229732 - Ruling on vocal effects in da`wah productions

the question

I work in the field of online da`wah and I find it very difficult to deal with video clips in particular, as video technology is advancing greatly and music and vocal effects are used as an important component for emotional impact and as a means of promoting beliefs and ideas. I would like to know what is religiously permissible in terms of vocal effects in videos, and what about natural sounds, for example, that are altered and enhanced? I hope that you can advise me as to what is permissible to use.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

It is prohibited to use musical instruments and listen to them. That is indicated by textual evidence in the Qur’an and Sunnah, as has been explained previously in question no. 5000.

Secondly:

These background sounds and vocal effects which use human voices and other sounds to produce sounds similar to musical instruments come under the same ruling as music itself, which is that they are prohibited, because there is no difference between them and music in that case, and because what matters is how it seems to be and what impact it has. Imitating prohibited musical instruments is not permissible, especially because the negative effect is the same as that produced by real musical instruments.

For more information, please see the answer to question no. 91142.

We have previously given a detailed answer about what is called beat boxing, which is a way of

making musical sounds without using instruments; rather it is done using the mouth.

In that answer we said:

As the prohibition of musical instruments is not limited only to one type and not another, the prohibition is not because of what it is, rather it is because of what it produces of prohibited types of entertainment. If this prohibited type of entertainment was produced by something else, it would also come under the same ruling as these instruments. If it did not have these features, then this prohibition would not apply to it. …

Islam does not differentiate between things of a similar nature, so it is not appropriate to suggest that the wise Lawgiver would prohibit one sound then permit another, similar sound. … These sounds are so similar to musical sounds that even sound engineers themselves may sometimes find it difficult to distinguish between these sounds and actual music.

For more details, please see question no. 193426.

Shaykh `Abd al-`Aziz at-Tarifi (may Allah preserve him) was asked about human vocal effects that resemble music, but they are all done with human voices. He replied:

With regard to what is called rhythms, which resemble musical beats, whether they are played on an instrument and the like or are done with the mouth, or they are produced by electronic means, as there are computer programs, for example, which imitate musical instruments,

whatever resembles something wrong is also wrong. Islam prohibits intoxicants, for example, and intoxicants originally were things such as wine, but there could be other intoxicants in modern forms; if the reason for prohibition – which is intoxication of the brain – is found in such things, then they are also prohibited.

If it also resembles musical beats in its rhythms, then it is regarded as music, whether the sounds are produced electronically or by an instrument such as an oud (or guitar) or drum and the like; we say that the outcome is the same.

There are some people who imitate these beats with their voices, and they are gifted with a voice that can do that or with the ability to imitate the sounds, or some such, so he produces realistic sounds that resemble [musical sounds]. But is that something that is prohibited? Yes, we say that in principle it is prohibited. Why is that? Because what resembles something wrong is also wrong, and Islamic teachings do not differentiate between things that are similar to one another, and this is an Islamic principle. So everything that leads to the reason why the Lawgiver forbade a thing is also forbidden. This is one of the principles that the scholars follow when issuing fatwas. End quote.

As for the sound of flowing water, or the sound of the wind, or sounds made by animals, such as the neighing of a horse or bird sounds, or the sound of human voices weeping or laughing, the sounds of cannons and artillery shells, the sounds of cars, things falling, breaking glass and so on – whether they are natural sounds or are produced by modern technology – they are permissible and there is nothing wrong with them.

But they should not be used as a background to recitation of the Qur'an, because the word of Allah, may He be Exalted, should be respected, venerated and listened to attentively.

See also the answer to question 193426.

And Allah knows best.