has a good influence on a person. For example, it helps people overcome loneliness. The scholar al-Humam mentioned that music itself is not prohibited, but what surrounds music might be prohibited such as drinking, describing women’s bodies, wine, or any theme that does not comply with the Sharia. (Al-Atawneh, 2012)

A modern scholar, Muhamad Al-Ghazali (d.1996), claimed that music itself is not prohibited, arguing that it was practiced during the life of the Prophet. However, one must be aware what message the songs convey, and what practices are accompanying singing to determine their permissibility. He categorized songs in this hierarchy; the recitation of the Quran, the call to prayer, chanting (*anashid*), family celebrations, caravan chants, work songs, the music of the military bands, and music of prohibited practices. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a religious figure and important symbol for the Muslim Brotherhood, limited *ḥalal* music to religious themes, family concepts, and fine music that he himself listens to such as Umm Kulthum, Muhammad Abdulwahab, and Fayzah Ahmad. (Al-Atawneh, 2012)



Al-Azhar perspective on music

Al-Azhar is the highest religious authority in Egypt and the center for Islamic knowledge not only in Egypt but the world. Al-Azhar currently represents the Sunni “middle ground” (*waṣat*) and some of the proponents of the music permissibility are graduates of Al-Azhar or recognized by it. Not only that, but the book of Al-Ghazali, *The Revival of Religious Sciences (Iḥiā’ ‘ulūm al-Din)*, which discusses music is highly recognized and taught at Al-Azhar. (Encyclopedia of Islam; Al-Azhar mosque classes)

According to Egypt’s Dar AlIfta,¹ listening to music that is not accompanied by other arts is permitted under the condition that nothing impermissible is accompanying it like drinking wine, obscene singing, indecent singing that provoke the desires, or encourage deviation from permissible acts. (DarAlIfta, 1980) In 2005, Dar AlIftaa issued a fatwa considering music similar to talks; some talks are prohibited while others are permissible. Hence, permissible music is purposeful expressing good feelings like happiness, patriotism, or feelings that do not prime lust or obscenity. The prohibited music, on the contrary, distracts one from remembering *Allah*, encourages immorality, and allows mixing men and women. (DarAlIfta, 2005) According to Al-Azhar, the controversy over the permissibility of listening to music accompanied by instrument playing or patriotic songs is ideological, depending on each school of jurisprudence and its interpretation of the Quranic verses and *ḥadīth*, but not doctrinal. The supporting schools of jurisprudence depend on the *ḥadīth* narrated by Aicha, the Prophet’s wife, that when her father found two maids in the house of the Prophet singing like the people of Medina, Abu Bakr asked them to stop. The Prophet asked him to let them as it was a feast. (Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, 2018)

An opposing viewpoint by the *Wahabis* of Saudi Arabia and their fellows prohibited music for its immorality, waste of time, and distraction from worshiping God. They recommend *anashīd* as a *ḥalal* alternative. For them, every practice related to music and musicology is forbidden including singing, dancing, playing instruments, or listening to music. They deny and object the claim that music is used for therapeutic purposes. They also claim that musicologists, who were also religious figures in history such as al-Farabi, are not considered as good models. The only role model for them is the Prophet, the rightly guided caliphs, and other righteous companions and figures. (Al-Atawneh, 2012)

In 2000, the CRLO² issued a legal fatwa based on a question they received from a citizen in a neighboring country about the permissibility of music; the response was that music is unlawful as well as any action attributed to it including learning music, listening to music, or selling of music products like instruments.

¹ The official institution in Egypt issuing legal statements (Fatwas)

² The official institution in Saudi Arabia issuing legal statements (Fatwas)



Ironically, females were allowed to sing in weddings for female attendees, but learning and instructing music was prohibited. This means only spontaneous or improvised singing was allowed. Even more, CRLO responded to an inquiry by a person asking if he can sell his piano because it is prohibited to keep. The response was that he can neither keep nor sell it. (Al-Atawneh, 2012) In a paradigm shift in *Wahabi* thought, last November the Ministry of Culture announced that the Kingdom will allow film theatres and art production in KSA. Subsequently, for the first time KSA received the pianist Yanni as well as other Arab singers. (*AlSharq ALAnsar*, 2017)

Egyptian Islamists were concerned about women's performance and objectification of their bodies through art. They were also against the concept of fun or entertainment because it affects morals and disrupts their doctrinal paradigm on which their power and authority are based. The concept of "pious performing arts" was a duplicity between the religious and secular. The 1980s marked the time, where a number of Islamic preachers like Mohamed Metwally Al-Sha'rawy and Omar Abdel Kafy convinced some actresses to quit their jobs and be devoted to God. The artists announced their repentance to Allah, practiced community service, and studied Islam and preaching. In the mid-1990s a moderate Islamic (*waṣatiyya*) movement attracted the middle class and the elites, which can be identified as "centrist Islamist intellectual trend" and is characterized by lenient views towards the arts and artists, and this is why it is called "casual Islam". Preachers such as Amr Khaled asked artists not to quit, but perform in accordance with what is religiously correct (*mūltazim*). By this they are serving the religion. This view of art or moderate thought was called several names like Islamic "*Islami*", clean art "*al-fann al-naḥij*", permissible "*ḥalāl*", and moderate Islamic discourse "*al-Islam al-waṣatiyya*". This period is described as "the trial and error period," where freedom and religiosity were mixed together whereas the modern preachers focused on the development of the individual.

