

A Study on the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Pop Music Production and Dissemination in Kenya

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Abstract

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic caused disruptions in the creation and dissemination of pop music in Kenya. The pandemic forced pop musicians to use innovative methods in magnitudes that had never been experienced by musicians since the invention of music technology in the mid-19th century. The pandemic necessitated the need for pop musicians to develop innovative technological methods for musical production, performance, and dissemination. This study examined the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the musical production, performance, and dissemination in Kenya. The study objectives were two-fold: (1) To investigate how COVID-19 opened new avenues for live music production, and (2) How COVID-19 changed the music consumption and dissemination modalities across various age-groups. We relied on ethnographic data that was largely descriptive in character while looking at how pop musicians created and disseminate music in Kenya during the pandemic. This literature review looks at the music making and performance of popular genres during the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya which include Afro-fusion, Afro-soul, Afro-pop, *Genge*, Hip-hop, Jazz, *Bongo*, Alternative music and Rhythm and Blues. For our analysis, we considered only the research on popular musical genres such as Afro-fusion, Afro-Soul, Afro-pop, *Genge*, Hip-hop, Jazz, *Bongo*, Alternative, and Rhythm and blues. We collected data from organizations including UNESCO, Kenya Nairobi horns music project, Café Ngoma, Kenyan research on popular music and popular music articles written during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study showed that digital music modalities such as music streaming, TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram became extremely popular as musicians spent more time at home producing pop music for the consumer market. On the other hand, the lifting of pandemic restrictions in public life brought back live pop music events, which are currently seeing a rise in demand.

Keywords: COVID-19, pop music, Kenyan electropop music culture, music technology, social media, fourth industrial revolution

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1. Introduction

The emergence of the COVID -19 pandemic caused disruptions in the creation and dissemination of pop music in Kenya. The pandemic forced musicians to use these innovative methods in magnitudes that had never been experienced by musicians since the invention of music technology in the mid-19th-century. Due to the pandemic, popular musicians in Kenya experienced the artistic disruptions that diminished their creative development thus severely affecting their creative industry and livelihood. The COVID-19 Pandemic was a quintessential challenge for popular artistes requiring them to apply adaptive and transformative music creation and dissemination approaches. A country's musical landscape is expressed through the way in which its people create and consume music. Music not only shapes the culture of a country, but it also forms its basis for expression, entertainment as well as communication (Porter, 2000). These basic premises of music were interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic (the pandemic).

The Kenyan society was abounding with active music-making opportunities by contemporary artistes up until the onset of the pandemic at the beginning of 2020. The pandemic caused notable disruptions to the Kenyan entertainment industry which includes the music and theatre arts industries, which have heavily relied on live concerts, outdoor meetings, live plays and audiences to earn income for artistes pre-COVID-19 pandemic (UNESCO, 2020). The Kenya Government's policy instituted in April of 2020 required the closure of bars and restaurants and banned all public gatherings including entertainment music events. These bans had a negative economic impact on the income for practitioners in the industry, such as disk jockeys, karaoke hosts and musicians. Prior to the pandemic, the Kenyan people had expropriated music in their cultural and socio-economic wellbeing as it is customary. Mutisya & Banda (2019) were poignant when they wrote:

Music has an emotional and intellectual impact on societies and is therefore an effective tool in politics as it aids to consolidate, inform, establish, legitimize, criticize, question or break political order. (p. 214)

Just before the pandemic emerged, the Kenyan adults were spending their weekends attending social live music concerts staged in businesses such as stadiums, bars, and restaurants. These social musical performances not only promoted the well-being of the people, but also strengthened intra-cultural, inter-generational, and inter-ethnic cohesion. Additionally, the younger population engaged in musical entertainment with theatre productions and live music performances. Popular music artistes voiced their concerns to the Kenyan government regarding artistes' economic hardships as they had no sources of income during the COVID-19 pandemic. Amid the COVID-19 disruptions, Mutiso (2020) notes that music producers transformed their private homes into studios for music production to cut production costs. In addition, Mbasu (2021) notes that DJs moved from music entertainment spaces to digital platforms to continue entertaining their fans during "Lockdown Parties." These were informal gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic usually at musician's homes where live music would be performed indoors with food and drinks served. The closure of bars and restaurants coupled with the government ban on all public gatherings meant that Karaoke hosts and upcoming artistes, lighting and sound technicians, venue managers and employees, and event organizers lost their revenue (Shelmith, 2020). Upcoming artistes who often curtail raised for more prominent musicians did not get any recognition and this inhibited their ambitions to stardom. The pandemic prompted a global epidemiological circumstance which brought positive changes in popular artistes' creativity and artistic distribution (Mak, Fluharty & Fancourt, 2021).

