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***Abstract***

The advent of digitization in the Western world has brought about a revolution in trends and art of different professions of which music is not an exemption. Digitization improves trade, cultural transmission, and skill practices. This study, therefore, examines how digitization has enhanced gospel music distribution patterns in Nigeria, especially in this digital economy era. This study identifies the role of digital technologies in the consumption, process, methods and digital marketing of the Christian gospel music industry. By comparing old distribution methods with music produced using online digital distribution platforms, the study assesses the benefits and limitations of using digital technology in gospel music distribution. It was discovered that some factors that influence the choice, nature and use of digital technologies in the Christian music industry include fans preference, promotion, distribution, and consumption. The paper concludes that digital technology produces a remarkable effect on music distribution, especially in this digital economy era, such as reducing the cost of distributing and sharing information through online digital platforms and social media platforms. The paper suggests that musicians should utilize digital technology for positive advantage while striving to discourage the undermining of human talents and enhance the quality of general music content.

**Keywords:** Digital technology, Gospel Music, Distribution platforms, Social media

## **Introduction**

Digitization is the process of changing analogue signals into digital formats. It involves the conversion of analogue signals in electronic devices into an ultra-modern system. Sometimes the same process involves the transformation of sound waves from the analogue state into a sequence of numbers called a digital version. Nowadays, digitization has significantly impacted most businesses. For instance, Ikenna (2011) opines that computer programmes are used in digital recording to make changes in the storage of audio data into alphanumeric codes. There are various processes of analogue recordings; the musical sound that is saved in its original form will pass through the media and equipment of recording. The cost of acquiring and sharing information will be decreased through digital technologies (Aguiar & Martens, 2016). The music industry has witnessed various changes thereby enhancing the tremendous progress of digital technology. The production, distribution, promotion, and consumption of music have been completely altered by the availability of the internet, digitization of music, particularly the use of such popular digital platforms as Apple's iPad and iTunes, Spotify, YouTube, and others (Warr & Goode, 2011).

The application of digitization in gospel music enables easier ways of sharing music with people through digital means such as online articles, email, WhatsApp, Smartphone applications, and so Nigerian gospel music artistes have created websites where they advertise and market their musical products, on. Adedeji (2009) acknowledges that some globally. Today, the Nigerian music industry through the availability of numerous technological innovations offers platforms and results that cannot be underrated and disregarded. Therefore, space and time are demoralized through the technology of digital recording. Through technology, there is the existence of online music performances thus enhancing the role of music in television, film, and multimedia (Ukeme, 2011). Nigerian gospel music artistes create and

manage personal websites to create more awareness of their musical products globally.

In the modern world, music is closely associated with religion, technology, engineering, medicine, politics, social mobilization, patriotism, and social movements. However, the search through literature shows interesting research on the impact of digitization on the music production of gospel singers and notable among them Dr. Bola Are, Bukola Akinade, Babalola Wumi, Tope Alabi, Mrs Fasoyin, Dunsin Oyekan etc.

However, digital technology has additionally empowered artistes to access the market and sell directly to customers, though the sales of the compact disc, vinyl etc have declined due to new file-sharing methods and the availability of MP3 players, more music is being consumed than ever before (Hracs, 2012). Digitization is, therefore, a technical process of converting analog streams of information into digital bits that have discrete and discontinuous values or are based on two separate states (Feldman, 1997). These two separate states are a characteristic of the digital world, which in the words of Robert Pepperell (2003), is "discrete and pure" while analog information is "continuous and noisy".

However, Robinson (2008) defines his analogy much more in detail when he notes that it is analogous to smoothly changing, possessing the properties of the apparent impeccable and untouchable credibility of space and time. It compares analogy-ness with space and time, which allows for infinite division, and in association with them (space and time), connects something authentic and natural to the artificial and arbitrarily truncated precision of the digital. Digitization can also be understood as a process that, in addition to being symbolic, has material dimensions and generates information that can be expressed in many different ways, through many different types of materials and in many different systems. From a theoretical point of view, almost any material with two simple states can be used to store and communicate digitized signals,

including silico transistors, punch cards, or atoms (Brennen and Kreiss 2016).