Therefore, it was "a religious lifestyle, rather than the political aspiration," violence, or extremism. Influential thinkers of this period are Mohamed 'Emara, Mohamed al-Ghazali, Fahmy Howida, and Yusif al-Qaradawi, in addition to the younger generation like Amr Khaled, Khalid al-Gindi, Habib Ali al-Jafri, and Moez Masoud. They presented a renewed viewpoint of topics such as the position of women in the society, political issues, and art. Their most important view is regarding gender and art; unlike others, they rejected the degrading view of women and the shaming of their voice (*'awra*). As a result, art returned as one constituent of Islamic culture, after it was alienated during the Islamic movement. Even more, their chronicles included writings on arts. Through their writings, Mohamed 'Emara, Mohamed al-Ghazali, Fahmy Howida, and Yusif al-Qaradawi, affirmed some points like everything is licit unless there is a valid and strong reason to make it illicit. Additionally, authentication of the claim that something is illicit has to be eloquently verified and this is why they considered most of the claims that consider



art religiously impermissible are weak. Besides, it is human nature to lean towards aestheticism and creativity. It is an intrinsic attribute of humans and a source of diversity that without it the world would be boring. Beauty is one quality of God that is also manifested in the Quran. With that premise, it is hard to argue against beauty because “God is Beauty and He loves beauty.” (Allahu Jamil Yuḥib al-jamal). (Nieuwkerk, & Ebrary, 2011)

The content of the art and the demeanor may determine the legitimacy of singing or music listening. Amr Khaled, in one episode of his TV show Life-Makers (*Ṣona' al-Haya*), which later became an NGO, mentioned that art is one of the tools that the Prophet Muḥammad relied on to revive the Muslim community, after his migration to Medina. It is indeed essential, for him, to include not seclude art for it is a way to embrace culture and revive the Muslim Ummah *nabḍat al-ummah*. (Nieuwkerk & Ebrary, 2011)

This modern view of Islam attracted young people and the “easy-going” religious lifestyle fit the standards of the wealthy. Their preachers are from the same class, live in similar neighborhoods or compounds, and do their preaching in the community clubs. For the first time, religion and modernity blended and people’s favorite actors and actresses became role models. Gloominess was no more seen as a proper lifestyle for a Muslim. Moreover, art is a gift; by practicing it, a person realizes what gifts God bestowed on him, and realizing the gift is a way of thanking the lord for it. (Nieuwkerk, & Ebrary, 2011)

The media scene

Nieuwkerk claims in his book that before the 1990s, it was not possible to see any form of religious art on state television except for the broadcasting of Sheikh Sha‘rawy’s show every Friday as well as the *tawashiḥ* and *ibtihalat* of al-Naqshabandi before Dawn prayer (*fajr*) or during the month of Ramadan. Since the 1990s, veiled women appeared on satellite television through al-Jazeera channels and the first religious channel Iqraa, which is owned by a Saudi millionaire, and al-Risala that is owned by the billionaire al-Walid Ibn Talal, who also owns Rotana production and entertainment channels. Through Iqraa and Risala, religious music and pious arts were re-introduced. Since then, it was common to hear terms such as clean art (*al-fan al-naẓif*), purposeful art (*al-fan al-hadif*), alternative art (*al-fan al-badil*), pious art (*al-fan al-multazim*), and Islamic art (*al-fan al-Islami*). According to an Egyptian actor, (*al-fan al-hadif*), is the art that holds a moral message mentioning an example from the biography of the Prophet, when his grandchildren al-Hassan and al-Hussein acted out a scene after seeing a man doing the ablution (*wuḍūʿ*) incorrectly, they pretended that one is asking the other to show him the correct way to avoid hurting him by giving direct advice. (Nieuwkerk, & Ebrary, 2011)



Halal songs

In the 1980s, Islamic weddings appeared as a conservative alternative to “mixed weddings”. It consists of “a short religious ceremony attended by male guests,” afterward, the male and female guests are divided into two separate parties. *Anashid* and other songs praise the Prophet by using the *duff*, the tambourine. During this period, Islamic bands started to emerge like al-Hada, al-Wa’d, and Basmit al-Andalus. Female bands also had their share such as Sondos and Banat Basmit al-Andalus. In 2005, Basmit al-Andalus said in an interview that they performed at 100 weddings. Until the early 2000s, Islamic weddings were a profitable business. (Nieuwkerk, & Ebrary, 2011)

Fanatic groups: ISIS use of music

Unfortunately, ISIS knew the importance of music, and used it as propaganda for their extremist ideology, and it helped them in their online recruitment. Although their songs are charged with violence and hatred, they succeeded in attracting youth. They attracted youngsters from the East and West through their promises of martyrdom, fighting for God’s cause, and heavens. After a study of the content of more than a hundred songs, it was noted that the group relies on music to spread the culture of resistance (*jihad*) by brain washing its fellows. (Aawsat, 2017) They use high quality production and technology, and this is apparent from the sound effects of their songs that present sounds of horses, fighting swords, or military tanks. The song’s lyrics also aim at normalizing violence for its fellows by threatening the enemies by slaughtering, burning, bombing, and mass killing for God’s cause. (MBC.net, 2015) For example, their most known *nashid* “*Ṣalil Al-Ṣwarim*”, which means “the sound of fighting swords” became very popular. This shows how fast an idea can be conveyed to people through a song. Similar to this, the Egyptian version of the “*Ṣalil Al-Ṣwarim*”, which mocks and ridicules ISIS through sarcastic YouTube videos, was successful in raising awareness about the savagery of this group. The Egyptians fought idea with idea, rather than by weapons; they wanted to tell ISIS that their message does not frighten them. (Faisal, 2015)

Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratifications Theory

In this research, spiritual and religious music will be examined to underline different uses and motivations. The study will go further to examine the possible effects on its audience. (Blumler, 1979) As research on this topic is not well investigated in Egypt, it is a challenge to define the two terms spiritual and religious music. According to Bryant, a term is best defined by its use. Therefore, the uses and gratifications paradigm best suits this study, as it focuses on how people use media. It helps understand what needs and motivations inspire people to use



media, and what follows the use of the media to identify the medium effects. (Bryant & Oliver 2009)