Despite the pandemic, the Kenya popular music scene reached several milestones due to artistes' efforts of breaking away from the generic norms of creating music that only identifies with their local audience. Instead, the artistes ventured into fusions of global genres to attract global online audience. The pandemic inspired artistes to incorporate a wide range of musical forms, instruments, and dances. The social media factor brought musical ideas into the home studios, with artistes experimenting with new musical instruments, song forms, and dances which shifted to incorporate new sounds or developed new traditions. This trend has made the Kenyan pop music industry to rank highly around east and central Africa (KultureVulturez, 2022). The strategy employed by popular Kenyan artistes to identify with international audiences has given rise to Kenyan electropop music subculture. The Kenyan electropop music is a subculture that creates and consumes a hybrid musical genre that combines elements of Kenyan traditional musical idioms with electronic and pop genres of the West. Through collaboration between Kenyan artistes and other international artistes across Africa and around the world, this emerging subculture has subsequently brought international accolades to the Kenyan electropop music industry.

However, many highlighted underlying challenges which began at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic have been disrupting the success of Kenyan music artistes (Siele, 2020). Despite these challenges, there were still perceptions among Kenyans that the pop musicians continued to embrace their luxurious or affluent lifestyles during the pandemic. To the contrary, most artistes lost their basic income during the pandemic and in fact, are still inflicted by the economic downturn. Their economic struggles were manifest during the pandemic. In addition to the pandemic, the other most prevalent factors slowing down the economic growth of the Kenyan entertainment industry are high piracy rates, lack of artistes' knowledge and awareness of music copyright law and mismanagement of funds in government bodies such as the Music Copyright Society of Kenya (MCSK) and the Permanent Presidential Music Commission (PPMC). These bodies are mandated by the government to support, develop and promote the Kenyan entertainment industry (PPMC, 2020; WIPO, 2007). The mismanagement of resources within the agencies which are tasked with supporting local music gave rise to many artistes using platforms such as Spotify to disseminate their music during the pandemic. Cumulatively, the total global music consumerism on Spotify rose by 31% in the first quarter of 2020 (BBC News, 2020).

2. Popular music as pop culture

Defining Popular Culture has always been problematic, due to the evasive and polemical nature of the words "popular" and "culture" which in the context of our paper are conceived to be pre-set in compliance with the ethnic, racial, gender, economic, geographical, artistic and teleological parameters of the Kenyan people. Pop music is a subset or constituent of pop culture. In this respect, Adorno (1941) proposes a close examination and synthesis of the characteristics of music to be considered in understanding the musical correlates with pop culture. Adorno (1941) conceives the musical material as a plausible angle from which popular music can be meaningfully defined as popular culture.

In this paper, we present popular music as pop culture in the Kenyan context. Kenya's popular music of today however, cannot be removed from its early historical and contemporary milieu such as Kenya's political and socio-economic independence. These connections can be gleaned in the work of Hall (1997) who defines popular culture as "whatever is distinctive about the 'way of life' of a people, community, nation or social

group” (p. 2). This idea is further corroborated by Wanjala and Kebaya (2016) who opine that Kenyan popular music must be seen from the historico-political space it is consumed and the social references it may perceive and represent. Kenya’s popular culture therefore, tends to embrace these historical issues and reflects upon them through its popular music.