Manoff (2006) emphasizes the intangible quality of information obtained through digitization while reducing the importance of the physical systems (transistors) on which information is stored. In this context, the authors' key finding (Manoff 2006; Hayles 2003) is that digital information is stored on and communicated through the physical orientation of material transistors as bits. Although digitized information is not limited to specific types of materials it is based on material configurations. This is how digitization mediates between the material and the intangible thereby making digitization a unique process. (Price, Rozumilowicz & Verhulst, 2002) further argue that just as digitized information can be represented on any set of transistors, all forms of data - alphanumeric texts, graphics, still and moving images and sounds – can also be digitized. Van Dijk (2006) points out that the conversion process occurs through precise technical mechanisms and requires a specific technical infrastructure that re-aligns the original signal itself. While popular belief often describes digitization as a technical process, we humans have made certain choices about what to keep and what to discard on algorithms that perform the digitization process. Jonathan Sterne (2003) points out in the history of sound reproduction that the same method applies to analog technology. Analog technologies produce images that are more faithful to the original than digital images which continuously reconstruct bits in an instant, but both necessarily interpret the world. Digitization, therefore, generates data with a series of distinctive characteristics, or, as Negroponte (1995) points out, the universality of digitized information.

### **Concept of Gospel Music**

Adedeji (2004), Vidal (2012) and Adegbite (1994) all defined and recognized the influence of church music in the evolution of gospel music. Adedeji, in his definition, stated that the musical genre though borrowed a lot

of features from popular music and was made popular by its public performance, electronic media, and information technology such as television, radio, recording studios and internet. Adegbite added that the genre was brought about by the wave of religious fanaticism resulting in the proliferation of Christian churches in Nigerian society. However, Vidal opined that gospel music did not evolve from church music alone as expressed by Adedeji and Adegbite but originated from two main sources which are native airs synonymous with nationalist period of Nigerian church history dated by Sadoh (2009) as early 1920s to late 1960 said that as well as evangelical and gospel songs period of the 1970s.

Furthermore, Miller (1993) in his study pointed out the roles that gospel music plays in the life of the church and this he adduced to be a vehicle used for evangelism. He buttressed his opinion that many souls have been won to Christ through singing of hymns or gospel songs which offer hope to the oppressed, confirm believers in their faith, and enrich those who are rejoicing. Therefore, Omibiyi-Obidike (1994) focused more on the performance venue of gospel music having earlier agreed with other scholars that it evolved from church music. However, she pointed out that it is majorly performed at special festivals such as harvest and thanksgiving.

Adedeji (2001) presented some parameters for identifying gospel music and its performers. The dominant issue for him is the message of the music which is to project the good news about Jesus Christ, His birth, death, works, resurrection, healing, deliverance and hope of salvation. He, however, condemned the contemporary gospel musicians whom he labelled entertainers since the music and lifestyle of many of the artistes especially the younger and newer entrants seem to negate the message they often profess. However, some gospel musicians still maintain a level of decorum standard in their compositions, performances, and lives. Ojo (1998) identified some stylistic features of

Nigerian gospel music as a danceable rhythm adapted from indigenous and Western musical elements, very short and cryptic texts, and a combination of syncretic styles such as gospel-waka and gospel-fuji.

### **History of Nigeria Gospel Music**

Ajirire and Alabi (1992) in their discourse submitted that gospel music started with the inception of Christianity in Nigeria. This affirmation submitted that Nigerian gospel music started in the 1970s as a distinctive genre when choral groups moved their performance from the liturgical settings in churches into the public domain. This transition adapted gospel music for entertainment and commercial purposes. The texts of the songs are based on biblical and Christian concepts, but performances are buttressed with both western and traditional musical instruments. This view could not have been correct because of the historical evidence of the existence of gospel music in the 1970s. Vidal (2012) noted that the divine services by the church missionary society is often accompanied by the singing of European hymns whose texts were later translated into indigenous languages. This submission points to the facts that the music of the 1840s was not gospel music as suggested by Ajirire and Alabi, but strictly liturgical church music as exemplified by the Christian missionaries.

Adedeji (2005) in his discourse on the historical development of gospel music in Nigeria noted that gospel music started in 1960 though it had its antecedent some 30 years earlier. He affirmed that the predominant styles in the 1960s were purely spiritual, and solemn with very light instrumentation, and by the 1970s had metamorphosized into native styles in oratorio forms with S.O. Akinyele and Bisi Adeoye King being at the forefront of this style. This same period (1970s) featured the Lazarus and Emmanuel brothers from Eastern Nigeria with their voice of the cross. The incursion of the trap set into Nigerian gospel music took it to the era of disco and American pop with such influences as Amy Grant and Andrae Crouch, while the likes of the Jos-

based Nigerian popular gospel musician – Panam Percy Paul – represented the generation of singers labeled in the “gos-pop” style. This style flourished in university campuses and new generational churches.