The assumption that the paradigm is grounded on, will be utilized in verifying the research questions. For example, instead of proposing that media use people, people are active participants who select the media content they prefer in order to satisfy certain needs. Thus, the first research questions is: Do people in Egypt use spiritual and religious music for emotional therapy. As media affect people after they are exposed to it, it is assumed that music encourages people to engage in some cultural practices such as reading Sufi books, attending spiritual concerts, and selling and buying objects with spiritual themes. As part of these assumptions, the cultural significance of certain media or media content could be determined after measuring media use, which can be tested through self-reported data. Therefore, the study methodology will rely on a combination of open and close-ended short questions for participants to answer. (Bryant & Oliver 2009)

The researchers noticed that the need for affection and cognitive needs motivate users to resort to certain media. In brief, people resort to a medium that supports a comfortable social environment, where their problems can be solved. (Bryant & Oliver, 2009; Ruggiero, 2000) In other words, people with information attainment motivations, strongly interact with the media and use it instrumentally and selectively. (Bryant & Oliver 2009) Consequently, para-social activities may occur. The cognitive motivations, on the other hand, are related to three things relevant to this research a) information attainment b) escape and diversion c) and personal identity. Those factors will be utilized in the operational definitions in order to determine what emotional therapy means to the users and how this will be reported in the questionnaire. (Rubin, 2009)

The research also suggested that people who have a need for affection develop a companionship with media in the sense that they seek guidance from it when they are in a bad mood, lonely, or emotionally down. (Bryant & Oliver 2009)

Social Identity Theory

Social identity is defined as “aspects of an individual’s self-image that derives from the social categories to which he perceives himself as belonging.” As a result, the positive perception of the self is exemplified in self-esteem, value, and attachment to a certain group. (Baker, 2012) This is achieved when a sense of self-identity or “self-categorization” takes place. (Stets & Burke, 2000)

The way people recognize their identities as opposed to other identities is through three things: 1- cognitive, 2- evaluative, and 3- emotional. Through the cognitive, people recognize their belonging to a certain group. (Baker, 2012) This happens when they activate the “salient” characteristics in their own groups then realize what is common “in-group” identity or different “out-group” identity. The



evaluative way is the value attached to the group and this is why a social group looks at the shared values and beliefs. Finally, the emotional is the attitude that social groups have towards other groups. (Baker, 2012)

One purpose of this study is to understand how an individual uses spiritual and religious music for sustaining a sense of belonging. The Social Identity theory helps to explain how different groups relate to others to create self-identity and to develop a positive self-image.

Methodology

The current study is an examination of the spiritual and religious music in Egypt highlighting what motivations encourage people to consume it, and the relationship between music listening and some cultural activities. Consequently, the study aims at quantifying the uses of religious music with an emphasis on what constitutes emotional therapy and possible activities resulting from using the music genre.

Research significance

The study will present recent and updated data about spiritual and religious music consumption in Egypt. It will examine the different motivations for listening in comparison to studies done before mostly in the West. The primary data will be relevant to Egyptian society, where the sample population is selected. Moreover, the study will test if there is a relation between listening to this music and certain cultural activities. Importantly, the study is multidisciplinary for better understanding of the phenomena. For instance, Sociology is a guiding source through the theoretical framework as well as psychology that is highlighted through the reviewed literature in regards to the appeals and needs. Communication and Islamic studies are thoroughly presented in the work to analyze the media effects and to understand the concurrent Islamic perception of music and spirituality. Finally, the research can possibly be a starting point of a bigger research project, which combines multi-disciplines to understand spiritual and religious music consumption in Egypt and how this is related to the music production market, people's behaviors, and religion.

Research objectives

Obtaining accurate and recent data about spiritual and religious music consumption in Egypt is one of the study objectives. Testing the similarities or differences between uses of spiritual and religious music in Egypt as opposed to previous studies in Western academia is another objective. Additionally, the paper will examine the linkage between social behaviors and listening to this music genre as well as the role of religion in its popularity. The study is multidisciplinary, involving media studies, religion, psychology, and sociology to investigate this topic through an analytical descriptive research.



Method of data collection

A quantitative methodology of data gathering is utilized to obtain updated, accurate, statistical, and objective information about spiritual and religious music consumption in Egypt. The study will rely on a descriptive survey of both open and close ended questions distributed among Egyptians to answer the proposed research questions. The survey attempts to answer the research question in two related ways: first, do people use spiritual and religious music for emotional therapy in Egypt? Second, does the use of spiritual and religious music encourage cultural activities?

Population

A population of Egyptians from six academic institutions; three governmental and three private, were surveyed for the study. The population was selected based on the researcher's own networks. Academic institutions were also selected because of the access to youth, specifically students. As mentioned in the literature, this age is the most open to listening to different music types. They are also the most prone to using spiritual music for emotional therapy. Furthermore, they are very active and motivated to do activities in relation to listening to music. Employees of those institutions are encouraged to use music to cope with the daily problems, workload, and stress. The academic institutions that constitute the population are 1. The American University in Cairo 2. The British University in Cairo 3. The German University in Cairo 4. Cairo University 5. Ain Shams University 6. Al-Azhar University. The universities constitute a homogeneous geographical background as they are all located in Cairo. However, they demonstrate a heterogeneous background as half of them are national, the other half are international, and one is religious; Al-Azhar University.