Popular music serves as an identifier among Kenyan youth. Wanjala et al., (2016) have succinctly noted that this kind of “music represents an important cultural sphere where identities are affirmed, challenged, torn apart and reconstructed” (p. 20). This argument infers that music in fact influences the character and identity of the Kenyan youthful generation. The Kenyan younger generation therefore, shares the same sub-culture. du Gay, Hall, Jane, Mackay & Negus (1997) have referred to this idea as “a shared meaning and conceptual map” (p.18). Kenya’s pop music raises provocative questions such as differences in ethnic and sub-ethnic histories and traditions, ethnological, racial, political, social, and religious affiliations within traditional, neo-traditional as well as contemporary settings. According to Wanjala et al. (2016), popular music most often depicts the context in which it is created. During the Covid-19 pandemic, however, these subtle differences seemed to fuse into a unifying art form that emphasized the use of lyrics within songs. This common trait is linked to the production of pop music with characteristics germane to the entertainment culture of the Covid-19 lock-down economy. For example, popular rap artiste Benzema released a hit song ‘*Pandemik*’ which addressed the impact of the nightly curfew implemented by the Kenyan government that commenced from 7PM to 5AM during weekdays and for the entire weekend starting on Saturday 3PM. The curfews impacted independent pop artists within the music industry who operated entertainment clubs during the nights on weekdays and as well as during the weekend.

3. Language

The pandemic saw a rise in linguistic traits in Kenya’s pop music. The Kenyan youth have assimilated new shared languages that have emerged through the pop music. These languages were acquired through the process of phonological fusion - which occurs when the phonemes of two or more different speech stimuli are combined into a new percept that is linguistically more complex than either of the original languages (Cutting, 1975). This fusing of tongues, for example, English and the Kenyan local Luo language as can be heard in the pop song titled *Unbwogable* (Unintimidated) by a music group named *Gidi Gidi Maji Maji* is a prototype of a new linguistic trait in Kenyan pop music. This trait breaks with the earlier constructed past where there was a separation of ethnic identities from colonial hegemony at the expense of the multiple and fluid identities that are increasingly defining postcolonial Kenya (Nyairo et al., 2005). The use of fusion language is notable in many pop songs in Kenya which use *Sheng*, an English-Swahili fusion, which is mainly formed when syllables in a common word are interchanged, to create a new word with the same meaning. For example, the word ‘story’, would be *rysto*. Milu (2016) argues that ‘Kenyan artistes use translingualism to construct new ethnicities’ based on how the people of the culture sound, and not based on the consumers’ place of origin or cultural heritage (p. 74). Translingualism is also culturally influenced by many common languages in Kenya such as Kikuyu and Luhya (Gatobu, 2019). The use of *Sheng* is a fundamental linguistic identifier for the Generation Z, (or Gen Z) population as the generation prides itself in having created something that is shared almost exclusively amongst the users. This has been corroborated by other scholars in observing that Gen Z individuals are completely changing the way people consume products (Wanjala, et al., 2016; Cagnin et al., 2022).

4. Kenyan Pop Music Trajectories

One of the compelling interpretations of Kenyan popular culture focuses on the way Kenyans embrace new ideologies while conforming to exotic lifestyles. These new ideologies are favoured by the younger generation due to cultural diversity, individual freedoms, personal choices, gender equality, gender diversity and identity, and the transfer of knowledge through social media. Exotic human lifestyles which incorporate pop music tend to have a profound effect on urbanization. This relationship of urbanization and pop music is what Copland (1982) referred to as a “Subsystem and the field of social activity within which musical communication occurs” (p. 113). Ondieki (2010) associates urbanization with the introduction and accessibility of Western music instruments and the increase of Pan ethnicity in social domains which in his assertion, have led to the rise of popular music in Kenya the early 20th century.

At the turn of the 21st century, [notwithstanding the pandemic] the Kenyan popular music consumer index has risen in part due to the Generations Y and Z which makes up a staggering 48.3 per cent of Kenya’s population (KNBS, 2019). From a cross-generational standpoint, further interpretation to differentiate popular music from traditional music may bring an insight into the fundamental characteristics that define Kenya’s popular music more expressly. Kenya’s pop music is made up of fusions between African traditional musical elements and Euro-centric styles (Masasabi, 2005). However, over the last decade, several sub-genres have emerged largely driven by the assimilations of Kenyan neotraditionally fused musical nuances and those acquired through international expropriation through the abundance of media access and human migration. These Kenyan genres include but are not limited to afro-fusion, afro-pop-, jazz, *bongo*, alternative, reggae, afro-

soul, *genge*, an urban new school such as RnB, and hip-hop among others.