The 1990s witnessed the era of digital recording which encouraged more artistes to come onto the scene; the situation Adedeji critiqued as being ‘a watery pack of nonsense’ put in cassettes and sold as gospel music. Thus, the Nigerian market was flooded with American gospel music or those that bear strong resemblance with it such that by the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, gospel music as a genre had gone wild with the introduction and active use of radical secular hip-hop styles and adoption of youthful gangsteristic manifestation.

In the early 2000s, some gospel artistes were able to defile barriers to create music that transcended demography, language, and some extent religion (Ayomide, 2021). The local gospel music developed in Nigeria just about the same time African-American gospel music was imported to the country (Ademola, 2009). The creation, performance, significance, and even the definition of gospel music vary according to culture and context. Gospel music is composed and performed for many purposes and as an entertainment product for the marketplace. Gospel music is characterized by dominant vocals and strong use of harmony with Christian lyrics, Gospel music can be traced to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The traditional structure of gospel music changed in the late 1930s, when Thomas A. Dorsey, who became known as the “father of Gospel Music, began working for Pilgrim Baptist church in Chicago, Illinois, Dorsey was a former Jazz Pianist and composer who had worked with famous players such as Ma Rainey and Hudson Tamp Red Whitaker. Dorsey created a new style of gospel music called gospel blues, which infused his study of blues and jazz with traditional gospel music. It was initially rejected, however, by the end of the 1930s, gospel blues won over

acceptance as the new form of traditional gospel.

Gospel music continued to evolve throughout the late 1930s. There are four distinct styles of gospel music including, but not limited to, quartet style, traditional gospel, contemporary gospel, and praise and worship. Furthermore, the gospel quartet style is one in which a small number of male vocalists sing music together with tight harmonies. The major difference between traditional and contemporary gospel places more emphasis on sole artists. Most contemporary artists rarely sing with a choir. Praise and worship is a combination of both contemporary and traditional gospel styles, in that a praise leader has a small group of singers to help lead the congregation into singing gospel music.

### **Concept of Digital Technology and Economy**

Digital Technology is electronic tools, systems, devices and resources that generate, store, or process data. It refers to the system, hardware and processes that use digital data or signals to achieve a particular set of functionalities. Digital Technology has additionally empowered artistes to have direct access to the music market and sell their content which is in digital formats, directly to customers. The new way of selling music content in digital format has invariably affected the sales of recorded music which have declined in terms of file sharing and MP3 players, though it has been established that more music is being consumed now than ever before (Hracs 2012).

Digitization is, therefore, a technical process of converting analog streams of information into digital hits that have discrete and discontinuous values or are based on two separate states (Feldman 1997). These two separate states are a characteristic of the digital world, which leads us to conclude, in the words of Robert Pepperell (2003), that digital information is discrete and pure” while analog information is “continuously noisy”.

The digital economy is the worldwide network of economic activities, commercial transactions and professional interactions that are enabled by information and communication technologies (ICT). The correlation between digital technology and the digital economy is the inclusion of technology on both sides to make it more technologically relevant.

### **Advantages of Employing Digital Technology in Gospel Music Distribution**

However, some benefits are derivable from the application of digitalization to gospel music. The advantages are:

Digital sounds produced in the form of audio output are not device-dependent regardless of the device used for its playback unlike the analogue and early digital systems whose output production quality depends on the type and nature of the equipment used.

Specialized music training is not required digitally to apply digital to gospel music for quality musical output, unlike in analogue where continuous and sound training is required before handling.

In digital applications several portable recording devices such as optical, hard disc, SSD, and RAM enhance portability is possible.

Digitalization of music enhances network transmission which allows wider geographical spread over a short time.

It also facilitates powerful software integration with effects from plugin processors and instruments which assists in the correction of unwanted forms of error and output effects that would minimize acceptability.

Digitalization of music facilitates better sound production regardless of the experience of artiste.

The time involved in the production of the portable device is small compared with analogue.

Conversion of sound from one output form to another is possible such as WMA to MP3, MP3 to MP4, etc.