Sampling and data collection

A non-random purposive sampling was used to examine the population with the purpose of collecting data from participants with certain criteria; students and employees of six academic institutions in Cairo. Access to groups in the population was one factor behind determining the criteria of selection. (Palys, 2008). More, a sample of literate individuals, aware of this music genre, and exposed workload and daily pressures to explore the motivations for listening to this music type was needed. At another point, it is an asset to have a sample from religious as well as liberal and public education backgrounds in Egypt. Some demographics were requested by the survey to be considered for future studies such as the gender and nationality. However, no information is requested beyond the gender, position, nationality, and academic institution as they are sufficient for the current objectives. Noting that the sample is non-probability, the findings cannot be generalized and representative. (Dominick, 2014)



After obtaining the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the survey was distributed online through emails and some social media websites. A total of 332 respondents answered the online survey. In addition, 51 answered a self-administered survey after obtaining the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) approval. The duration of the study was 20 days of data collection.

Research questions

RQ1: *Do people use spiritual and religious music for emotional therapy in Egypt?*

RQ2: *Does the use of spiritual and religious music encourage some cultural activities?*

Constructs and operational definitions

Spiritual music: A music genre that could be performed within different music genres linking different religions, expressing different dogmas, and consumed by different beliefs. It creates a spiritual atmosphere through the expression of the mood and inner experience. (Anderson, 2015)

Religious music: A music that expresses a particular belief or religion; it is grounded on community traditions and practices related to a belief. (Anderson, 2015)

Emotional therapy: Activities toward achievement of well-being in a person by: mood regulation and diversion, an uplifting atmosphere, ecstasy, life meaning, inspiring experience, alternating negative thoughts, social acceptance, identity enhancement, self-transcendence, sense of motivation, connectedness with others, self-development, and experiencing aestheticism, self-expression. (Belcher & Haridakis, 2013) (Papinczak, Dingle, G. A., Stoyanov, S. R., Hides & Zelenko, 2015)

Cultural activities: information attainment through reading books, attending live concerts, sharing music among similar or dissimilar groups, practicing or educating the self about this music genre, selling or buying products related to the music genre (Bryant & Oliver 2009) (Papinczak, Dingle, G. A., Stoyanov, S. R., Hides & Zelenko, 2015)

Questionnaire design

The survey is designed to test all the study aspects, but it is considered not to be too demanding. It is three sections; each attempts to answer one of the research question and hypothesis, but they intermingle so that the respondent does not guess the purpose of the survey to avoid reactivity. The first section of the survey is the filtration to exclude non-listeners of spiritual and religious music. An online survey was created through Google forms and shared through three social media



channels: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram in addition to the hard-copies that were distributed after obtaining the IRB and CAPMAS permission.

Measures

For the research question, it is answered through a nominal scale of measurement asking people if they listen to spiritual music or not. The second part of the question, which is using the music as emotional therapy, is tested through an interval Likert scale, where answers are measured by the mean scores. The second question, which is “Using spiritual and religious music for emotional therapy encourages people to practice some cultural activities”, is measured through a Likert scale, that is already used to answer the first research question as well as nominal scale questions by asking open ended and close ended questions.

SPSS (version 23) was used to analyze the collected data as well as other statistical techniques like the frequencies, means, and percentage weight. T-Test was used with demographic groups for future studies, if the research is extended.

Survey pilot

Eight survey pilots were distributed on volunteers in Arabic and English. The pilot was necessary as some questions were amended or rephrased based on the received comments. The changes were minor, but it was considered that the respondent needed a short and clear survey. Therefore, some instructions were added to questions like “*If your answer is No to the previous question please write NA.” Some Arabic terms and phrases needed grammatical checking.

It was also noticed that some respondents did not know what spiritual and religious music is, so a brief definition was added on the survey. To test validity, the questionnaire was checked to confirm if answers respond to the questions or not. It was noticed that some respondents, who answered the first question “I listen to spiritual or religious music” with “No”, continued the survey and answered the Likert scale question that measures the effect of the music on them. Therefore, a statement “If your answer is No please do not continue the survey” was added. To test the survey’s credibility, the questionnaire was reviewed with the respondents to check if they give the same answer.

Results and Findings

A quantitative survey is used in this study to examine the proposed questions: “Do people use spiritual and religious music for emotional therapy in Egypt?” and, “Does the use of spiritual and religious music for emotional therapy encourage listeners to practice some cultural activities?” After breaking the two constructs, emotional therapy and cultural activities, they were defined as previously mentioned in the operational definitions. To measure those variables, (10) nominal questions, Likert scale question (12 statements), and close-ended and open-ended questions



that required short answers. Five of the 45 survey questions acted as demographic and filtering questions, which will be discussed in the following chapter. As the sample is purposive, the information is collected from listeners of this music in a specific community with specific characteristics. The criteria were selecting students and employees of six academic institutions, who are more probable to be active consumers of the music genre.

RQ1: *Do people use spiritual and religious music for emotional therapy in Egypt?*

I. A filtering question

The survey started with a filtering question to only study the characteristics of the users of spiritual and religious music. The results showed that (337) out of (383) respondents listen to this music. Only (12%) were excluded who answered with “No” compared to (88%) users.