A clear judgment discerning the popularity of the aforementioned genres as constituents of pop music in Kenya during the Pandemic can be arrived at only by strict attention to their fundamental characteristics. While these characteristics vary broadly in the musical nuances such as tempo, intonation, rhythm, tone, language and form, the overarching impetus is the fact that the creative endeavour is devoid of socio-cultural boundaries. Due to the pandemic, the lockdowns were in particular, a motivating factor for pop artistes to experiment with musical creation premised on the social media's playlists that were based on both multicultural and multi-generational musical preferences. According to UNCTAD (2020) while digital solutions do not provide the same aesthetic value as live musical performances, many Kenyan artistes moved to digital platforms to disseminate their music for economic gain. Mass media houses in Kenya provided unlimited access to the global pop music trends during the pandemic. For this reason, pop music tended to be more readily available through the networks which total to about 90 radio and 64 television stations, as well as on social media outlets including YouTube, Spotify, TikTok, and Vimeo. While Carlson et al., (2021) provides initial insights on the impact of COVID-19 on music consumption, this research expands their findings to the Kenyan context – where the digital industry emerged substantively during the Covid-19 lending itself to Schwab (2016) referred to as “the 4th industrial revolution” – which specifically impacted the commercialization of Kenya's popular and indigenous music. Despite Kenya's poor track record with industrialization, Kenyan pop musicians parodied their American and British counterparts by expropriating the social media within the fourth industrial revolution framework. The Kenyan artistes digitally recreated their sub-genres to reflect exotic musical traits that weaved into the quasi-Afrobeat that illuminates the neotraditional musical landscapes upon which Kenya's pop music is predicated.

4.1 Afro-fusion

Afro-fusion is defined as music that essentially fuses African rhythms and contemporary styles and instruments (Ruguru, 2018). Chukwu & Unaegbu (2014) have referred to Afro-fusion as a synthesization process. They argue that this process “helps systematize the present popular African music practices especially by the young artistes and music educators to seriously preserve African musical history for posterity” (p. 2). In Kenya, some popular Afro-fusion artistes include Makadem, Suzanna Owiyo, Tetu Shani, H art the Band and Sauti Sol. Sauti Sol's and H art the Band's Afro-fusion sounds depict strong cultural influences of the people from Luo community, backed by rich African syncopated rhythms played on Europe instruments. Their characteristic sounds are defined by beautiful guitar riffs, catchy beats, tuneful melodies that are easy to remember, and relatable lyrics in Luo, Swahili, English or Sheng- Kenyan Swahili-English slang. During the pandemic, Sauti Sol released their long-anticipated album “Midnight Train,” online dubbing it a Virtual Album Experience (Writes, 2020).

The pandemic opened new vistas and perspectives on how musicians created, performed and disseminated their music. Technology proved a transformative and innovation impetus to Kenya's pop music industry. December of 2020 was a challenging time for many Kenyans who were not able to travel for their Christmas holidays as is the norm, due to lockdowns by the government and the ban on public gatherings (Mueni, 2020). This travel ban inspired the pop music group Sauti Sol to stage a live Christmas Concert on its YouTube platform named *A Sol Christmas*, which brought together several popular artistes. The aim was to initiate a celebrative Christmas season among the people during the Christmas to help them overcome the anxiety and stress they had thus far experienced from the pandemic. Young musicians used YouTube to perform their pandemic-themed music to entertain and also to educate the public on healthy practices to stave off the virus. Salome Wairimu, a 12-year-old musician rose to fame after releasing her song titled *Janga la Corona* (The catastrophe of Corona). Salome used her music to remind the public to observe the Ministry of Health's directives, which preventive public health measures such as handwashing regularly, proper use of facemasks, staying at home when sick, and keeping safe during the COVID 19 pandemic (Ministry of Health, 2021). Wairimu's (2020) lyrics in her “Janga la Corona” provides a stark reminder to Kenyans that the pandemic is not the common cold when she sings:

