

THE IMPACT OF GLOBALISATION ON THE COMMODIFICATION OF AFRICAN ARTS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study examines the complex relationship between globalisation and the commodification of African arts, providing a critical analysis of its impact on African cultures, artists, and art forms. Globalisation has transformed the ways in which African art is perceived, produced, and consumed worldwide, raising questions about cultural ownership, authenticity, and value. The paper finds that globalisation has led to the commodification of African art, prioritising profit over cultural significance. It argues that African artists often face exploitation in the global art market, with limited control over their work and its value. A historical method is adopted for the study. Secondary sources on the subject are utilised and analysed qualitatively through discursive and narrative approaches. The article further argues that globalisation threatens the diversity of African art forms, leading to cultural homogenisation. The study highlights the experiences of African artists navigating the global art world, revealing challenges such as exploitation and the loss of traditional art forms. The research concludes that a nuanced understanding of the impact of globalisation on African arts is essential for promoting cultural diversity, preserving traditional art forms, and supporting African artists in the global art market. It recommends a critical approach to globalisation—one that balances economic opportunities with cultural sensitivity and preservation.

Keywords: Impact, Globalisation, Commodification, African Arts, Analysis

Introduction

The impact of globalisation on the commodification of African arts is a complex and multifaceted issue that has garnered significant attention in recent years. Globalisation, defined as the process of world shrinkage, distances getting shorter, and things moving closer, has transformed the way African art is perceived, produced, and consumed globally. According to Caleb A. Folorunso, globalisation is "the compressing of the world and intensifying the consciousness of the world as a whole".¹ This phenomenon has led to increased cross-cultural exchange, enabling artists to draw inspiration from diverse cultural traditions and movements.

However, the commodification of African arts has raised concerns about cultural appropriation, exploitation, and the loss of traditional cultural identities. The global demand for African art objects has fuelled the looting and destruction of cultural heritage sites, resulting in the devaluation of African cultural heritage and the marginalisation of local artists. As Folorunso notes, "the on-going global demand for African art objects continues to fuel the looting and destruction of prehistoric periods".²

The impact of globalisation on African arts is further complicated by the dominance of Western art markets and institutions, which can make it challenging for African artists to gain recognition and fair compensation for their work. This has led to calls for the decolonisation of the global art scene, increasing the representation of non-Western artists, and re-evaluating the power dynamics that regulate art's global narrative.³ In the context of African arts, globalisation has both positive and negative effects. On the one hand, it has provided opportunities for African artists to gain international exposure and recognition. On the other hand, it has led to the commercialisation of African arts, threatening the authenticity and cultural significance of traditional art forms.

The evaluation of the implications of cultural globalisation on African heritage and philosophy has been a subject of great concern to scholars within and outside Africa. While globalisation has improved the socio-economic status of

many countries, it has also had tremendous negative effects on their heritage, identity, and philosophy.⁴ The impact of globalisation on the commodification of African arts is a critical issue that requires a nuanced understanding of cultural, economic, and historical contexts. By examining the dynamics of globalisation, cultural exchange, and commodification, researchers can gain insights into the challenges and opportunities facing African artists and cultural producers.⁵

The paper is divided into nine parts. The first part is introduction. This is followed by the conceptual clarification and definition of terms. The third is the theoretical framework on which the work derives its analysis. The fourth discusses the homogenisation of African Art. This section explores how globalisation leads to the homogenisation of African art, resulting in the loss of cultural identity and uniqueness. It also examines how Western art market trends and tastes influence the production and consumption of African art, leading to a loss of traditional techniques and cultural significance. The fifth investigates how globalisation and the codification of African art lead to the exploitation of African artists. The sixth section explores the impact of globalisation on the commodification of traditional African art and cultural heritage. The seventh highlights the opportunities and challenges presented by globalisation and the global art market for African artists. The penultimate section is the analysis of the issue of cultural appropriation in the context of globalisation and the commodification of African art. The last part is the conclusion and Recommendation.

Conceptual clarifications

The study engages a few words or concepts which may seem quite ambiguous. These concepts require some clarifications. It is my intention to define them in brief to enable readers to understand and digest the work without racking their brain.