1- I listen to spiritual or religious music:

Table (1): I listen to spiritual or religious music

I listen to spiritual or religious music	F	%
Yes	337	88%
No	46	12%
Total	383	100%

II. The selected sample

Based on the selected criteria for the participants’ characteristics, a 51 self-administered surveys were collected from employees and students at the American University in Cairo. Three hundred and thirty two (n=332) surveys were answered online through a Google survey form. The survey link was shared through personal e-mail (Google e-mail) to a limited number of participants, who fit the criteria of selection. In addition, the link was shared on social media channels such as

- 1- Facebook
- 2- Twitter
- 3- Instagram

On Facebook, students and employees of the American University in Cairo were approached through their most active pages/groups such as

- 1- Rate AUC Professors, which has 13,805 users
- 2- WhatsUp in AUC
- 3- WhatsUp AUCians
- 4- Women of AUC



Students of the British University in Egypt were approached through a personal message on Facebook with the link to those who have direct contact with the researchers, and through groups like

- 1- BUE Social Gathering
- 2- BUE Mass Communication Students of 2016-2017
- 3- Mass Communication Society-BUE

Students of Al-Azhar University in Cairo were approached through a direct message on Facebook and through a shared link on pages such as

- 1- Al-Azhar mosque classes
- 2- The Faculty of Linguistics and Interpretation of Al-Azhar
- 3- Islamic Studies Institute-Year II

Other universities like Ain Shams, Cairo University, and the German University in Egypt answered the survey through the publicly shared link on social media. The majority of the respondents were from AUC and BUE. A number of 153 current AUCians representing (45.4%) and 119 current BUEians (35.2%) answered the survey. The lowest number of respondents was nine participants (2.7%) from Al-Azhar University in Cairo, followed by 11 (3.3%) from Ain Shams, and 15 (4.5%) participants from the German University in Cairo-GUC. Cairo University came in the middle with 30 responses, which constitutes (8.9%) of the total percentage of the sample.

2- To whom do you listen

In this section, the respondents provided names of spiritual and religious music (singers, bands, or music) they listen to. Some names were given in the questionnaire, so the participant can put a check mark in front of the name they are familiar with. To have exhaustive options, the respondents were asked to provide a name of whom they listen to through the short answer “others (please specify)....” in case their favorite music is not mentioned. It was found that most participants marked the singers “Hamza Namira (54.3%), Maher Zain (47.5%), and Sami Yousef (46.6%)”. Notably, other options were not named in the surveys, but the participants mentioned them in the short answers such as Egyptian Project¹, which is a band composed of the *mūnshid* and a Sufi musician. The respondents marked “Sufi music” (16.9%) as their preference, “Ensemble Ibn Arabi” (14.8%), which is a Moroccan band singing Andalusian and Sufi poetry, and Al-Mawlaweya (10.7%). Besides, the Christian songs were also mentioned by some respondents (3.9%).

¹ Egyptian Project is founded by Zain Mahmoud and a team that produces contemporary spiritual music. His song “*Saqani al-Gharam*” was a hit after his return to Egypt from France.



Table (2): To whom do you listen (n=337)

You listen to	F	%
Hamza Namira	183	54.3%
Maher Zain	160	47.5%
Sami Youssef	157	46.6%
Al-Naqshabandi	117	34.7%
Sufi music	57	16.9%
Ensemble Ibn Araby band	50	14.8%
Al-Mawlaweya	36	10.7%
Yasmine al-Khayam	28	8.3%
Mohamed Tharwat	21	6.2%
yassin tohamy	5	1.5%
Hillsong worship	4	1.2%
زين محمود – Egyptian Project	4	1.2%

3- When I listen to spiritual and religious music:

In this section, emotional therapy is measured through a Likert scale that is composed of 12 statements. The respondents expressed their level of agreement with each statement through a five interval evaluation using words (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree). The majority of the answers range between high and moderate scores. The listeners, who were highly influenced by the spiritual and religious music and used it as emotional therapy, are (66.8%) compared to (33.3%) moderately influenced. In other words, “strongly agree” and “agree” were more frequently chosen by the respondents than “neutral”, “disagree”, or “strongly disagree”. The most agreed upon statements were “Listening to spiritual and religious music is a beautiful experience” with a mean score (4.21), “spiritual and religious music usually holds a moral message” with a mean score (4.12), “It changes my mood” (4.05), “It gives me positive energy” (4.01), “it gives me hope in life” (3.9), and the lowest usage of the music appeared in “it connects me with friends” (2.89).

Table (3): Emotional Therapy Categories

I listen to spiritual or religious music	F	%
Moderate	112	33.2%
High	225	66.8%
Total	337	100%



Table (4): When I listen to spiritual and religious music (n=337)

Statements	Degree of acceptance Ranking	Mean Scores
1. It changes my mood	3	4.05
2. I forget the daily problems	9	3.42
3. It gives me positive energy	4	4.01
4. It connects me with friends	12	2.89
5. It reflects my musical taste/mood/my relation with religion/my standards and values	7	3.59
6. It adds to me in a way or another	6	3.81
7. It usually holds a moral message	2	4.12
8. It gives me hope in life	5	3.96
9. It helps me better understand and express myself	10	3.41
10. Listening to spiritual and religious music is a beautiful experience	1	4.21
11. I learned things about my culture from the music	8	3.51
12. I can listen to a song that I do not completely agree with its content message	11	3.27
Total		3.69

RQ2: *Does the use of spiritual and religious music encourage some cultural activities?*

The construct “using spiritual and religious music as an emotional therapy” was already measured in RQ1 on a Likert scale. In this question, it is aimed to test the relation between (using spiritual and religious music for emotional therapy) and (practicing some cultural activities). “Cultural activities” construct was broken into concepts that are defined by the reviewed literature and mentioned in the operational definition section. Thus, it was tested by the following questions, on a nominal scale, as well as some open-ended questions that required short answered.

4- I like sharing the music with others

With (78%) answering “Yes” compared to (21.7%), who answered “No”, there is a relation between using music as emotional therapy and sharing it with others.

Table (5): I like sharing music with others

I like sharing the music with others	F	%
Yes	264	78.3%
No	73	21.7%
Total	337	100%



5- I buy objects related to spirituality or Sufism

With a majority of (67.1%) who do not buy objects related to spirituality or Sufism versus (32.9%) who do, there is no relation between using music as an emotional therapy and buying objects related to spirituality or Sufism.