*Ugonjwa huu kwa jina la korona
Ulilipuka mwaka jana uhani nchini Kenya
Viongozi pamoja na wananchi
Sote tulidhani ni homa ya kawaida.*
(Wairimu, 2020, stanza 1)

The Swahili lyrics is translated as follows:

This disease called Corona
It struck last year in the country of Kenya
Leaders and citizens
Thought it was the common cold
(Wairimu, 2020, stanza 1)

4.2 Afro-Soul

Afro-soul, a fusion of soul music with traditional African elements still embeds musical characteristics that soul music in the 1960's was identified with, including: polytonality, basic blues sound and idioms, vocal expression, lyrical subjects of love and betrayal, politics and every-day life and performed in a quasi-religious disposition (Neal, 1997; Stephen, 1984). According to Stephen (1984), Soul musical style stems from "blues-based dance music and the black gospel tradition" (p. 21). Stephens (1984) notes that Soul music has great influences from its predecessors, the blues, black gospel style, motown and the Memphis soul. Pioneer artists of the Soul genre such as Aretha Franklin, James Brown and Ray Charles popularized Soul music with their grooves, adlibs and their unique talent for entertainment. In addition, Fila-Bakabadio (2014) argues that afro/neo-soul music seems to merge disconnected histories and cultures through their lyrics and sound, stating that 'they reflect an African past through percussions, acoustic drums, syncopated beat or polyphonic background vocals and refer to an Afro-descendant present' (para. 22). In 1960 America, the term 'soul' was used to identify any conceptual idea relating to black culture, at a time when black people were trying to liberate themselves from oppression and segregation (Lordi, 2020; Stephens, 1984). Neal (1997) denotes soul music to be directly "linked to evocations of black communal pride' during the Civil Rights Movement era" (p. 118).

Notable Afro-soul artistes in Kenya include Olivia Ambani, Atemi, Harry Kimani, Kasiva, Serro and boy band *Men of Soul*. During the pandemic, the Kenyan music group including Men of Soul embarked on live performance on their YouTube platform Afro-Soul music for their audience. Their genre was uniquely Kenyan with idiomatic musical nuances that elicited soulful tunes backed by harmonious acoustic guitar, neo soul melodies, and well-blended harmonies. With its origin in the United States, neo soul music is a relatively new music genre with a mixture of modern R&B, hip-hop and classic soul (Meeus, 2010). Both the Afro-soul and neo soul not only found their way into the Kenyan musical parlance during the pandemic, but were prototypes of the creative industry which blended what Herbert et al. (2021) referred to as pandemic-instigated emotions such as sadness, anxiety, and anger, and musical rhythms, melodies, harmonies and dirges derived from illness or loss of loved ones.

4.3 Afro-pop

Inspired by musicians such as Fela Kuti, Afro-pop music is an acculturative product of the African folk music which began in Nigeria, it is the congruent collaboration of creativity and politico-socio-economic activities of the mid-1940s (Onwuegbuna, 2010; Akombo, 2016). The popularity of Afro-pop arose due to structural and functionalism that had then permeated across the socio-cultural class of the Nigerian people. This genre was soon assimilated throughout Africa with each country appropriating it to its cultural milieu. In Kenya, pop music is undertaken in order to highlight artistes' communicative capabilities (Gitonga, 2009). According to a report by UNCTAD (2020), digital platforms helped artistes cope with anxiety and stress during the COVID-19 crisis. Popular Afro-pop artistes such as Tetu Shani, whose music is inspired by music of Fela Kuti, dedicated his digital platform to sharing Afro-pop music and earning a living, now that live shows were significantly interrupted (UNCTAD, 2020).

4.4 Genge

Genge is a sub-category of Kenyan pop music within the rap genre which uses *Sheng*, a type of urban slang - a mixture of Swahili, English and other Kenyan local dialects (Wasike, 2011). This genre has been popularized by Peter Anunda, also known as *Jua Cali* although he is not the inventor of the genre. This kind of rap musical genre has been developed for over a decade with varying artistic renditions in the Kenyan musical landscapes. Rose (1999) described *genge* as:

A genre that privileges flow, layering and raptures in sound, or simply put, the ways in which the rapper's lyrical lines are set in motion, broken abruptly, with sharp angular breaks yet they sustain motion and energy through fluidity and flow" (p. 194).