Globalisation: Scholars and authors have offered multifaceted understandings of globalisation, shaped by their distinct theoretical orientations and disciplinary backgrounds. Anthony Giddens views globalisation as process that intensifies worldwide social relationships, creating interconnectedness between local and distant events.⁶ According to Daniel A. Offiong, globalisation represents the culmination of the global spread of capitalism and its attendant institutions, as well as the subjugation of peoples worldwide, a process that has its roots in historical developments spanning several centuries.⁷ According to A. D. Abdurrahman and Y. S. Kura, globalisation is a multifaceted phenomenon characterised by a vast network of connections and interdependencies that transcend national borders. This process intricately weaves together diverse actors, issues, events, and actions into a complex web of relationships and interactions.⁸ Here, emphasis is simply on the integration of politics, economics and homogenization of global cultures. For Ritzer, globalisation is characterised by the global spread of social relations, practices, and organisational forms, accompanied by an increased awareness of the world as a single, interconnected entity.⁹

Globalisation has also been defined “as a coalescence of varied transnational processes and domestic structures, allowing the economy, politics, culture and ideology of one country to penetrate another. The chain of causality runs from the spatial reorganisation of production to international trade and to the integration of financial markets”.¹⁰ Globalization therefore, has a multi-dimensional process whereby cultural, economic and political relations increasingly take a global basis.¹¹ It involves many agents or actors that are instrumental or are direct players in the process; these actors or agents according to A. Liman and J. E. Onyetube, include Transnational Corporations, the multilateral institutions like the World Bank, IMF, WHO, WTO, etc. and the media.¹²

Globalisation complex and multidimensional character makes it a uniquely impactful and pervasive force shaping the lives of people worldwide, regardless of cultural or geographical distinctions. Globalisation is akin to an unstoppable force, spreading rapidly and unpredictably, with its trajectory and ultimate destination unknown. One thing is certain, however: its impact is universal, affecting individuals, families, communities, and societies across the board. As a result, globalisation is reshaping various aspects of our societies, including labour markets, inequality patterns, consumption habits, health outcomes, and political stability. Globalisation is an undeniable reality that affects us all, as we are inevitably part of an interconnected world where geographical boundaries are increasingly irrelevant.

Commodification: Commodification refers to the process of transforming goods, services, ideas, or people into marketable products or commodities that can be bought, sold, or traded.¹³ This concept is rooted in the works of Karl Marx, who argued that capitalism tends to transform all aspects of life into commodities that can be exchanged for value. Commodification involves assigning a market value to something that may not have had one previously, often

resulting in the exploitation of the thing being commoditised.¹⁴ According to David Harvey (2005), commodification is a process that "involves the transformation of social relations and things into commodities that can be bought and sold on the market."¹⁵ Commodification can take many forms, including:

Cultural Commodification: The transformation of cultural practices, traditions, and symbols into marketable products.¹⁶ This can lead to the exploitation of cultural heritage and the loss of cultural autonomy.

Labour Commodification: The treatment of labour as a commodity that can be bought and sold on the market. This can result in the exploitation of workers and the erosion of labour rights.

Nature Commodification: The transformation of natural resources and ecosystems into marketable commodities.¹⁷ This can lead to environmental degradation and the loss of biodiversity.

Critics of commodification argue that it can lead to the exploitation and degradation of the things being commoditised, as well as the erosion of social relations and cultural values.¹⁸ According to Naomi Klein, commodification can result in the loss of cultural identity and the homogenisation of cultures.¹⁹ As stated before, commodification is a complex and multifaceted concept that involves the transformation of goods, services, ideas, or people into marketable products or commodities. While commodification can bring economic benefits, it can also lead to the exploitation and degradation of the things being commoditised, as well as the erosion of social relations and cultural values.

Theoretical Framework

Several theoretical frameworks can be applied to understand the impact of globalisation on the commodification of African Arts: A critical analysis. However, the most appropriate is the theory of commodity fetishism. The Proponent of this theory is David Harvey. David Harvey's work on commodity fetishism builds upon Karl Marx's concept, which describes how social relationships between people are mediated by commodities, obscuring the labour that goes into producing them. Harvey applies this idea to contemporary capitalist systems, highlighting how commodity fetishism masks exploitation and drives capitalist accumulation.

The theorist argues that social and labour relationships involved in producing commodities are obscured, making commodities seem valuable in themselves. Commodities are valued based on market demand and supply, rather than their actual use value or labour input. Commodities take on a mystical quality, with their value appearing inherent rather than a product of social relationships.