Table (6): I buy objects related to spirituality or Sufism

I buy objects related to spirituality or Sufism	F	%
Yes	111	32.9%
No	226	67.1%
Total	337	100%

6- I sell products related to spirituality or Sufism

Similarly, (98.8%) do not sell products related to spirituality and Sufism, but the (1.2%) who are (4) respondents mentioned that they do sell accessories and rosary. Therefore, there is no relation between using the music as emotional therapy and selling products related to spirituality or Sufism

Table (7): I sell products related to spirituality or Sufism

I sell products related to spirituality or Sufism	F	%
Yes	4	1.2%
No	333	98.8%
Total	337	100%

7- I attend spiritual or Sufi music concerts

With (71.8%) of the respondents, who do not attend spiritual or Sufi concerts compared to (28.2%) who attend, there is no relation between using the music as emotional therapy and attending spiritual or Sufi music concerts.

Table (8): I attend spiritual or Sufi music concerts

I attend spiritual or Sufi music concerts	F	%
Yes	95	28.2%
No	242	71.8%
Total	337	100%

8- I read about Sufism/Sufi music

The variance here is insignificant, (58.8%) do not read about Sufism or Sufi music, while (41.2%) do. The overall results show that there is no relation between using the spiritual music as an emotional therapy and reading about Sufism/Sufi music. Significantly, the most read books were “Forty Rules of Love” (79/1%) about *Jalal al-Din al-Rumi* followed by “The Tragedy of Alhallaj” (27.3%) and “The



Bezels of Wisdom” by Ibn Arabi (12.2%), (2.9%) read about al-Rumi on different sources, and (2.2%) read about related topics.

Table (9): I read about Sufism/Sufi music

I read about Sufism/Sufi music	F	%
Yes	139	41.2%
No	198	58.8%
Total	337	100%

III. Demographics

Differences in emotional therapy according to demographic features

The following demographic information shows that there is a difference in consuming spiritual and religious music among the surveyed groups according to their gender, occupation, and nationality. Therefore, further studies can propose a hypothesis based on the consumption of each category presented here.

Table (10)

		N	Mean	SD	Test Statistics	Df	Sig.
Gender	Male	118	45.08	6.578	T=1.774	335	0.077
	Female	219	43.79	6.256			
Nationality	Egyptian	317	44.32	6.365	T=0.791	335	0.430
	non-Egyptian	20	43.15	6.862			
Occupational Status	Student	267	44.09	6.221	T=-0.898	335	0.370
	Employee	70	44.86	7.014			
University Categories	International	287	44.08	6.443	T=-1.120	335	0.264
	National	50	45.18	6.057			
University	The American University in Cairo-AUC	153	43.81	6.731	F=0.975	5 331	0.433
	The German University in Cairo-GUC	15	43.07	4.511			
	The British University in Cairo-BUE	119	44.56	6.276			
	Cairo University	30	45.60	5.703			
	Ain Shams University	11	46.36	5.818			
	Al-Azhar University	9	42.33	7.263			

Discussion

The first research question examines if people use spiritual and religious music for emotional therapy in Egypt. After selecting a sample from a population of six academic institutions, the research focused on exploring the characteristics of the listeners. The reason behind asking the respondents not to complete the survey, if



their answer to the first question “I listen to spiritual or religious music” is “No”, is because it is assumed that no impact of the music can be measured on the non-listeners of the music genre. Therefore, this was a filtering question to exclude non-listeners from the analysis. The following demographical questions acted as filtering questions too in order to control the respondents, who do not match the sample characteristics, especially that most of the responses were collected online. For example, six universities were mentioned in the demographic questions and the respondent who does not belong to any has to quit the survey.

The survey pilot was given to eight respondents to test the validity and reliability of the questions. Based on the comments of the volunteering respondents, some questions were amended or rephrased. For example, some guidelines were added such as “*if your answer is NO, please do not continue the survey” and some music examples were added to the options. Other comments were suggested in regards to the survey in the Arabic language and accordingly the statements were rephrased.

After collecting the data, (88%) of the participants were found to be listeners of this music genre. Only (12%) of the sample do not listen to it. Although the survey targeted both students and employees, a majority of (79.2 %) were students and the rest employees. This was expected as the literature suggested that teenagers and young adults are the most encouraged to listen to non-mainstream music such as spiritual and religious music, and do activities related to it. (Papinczak, Dingle, G. A., Stoyanov, S. R., Hides & Zelenko, 2015) It was also noted that more females than males answered the survey, but it is hard to draw a conclusion about the gender differences in using spiritual and religious music from the collected data. If the sample relied on a quota sampling, the results would be representative, but in this study (65%) of the respondents were females compared to (35%) males. Although the results provide a sample of heterogeneous backgrounds, the response is disproportionate, if the responses of the governmental institutions are compared to the non-governmental. By the same token, the highest response was from students and employees of the American University in Cairo (45.4%) and the British University in Cairo (35.2%), while a very low response rate was from the German University in Cairo, Cairo University (8.9%), Ain Shams (3.3%), and Al-Azhar University (2.7%). This is one drawback of online surveys, which sometimes result in low response rate.

The results show that the respondents listen to a variety of spiritual and religious music whether Egyptian or non-Egyptian. Hamza Namira, Maher Zain, Sami Yousef, Al-Naqshabandi. Maher Zain and Sami Yousef are non-Egyptian singers; the first is Swedish from Lebanese origins, while Sami Yousef is British. The Sufi music was also one of the most listened to. It is interesting that a high number of respondents listen to non-modern singers such as Yasmin al-Khayam and Al-Naqshabandi, although most of the respondents are youth (79.2%).