During the Covid-19 lockdown, listeners and performers indicated that they were grateful for the ban on everyday activities so that they could stay at home and enjoy the *genge* music using the online platforms. The lack of live performances had a negative impact on revenue generation for the musicians thereby resulting in the musicians using online platforms to market *genge* music. *Genge* became a popular musical genre on the Kenyan media for online music consumption. Online music consumption was the only available means to consume music since the online musical experience was ideally the "state of the art" (Zorn & Garcia, 2020, p.89). During this time, *Gengetone* sub-genre also increased in production. In *Gengetone* music, one may hear circuitry in the electronic sounds of the keyboards and guitars fused with virtual instruments with rap lyrics in *Sheng*. *Gengetone* artists took their music to online platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and Spotify. According to the BBC (2020) Spotify gained 6 million new subscribers in the first few months of 2020. NENDO (2020) noted that online platforms such as TikTok, Instagram live, and YouTube experienced an increase in their viewership during the pandemic, where artists also disseminated their music.

Table 1 shows NENDO’s report on the trend.

Table 1.

Rising demand of digital platforms for dissemination of music

Digital Platform	Demand
TikTok	According to Nendo’s 2020 Trend Report, on Kenya’ music consumption during the pandemic, TikTok grew 487% in downloads compared to 2018.
Instagram Live	Kenyan R&B and Hip-Hop artist Nyashinski performed to a 15,0000 YouTube livestream audience and to 8,000 people on his Instagram Live.
YouTube	As an emerging platform for DJs and entertainers to livestream content, DJs such as DJ Bash, DJ Nijo, and G-Money are among DJs brought their music to their audiences. Their technology switched between YouTube, Instagram, and Vimeo for live streaming as artists sought the ideal platform to connect with their audiences.

Note. Adapted from NENDO (2020)

During the pandemic ‘The Good Company KE’ Kenyan band began YouTube live performance series called “The lockdown sessions,” where the band performed different musical genres for hour-long sessions every Friday. The YouTube live shows were very popular with consumers and generated revenue for band members. During one of their lockdown sessions, the band captioned an inspirational message on YouTube meant for their live audience. In the message they wrote “in these curfew and lockdown times, we can still manage fun times” (The Good Company KE, 2021). The music-making process for artistes involved bringing people together in through the online platform and uplifting the people’s spirits during the pandemic as well as generating income for the musicians through the digital platform.

4.5 Hip-hop

Hip-hop is a cultural movement that incorporates different elements of art forms. Riesch (2005) has noted that “since hip-hop’s origins during the mid-1970’s it has grown from a localized urban arts pastime to a multi-billion dollars a year industry” (p. 1). The roots of hip hop can also be linked to the political protest movements of Black Nationalism of the early 1970s and the impoverished ghettos of urban centres in the United States (Henderson, 1996). Mose (2013) argues that hip hop is unique to the particular area in which it is created and its divergence across global communities. In Kenyan, the hip hop characteristics are significantly different from those of Tanzanian hip hop based on the subtleness of the linguistic traits. While the Kenyan subgenre uses *Sheng*, the Tanzanian counterpart tends to stay within the *Kiswahili sanifu* or standardized Kiswahili. The pioneers of Kenyan hip hop include artistes such as Juliani, Nonini and Prezzo, who have used their music to highlight the politico-social dimension of the Kenyan culture. Kenyan hip hop pioneers seek to deconstruct the ideologies that surround hip hop culture, such as poverty, violence, drugs and bad behaviour among the youth, encouraging their consumers to ‘hustle’ in order to earn a decent living (Mose, 2013).

However, at the emergence of the pandemic, the overarching themes were altered to address the pandemic. The pop musicians of the genre took on broader themes not just for the enlightenment of the public on healthy practices to contain the pandemic but also to creative domains that would generate income for themselves. Pioneer hip hop artiste Jua Cali held an online concert to raise awareness on the socio-economic inequalities highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The concert aimed to bring awareness to the Kenyan government, whose lockdown measures had made it impossible for Kenya’s less fortunate communities to protect themselves from the COVID-19 Virus or earn a livelihood. The musicians took the opportunity and used their digital following to raise awareness on pressing socio-economic issues through their music.