Harvey's Perspective posits that commodity fetishism conceals the exploitation of workers and unequal distribution of value by obscuring labour relationships. Commodity fetishism fuels capitalist accumulation by creating new markets, products, and desires.²⁰ His work explores the relationship between postmodernism and capitalism, including the concept of commodity fetishism. Harvey's writings often engage with Marxist theory, providing insights into commodity fetishism and its relevance to contemporary capitalism.

The theory of commodity fetishism is highly relevant to this research on "The Impact of Globalisation on the Commodification of African Arts: A Critical Analysis." This theory, rooted in Marx's ideas and further developed by David Harvey, can help analyse the transformation of African art into commodities, where market value often overshadows cultural significance and labour.

The Homogenisation of African Art

The homogenisation of African art is a pressing concern in the era of globalisation, where the boundaries between cultures are becoming increasingly blurred. With the rise of globalisation, African art has become more accessible and appealing to a broader audience worldwide. However, this increased exposure has also led to the homogenisation of African art, resulting in the loss of cultural identity and uniqueness. Globalization has facilitated the spread of Western art market trends and tastes, influencing the production and consumption of African art. This has led to a loss of traditional techniques and cultural significance, as African artists adapt to meet the demands of the global market. The dominance of Western art institutions and markets has also contributed to the marginalisation of local art forms and the suppression of African cultural identities.²¹

The impact of globalisation on African art is multifaceted. On one hand, it has provided opportunities for African artists to gain international recognition and exposure. On the other hand, it has led to the commercialisation of African art, threatening the authenticity and cultural significance of traditional art forms. As a result, many African artists are forced to navigate the complexities of the global art market, often at the expense of their cultural heritage.²² Cultural homogenisation is not a new phenomenon, but its effects are more pronounced in the modern era due to technological advancements and the increased interconnectedness of the world's economies and societies. The spread of Western

cultural values and norms through media and technology has contributed significantly to the homogenisation of African art, often overshadowing local cultural practices and expressions.²³

The loss of cultural identity and uniqueness in African art is a critical issue that requires immediate attention. It is essential to understand the dynamics of globalization and its impact on African art, as well as the role of Western art market trends and tastes in shaping the production and consumption of African art. By examining these factors, we can gain insights into the challenges facing African artists and the measures that can be taken to preserve the cultural significance and uniqueness of African art. In recent years, scholars have highlighted the need to promote cultural diversity and preserve local art forms in the face of globalisation. This can be achieved through initiatives that support local art industries, promote cultural exchange programs, and provide platforms for African artists to showcase their work. By taking these steps, it will help to mitigate the effects of cultural homogenisation and ensure the continued relevance and significance of African art in the global cultural landscape.²⁴

The importance of preserving African cultural identity and uniqueness cannot be overstated. African art is not just a form of creative expression but also a reflection of the continent's rich cultural heritage. The loss of cultural identity and uniqueness in African art would not only diminish the cultural significance of the art but also erase the history and experiences of the African people. The homogenization of African art is a complex issue that requires a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of globalization and its impact on local cultures. By examining the effects of globalization on African art and the role of Western art market trends and tastes, we can gain insights into the challenges facing African artists and the measures that can be taken to preserve the cultural significance and uniqueness of African art. Ultimately, it is essential to promote cultural diversity and preserve local art forms to ensure the continued relevance and significance of African art in the global cultural landscape.²⁵

The Exploitation of African Artists

The exploitation of African artists is a pressing concern in the global art market, where the unequal distribution of benefits has led to a significant disparity in the financial rewards received by African artists compared to external parties. Globalisation and the commodification of African art have exacerbated this issue, creating a system where African artists are often marginalised and excluded from the financial benefits of their work.²⁶

The global art market's emphasis on profit and market value has resulted in a situation where African artists receive minimal benefits from their work, while external parties, such as galleries, collectors, and middlemen, reap most of the financial rewards. This exploitation is perpetuated by a lack of transparency and fairness in the art market, making it difficult for African artists to negotiate fair prices for their work. Historically, African artists have faced significant challenges in the art market, including segregation, discrimination, and limited access to resources and opportunities. Despite these obstacles, many African artists have achieved success and recognition, but the underlying issues of exploitation and unequal distribution of benefits remain.