From the pilot and self-administered surveys, it was noticed that some listeners do listen to spiritual and religious music, but did not know that what they listen to is classified as “spiritual or religious”. It was necessary sometimes to discuss, with those who rush to answer with “No” on “I listen to spiritual or religious music,” they were advised to read the examples of this music genre and the definition of “spiritual and religious music”. This is a significant finding since there is lack of awareness about this music, even though it is gaining popularity in Egypt. This “knowledge gap” is referred to in the research problem and significance. Moreover, some respondents considered the Qūr’ān as “religious music”, which is also supported by the literature, as some religious scholars considered the qūr’ānic recitation (*tartīl*) as distinguished *mūsīqa* or alternative to it. (Salhi, 2014)

At another point, the Likert scale reflected how the respondents are influenced by the spiritual and religious music and use it as an emotional therapy. Emotional therapy is a reflection of the effect of the music on peoples’ wellbeing exemplified in: mood regulation and diversion, an uplifting and transcending atmosphere, ecstasy, finding meaning in life, feeling positive and connected with others and, sense of belonging, self-development, self-expression, and experiencing aestheticism. Most of the respondents (66.8%) highly evaluate the music as emotionally therapeutic, while (33.2%) moderately evaluate it as emotionally healing. Therefore, it can be inferred that spiritual and religious music is perceived as an aesthetic experience and a meaningful art that has a moral message. It helps people change their mood by giving them hope in life and through its positive energy. Although the lowest evaluation was for “it connects me with friends,” (78.2 %) said they like to share the music with others. This contradiction may be explained by the possibility that the individuals share the music and the musical events on their social media channels, or play the music while driving in the company of their friends, but it does not result in a bond between them and their friends.

Historically, music has played an important role in people’s life, sometimes, it determined their destiny. During the Islamic medieval ages, it was used in treatment, and the religious scholars of that age considered it an esoteric science, and thus dealt with it from a philosophical point of view. They also devoted their knowledge to develop this branch of science by inventing new musical instruments and establishing music schools.

As mentioned in the literature, the fanatic group, ISIS, used music maleficently as propaganda for their extremist ideology, online recruitment, and brainwashing its followers. Although their songs are charged with violence and hatred, they succeeded in attracting youth to join them. They attracted youngsters through their promises of martyrdom, fighting for God’s cause, and the heavens. Normalizing and entrenching violence by threatening the enemies by slaughtering, burning, bombing, and mass killing for God’s cause is their strategy. Having said



that, with the changes that Egypt is witnessing and in parallel with the national development plan in 2030, spiritual and religious music can be a powerful tool. It can sustain people's sense of belonging and help create cultural relevance. The collected data support that this music contains people's negative feelings and encourages feelings of tranquility, transcendence, and tolerance. Instead of directing people's feelings to hatred and violence, the good alternative "spiritual and religious music" can sustain people's morality and tolerance.

The second part of the primary data answers the question "does the use of spiritual and religious music for emotional therapy encourage some cultural activities?" Most of the respondents expressed the willingness to share the music they listen to with others; (78.3%) do share it, while the (21.7%) do not. This indicates the extent to which people like the music, would like others to listen to it too, and consider it as an interpersonal communication tool. Although it was assumed that those who use the music are more likely to buy and sell objects related to spirituality and Sufism, the answers did not support the assumption. Based on the answers, most respondents do not buy objects related to Sufism or spirituality such as accessories, clothes with Sufi/spiritual quotes, or wall-frames. A majority of (98.8 %) do not sell products, but (1.2 %) answered with "yes". Only four respondents sell accessories and rosaries (1.2%). Around (67.1%) of them said that they do not buy the mentioned objects or any other objects. Yet, (32.9%) do buy, and this is a significant finding. The most marked object that the participants buy were accessories (66.7%), then wall frames (43.2%), clothes with Sufi/spiritual quotes (27.9%). The respondents also mentioned "other" objects bought such as rosaries and oriental perfumes (3.7%), artifacts, leather Sufi notes, paintings and wall arts (2.7%), and other objects such as statues and decorations.

Considering the Moroccan model, the Sacred Music Festival in Fez brings thousands of tourists, and during the festival, handmade products, Berber's handcrafts, and Spiritual-related objects are sold through the old markets in the city. The handcrafts contribute to the national economy of the kingdom with 2.2 billion dollars being earned in 2015. Sixty percent of the economic production in Fez comes from the traditional crafts. (*Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, 2017) Since Egypt has an annual spiritual music festival, it is an opportunity to encourage small and medium enterprises and the handmade industries to participate in the festival. This will not only refresh the economy, but will also promote the Egyptian culture among the visitors of other nations.

Surprisingly, attending concerts has no relation to liking this music type as (71.8%) of the listeners do not attend concerts, and only (28.2%) of them do. Similarly, most of the listeners do not read books related to the music, Sufism, or spirituality. However, the answers of the (41.2%) revealed that those who read preferred these books *Forty Rules of Love* (79.1%) which is also one of the best-selling in Egypt. *The Tragedy of Al-Hallaj* was written by a well-known Egyptian writer, Salah Abdel Sabour, came in the second rank of the most read books



(27.3%). Other books were mentioned by individuals such as *Biographies of Christian Songs*, poetry, and different readings in Sufism. In brief, unlike what was suggested by the literature, the level of involvement with music did not encourage the listeners to practice some activities or educate themselves about the music content. Nonetheless, it should be considered that the sample was non-probability and it cannot be generalized.

Limitations

Considering the time constraints, a non-random sampling technique was chosen for this study. To get a high response rate in a limited time, clarity and shortness were considered while designing the questionnaire. For the same purpose, most of the data were gathered through electronic means. This is why a limited number of surveys were distributed as self-administered hard-copies. This is also why a very low response rate was received from Al-Azhar University (n=9), Ain Shams (n=11), and Cairo University (n=30). Although a high response rate was desired especially from the religiously educated students of Al-Azhar, the permissions required to distribute hard-copies in these institutions took a long time to be obtained from the CAPMAS. Another permission was required from each university other than AUC to access the campuses.