### **Limitations**

- (i) The resolution of musical output depends on the production format and it is also limited to the output format.
- (ii) Accuracy and precision of sound quality depend on the type of equipment used for production.
- (iii) Problems associated with stable sources of electricity serve as barriers to prompt delivery in the digitalization of music.
- (iv) Technological advancement enhances the need for quick and easy obsolescence of instruments. Digital musical tools become obsolete over a short time.
- (v) The space available on the storage devices is also a limiting factor to the volume of music available for storage.
- (vi) Variation in the size of different storage devices is a barrier to the conversion of digital output.

### **Digital Technology and Economy in Gospel Music**

Digital music technology encompasses digital instruments, computers, electronic effects units, software, or digital audio equipment by a performer, composer, sound engineer, DJ, or record producer to produce, perform, or record music. The term refers to electronic devices, instruments, computer hardware and software used in performance, playback, recording, composition, mixing, analysis, and editing of music.

### **Role of Digital Technology and Economy on the Production and Distribution Patterns of Gospel Music**

Innovative music technologies are also integral to the creation of a lot of modern music. Software – based virtual instruments and MIDI technology allow people to use million, of sounds in the production of their music, which musicians can program and manipulate in complex ways.

New synths, sample manipulation and new noises that we have heard before will greatly impact how people compose music. Writing and recording music becomes easier, which

allows more people to partake in the activity. Social media continues to offer musicians the opportunities they previously could only have through record companies. In the past, musicians would need to do things like record demos and distribute them to fans. Technological advancements have profoundly influenced the development of the music industry. There is a shift from phonographs and analog tape machines to digital recording software, and online streaming services. The rapid evolution of digital technology in music over the last two decades has significantly impacted every aspect of the industry including distribution.

Digital platforms such as iTunes, Amazon, Spotify, boomplay, etc. have replaced conventional record label operations offering opportunities for uploading songs for consumers on these platforms. The new digital process still retains the distribution of royalties to artistes based on the volume of streaming enjoyed by the artistes. Such royalties are administered by numerous digital service providers that serve as the intermediaries between the artiste and the consumers.

Digital streaming offers opportunities to listen and appreciate recorded music in their highest digital formats on the internet. It also fast tracks the distribution of such music materials globally with a touch of a button, thus eliminating hitherto old cumbersome logistics of achieving such in the past. Websites such as Napster, YouTube, and My Space were among the early adopters of streaming, enabling musicians to upload music for free and have it heard across the world at the click of a button. More recently, we have seen the introduction of specific streaming sites such as SoundCloud, whilst free, downloadable platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music and TIDAL allow listeners to enjoy music from every country, genre and background without leaving their living room.

The new available technology has narrowed down the disparities in quality of

music production through globalization and availability of software, samples and tone banks which enables gospel music produced in Nigeria to sound as good as those produced and recorded abroad. Also, the digital distribution methods and platforms is able to offer Nigerian gospel music the much-needed global acceptance. Gospel artistes such as Sinach, Dunsin Oyekan, Nathaniel Bassey and the rest are making waves globally with some of their songs being rendered and popular globally.

a remarkable effect on music production, especially in this digital economy era, such as it has reduced the cost of acquiring and sharing information, but gospel musician can now use websites, WhatsApp, and YouTube among others to share their music with the world. The paper therefore suggests that musicians should utilize digital technology for positive advantage while being careful not to undermine human talents or reduce the quality and content which gospel music is well known for.

### **Factors that Influence the nature, choice and use of digital technologies in the Christian music industry**

There are so many factors that influence the nature, choice and use of digital technologies in the Christian music industry which include but are not limited to fans' preference, availability of technological equipment, quick production, promotion, distribution, and consumption among others.

- (i) Increase in competition among the music artistes, the quality, and the studio outlet issued for music production.
- (ii) Patronage and increasing demand given to digital music have made many artistes see the need to move from old technology to newer technology.
- (iii) The ease of using modern technology and the attractiveness of the quality of sound production is also one of the factors leading to the choice of digital technology.
- (iv) Improvement of digital sound format over analogue has drawn the attention of gospel music producers to digitalization.
- (v) The number of personnel required in music digitalization is small compared with analogue.

### **Conclusion**

Digital Technology can be seen as one of the major tools that can promote the distribution of Gospel Music. Based on this fact, Nigerian society tends to experience social, and economic change through digital application of music distribution. In conclusion, digital technology application in distributing Nigerian gospel music has greatly influenced the genre in the area of morals and commodification thereby bringing about an improved society. Digital technology has had

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