The exploitation of African artists is not only an economic issue but also a cultural one. The appropriation of African art and cultural expressions by external parties can lead to the loss of cultural identity and significance, as well as the erasure of the cultural context in which the art was created. Furthermore, the emphasis on profit and market value can result in the homogenisation of African art, reducing its cultural significance and uniqueness.

To address the exploitation of African artists, it is essential to promote fair and transparent practices in the art market. This can be achieved through initiatives such as fair trade art programs, artist-led organisations, and advocacy groups that support African artists and promote their work. Additionally, increasing access to resources and opportunities, such as education, training, and mentorship programs, can help African artists navigate the art market and negotiate fair prices for their work. Ultimately, the exploitation of African artists is a complex issue that requires a nuanced understanding of the global art market and its impact on African artists. By examining the dynamics of globalization and commodification, as well as the role of external parties in the art market, we can gain insights into the challenges facing African artists and the measures that can be taken to promote fair and equitable practices in the art market.

In the context of Africa, the exploitation of resources, including art, is a broader issue that reflects the continent's history of colonisation and marginalisation. Foreign corporations and powers have often exploited Africa's natural resources, including oil, gas, and minerals, without providing significant benefits to local populations. Similarly, the exploitation of African artists reflects a broader pattern of cultural and economic exploitation, where external parties profit from African creativity and resources without providing fair compensation or recognition.²⁷

The Commodification of Cultural Heritage

The commodification of cultural heritage, particularly traditional African art, has become a pressing concern in the era of globalisation. The process of transforming cultural expressions, practices, and traditions into marketable goods and services has significant implications for the cultural significance and well-being of the communities from which they originate. According to Caleb A. Folorunso, globalisation is "the process of world shrinkage, of distances getting shorter, things moving closer," and this phenomenon has led to increased cross-cultural exchange and the emergence of cultural industries that package and sell cultural products to cater to consumer demands.²⁸

However, the commodification of traditional African art often disregards the cultural significance and context of the artefacts, leading to the exploitation of African artists and communities. The global demand for African art objects has fuelled the looting and destruction of cultural heritage sites, resulting in the devaluation of African cultural heritage and the marginalization of local artists. As Folorunso notes, "the ongoing global demand for African art objects continues to fuel the looting and destruction of prehistoric periods".²⁹

The impact of globalization on the commodification of traditional African art is multifaceted. On one hand, it provides opportunities for African artists to gain international recognition and exposure. On the other hand, it leads to the commercialization of African art, threatening the authenticity and cultural significance of traditional art forms. The emphasis on marketability and profitability can result in the standardization and homogenization of cultural expressions, stripping away their authenticity and distinctiveness.³⁰

Cultural appropriation and exploitation are also significant concerns in the commodification of traditional African art. The adoption of African cultural elements by dominant cultures without proper recognition or respect for their cultural significance can lead to the misrepresentation or misinterpretation of cultural practices, perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing power imbalances. According to George Nicholas, awareness of how the appropriation and commodification of cultural heritage affects Indigenous peoples is much needed, as Indigenous heritage is too often viewed as "public domain," free for the taking.³¹

The commodification of cultural heritage also raises questions about the role of intellectual property rights in protecting cultural expressions and traditional knowledge. While intellectual property laws aim to safeguard the rights of creators and provide them with control over the commercial use of their cultural assets, striking a balance between protection and promoting cultural exchange and creativity can be challenging.³² The commodification of traditional African art is a complex issue that requires a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of globalisation and its impact on local cultures. By examining the effects of globalisation on the commodification of traditional African art, we can gain insights into the challenges facing African artists and communities and the measures that can be taken to promote fair and equitable practices in the art market.

Globalisation and the Art Market

Globalisation has profoundly impacted the art market, presenting both opportunities and challenges for African artists. The increased interconnectedness of the world has enabled artists to showcase their work globally, reaching new audiences and markets. Digital platforms, international exhibitions, and global art fairs have been instrumental in promoting African art, allowing artists to gain international recognition and connect with collectors and art enthusiasts worldwide.³³ The global art market's growth has also led to increased interest in African art, with contemporary African artists gaining recognition and accolades. The use of digital platforms, such as social media and online galleries, has democratised access to the art market, enabling artists to showcase their work without traditional gatekeepers. This shift has opened up new opportunities for African artists to establish successful careers and gain recognition beyond their local communities.³⁴