While analyzing the data, it was decided to focus only on the characteristics of those who consume spiritual and religious music, and disregard those who do not listen to it. This is justifiable since the study is only concerned with the effect of the music on its listeners. Although it is preferred to put the demographic questions at the end of the questionnaire by some media researchers, the demographic questions were placed at the beginning to use them as a filtering mechanism and avoid irrelevant or misleading information.

Recommendations

Being aware of the capacity of the researcher, the available resources, and the limitations, this study is a step in the study of religious communication in Egypt. There is no doubt that it will bring attention to both disciplines, communication, and religion especially in regards to spiritual and religious music.

Thus, it is recommended to study the phenomenon more in-depth. While doing that, considering to have a longer study duration to provide more representative data of the selected sample to avoid disproportions in groups like the low response received from some universities like Al-Azhar.

Similarly, it was hard to encompass all the historical periods in the literature in regards to the controversy over the permissibility of music. As a result, the time of the Prophet Mūḥammād, which was the milestone in establishing the legislative rules regarding music and arts was not covered by the study. To tackle it, the study needs much effort and emphasis on primary sources and manuscripts produced



during this era with careful attention to authentic and inauthentic sources. Even if the study touched on some of the four schools of the Sunni thought (Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki, and Shaf'i) another study can spot the difference between each perception and interpretation of music to project the ideological difference, which is not dogmatic. At another point, the Moroccan model presents an interesting case in the field, and this is why it is recommended to extend the study to focus on the differences in consumption behavior between Egypt and Morocco.

During data collection, it was realized that there is lack of awareness about spiritual and religious music in Egypt. It is surprising in a country like Egypt, with its history and contribution to this field, that some people do not know what "spiritual and religious music" is. Some participants do not know that the music they are used to listen to is called "spiritual" or "religious". It is, therefore, recommended to use the results of this study to raise awareness about this music and its heritage.

It becomes clear from the results that this music genre enjoys popularity and there will be more demand for it. If it is not met by well-studied research and directed to the right path, the alternative might be the so-called religious music of extremist groups or lowbrow art (*fan habit*). From what was mentioned before, it becomes necessary to counter the terrorist thoughts by nonviolent means. It is important to revive the spiritual and religious music that charges the listeners with aestheticism, spreads tolerance, and a sense of belonging. Spiritual and religious music also reflects the true message of religion, which promotes peace and coexistence unlike the Da'ishi music that is based on wrong beliefs. (MBC.net, 2015)

Ideas have wings; no one can prevent them from reaching people.

(The Destiny Al-Maṣṣūr¹)

Conclusion

Although the world has advanced in using weapons of mass destruction, it has become evident that an idea can have a stronger effect than violence. Violence kills leaving emptiness, but the idea is immortal. And this is why nations resort to public diplomacy and soft powers instead of weapons. For instance, India succeeded in promoting itself as a top-visited country, a country of diversity, and a nation of cultural authenticity. "Incredible India", as it calls itself, relied on the performed art; namely music and dancing to compete with Hollywood. India is publicized for its religious diversity, multiplicity, and religious tolerance through the art that was used in propaganda. This definitely helped in achieving national goals on many levels. Even the Arab world became obsessed with Indian culture,

¹ An internationally awarded movie by the Egyptian director Youssef Shahin



fascinated by its colors, eager to watch its series, and travel to the country accepting the religious and cultural differences there.

In the Arab world, Morocco is an example of music-tourism. A nation that succeeded to build its economy and reputation on spiritual music. Morocco opened itself, thanks to sacred music industry, to the international arena to become an example of religious tolerance, hospitality, and performing arts. Even nationally, sacred music sustained the citizen's sense of belonging, their cultural relevance, and connectedness with their domestic arts and folklore. Their sacred art united the nation *Amazigh*, Jews, and Muslims under the umbrella of mystic art.

With the openness that Egypt is witnessing nowadays, researchers need to reconsider a deeper study of this phenomenon like studying the characteristics of spiritual and religious music, the characteristics of its listeners, what this music gratifies in people, and how it influences their behaviors and attitudes. Egypt needs to study the mentioned models and how they were able to promote Sufi and religious tourism and music tourism. Egypt needs to study how national festivals can be used to combat the economic recession through the promotion of small and medium industries especially handmade crafts. Moreover, spiritual and religious music in Egypt can be utilized in enhancing the country's cooperation with other countries and creating coherence among citizens.

Ample examples can be projected to showcase how music had a major role to play in the countries' history. *Despacito*, the top Latin song in 2017 in 35 countries, was successful in promoting tourism in the poor Island of Puerto Rico, where the song was filmed. Tourism witnessed an increase of 45% after the song was watched 2 billion times on YouTube. Tourism companies made the places, where *Despacito* was video recorded, on their program of touristic visits. (Sky News Arabia, 2017) For this, the current study sheds light on the spiritual and religious music consumption in Egypt hoping to bring attention to this music genre and to raise awareness about it not only among the decision makers but within the music industry. Academia, in that realm, plays a vital role in mobilizing both through a well-studied phenomenon.

Finally, from the study, it is worth noting that the spiritual and religious music is a promising industry. It enjoys popularity among the presented sample and it positively influenced the audience. Spiritual and religious music is a self-transcending communication tool, it spreads good values among people such as connectedness and cultural relevance. It also offers a musical taste distinguished from the mainstream. It can be also used in promoting tolerance and acceptance while having a financial return.



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