However, navigating the global art world poses significant challenges for African artists. The dominance of Western art markets and institutions can make it difficult for African artists to gain fair recognition and compensation for their work. Cultural appropriation and exploitation are also concerns, as African art is often absorbed into the global market without proper understanding, credit, or compensation. The art market's emphasis on profit and market value can also lead to the commodification of African art, threatening the authenticity and cultural significance of traditional art forms. Furthermore, the pressure to conform to global market trends can compromise an artist's unique voice and cultural identity.³⁵

Despite these challenges, many African artists are successfully navigating the global art world, leveraging digital platforms, collaborations, and international exhibitions to showcase their work. The future of African art looks promising, with a growing recognition of the importance of diversity, inclusivity, and representation in the art world. As the art market continues to evolve, it is essential to prioritize fair practices, cultural sensitivity, and support for African artists to ensure their work is valued and recognised appropriately. The African art market is expected to experience significant growth, driven by the adoption of new technologies like artificial intelligence and non-fungible tokens (NFTs). These technologies will shape the way artists create, discover, and distribute their work, providing new opportunities for growth and innovation. Education and awareness about African art, the benefits of new technologies, and ethical considerations will be crucial in fostering a sustainable and thriving art market.³⁶

Cultural Appropriation and the Globalisation of African Art

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Conclusion

The impact of globalisation on the commodification of African arts is a complex issue that warrants critical analysis. Globalisation has transformed the ways African art is produced, consumed, and perceived globally, creating new opportunities for artistic expression and economic growth. However, it has also led to the commodification of African arts, in which cultural expressions and traditional art forms are transformed into marketable goods and services. This phenomenon raises important questions about cultural ownership, intellectual property rights, and the ethics of cultural exchange.

The commodification of African arts is often accompanied by the exploitation and appropriation of African cultural heritage. Western art markets and institutions frequently dictate the terms of the global art trade, marginalising African artists and cultural producers and preventing them from fully benefiting from their contributions. The emphasis on profit and market value can also lead to the homogenisation of African art, reducing its cultural significance and uniqueness.

In conclusion, the impact of globalisation on the commodification of African arts highlights the need for a more nuanced and contextual understanding of the global art market. To promote fair and equitable practices, it is essential to recognise the agency and autonomy of African artists and communities. This can be achieved by supporting

initiatives that empower African cultural producers, promoting transparency and accountability in the art market, and fostering a deeper appreciation of the cultural significance and context of African art. By prioritising the needs and interests of African artists and communities, the global art market can become more inclusive and equitable, ensuring that African arts continue to thrive both as a source of cultural expression and as a driver of economic growth.

Recommendations

Here are some recommendations based on the topic "The Impact of Globalisation on the Commodification of African Arts: A Critical Analysis":

- **Promote Fair Trade Practices:** Encourage fair trade practices in the African art market to ensure that artists receive fair compensation for their work. This can be achieved through initiatives such as fair trade certification, transparent pricing, and direct sales to collectors.
- **Support African Art Institutions:** Support African art institutions, such as museums, galleries, and art schools, to promote the development of African art and provide opportunities for African artists to showcase their work.
- **Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness:** Promote cultural sensitivity and awareness among art collectors, dealers, and enthusiasts to appreciate African art in its cultural context. This can be achieved through education and outreach programs that highlight the cultural significance and meaning of African art.
- **Empower African Artists:** Empower African artists to take control of their own careers and artistic practices. This can be achieved through initiatives such as artist-led workshops, mentorship programs, and online platforms that provide access to global markets.
- **Develop Policies and Regulations:** Develop policies and regulations that protect the rights of African artists and communities, including intellectual property rights, cultural heritage protection, and fair labour practices. This can help to prevent the exploitation and appropriation of African cultural expressions.
- **Encourage Collaborative Approaches:** Encourage collaborative approaches between African artists, art institutions, and Western art markets to promote mutual understanding and respect. This can be achieved through initiatives such as artist residencies, cultural exchange programs, and collaborative exhibitions.
- **Support Digital Platforms:** Support digital platforms that promote African art and provide opportunities for African artists to showcase their work globally. This can include online galleries, social media, and e-commerce platforms.
- **Foster Community Engagement:** Foster community engagement and participation in the development of African art, including community-based art initiatives, public art projects, and cultural festivals. This can help to promote the cultural significance and meaning of African art.
- These recommendations can help to promote fair and equitable practices in the African art market, support the development of African art, and empower African artists and communities.

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