In Kenya, the very idea of ‘pastime’ concerning how hip-hop consumers accessed this genre during the pandemic could not be more opportunistic. Gen Z, which makes up 43% of the Kenyan population, invigorated the consumer index for popular music via online media. Hip-hop artistes for example, used Instagram worthy captions within hip-hop lyrics to get attention in the digital music spaces, in addition to punchlines and lyrical imagination (Wangeci, 2022). Popular hip-hop artistes in Kenya include Kaligraph Jones, Kahush, SSaru, Wakadinali, Ochungulo Family, Chris Kaiga and Wangeci. One noteworthy hip-hop group that debuted during the COVID-19 pandemic is the ‘Buruklyn Boyz’ who immediately gained momentum in the Kenya underground hip-hop scene and music spaces (Wangeci, 2022). The Burukln Boyz released ten music videos on their YouTube channel in 2020, only having live performances when the country opened up from the pandemic lockdowns in late 2021.

4.6 Jazz

Many authors have accredited the history and growth of Jazz to the 1920’s decade which is now referred to as ‘The age of Jazz’ (Gioia, 2011; Nelson, 2016). Famous legends of the genre such as Louis Amstrong and the Buddy Boldens band from New Orleans paved the way for the growing jazz scene that created subgenres

through its influence across the globe. For example, in 1940 South Africa, jazz was a blend of contemporary music that was popular in the townships and formed and identified a certain social status which often borrowed fashion and musical trends from American culture copied from television (Cohen, 2014). This seems to corroborate Wanjala and Kebaya's (2016) argument that popular music contributes to 'the formation of a social identity' within cultures (p. 25).

In Kenya, the musical pop culture has continued steadily to sub-divide to create other sub-cultures. According to Shelmith (2019), the Jazz music industry in Kenya started with artistes such as Mzee Ngala who is regarded as the father of a jazz sub-genre known as *Bango*. She notes that Mzee Ngala popularized bango in the coastal region of Kenya in the 20th Century. During the pandemic, pop artistes combined the Kenyan sounds with other nuances such as the *Taarab* (طرب or joy in Arabic) which are characterised by the heptatonic *maqamat* or scales of the Arabian musical cultures. *Bango* also has influence from Portuguese music with a Bossa nova accent from Latin America which places emphasis on the second beat. Even though Jazz music is characterised by brass instruments especially the trombones, horns, clarinets- and the saxophones, keyboards and guitars, the jazz music in Kenya combines both European and Kenyan indigenous instruments. Jazz has become one of the most popular genres, which has been spearheaded by the Safaricom International Jazz festival (popularly known as Jazz Fest) and the *Koroga* Festival (Ilado, 2021, Ministry of Sports, Culture and Heritage, 2022) which showcases both local and international jazz artistes. In 2020 and 2021, both the Safaricom Jazz Festival and the *Koroga* festival were cancelled due to the ban on public gatherings but pop artists continued to recreate jazz sub-genres such as *Bango* and made their music available through the social media.

4.7 Bongo

In the Kenya, popular music continues to evolve through various processes, hybridization, syncreticism, synthesis, and adaptation which often morph into newer sub-genres. Bongo music is a kind of hip-hop whose new and original renditions are a blend between foreign genres and local Kenyan musical styles. The global musical trends disseminated on media networks and the proximity of Kenya to Tanzania facilitates porous cultural boundaries making it feasible for Kenyan musicians to embrace these new musical sub-cultures. Oehrie & Emeka (2003) noted that the African people were inhabitants who share most of the elements of culture such as related languages and similar ecological conditions, economic, social ideological and social systems. Hence the Kenyan popular music known as *bongo* has its origins in the word *bongo* which is a hip-hop derivative of *ubongo*, meaning 'brain' in Swahili (Suriano, 2006). The use of *ubongo* as a pop-cultural expression has its roots in the city of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania during the economic crisis in the 1980s when people needed the 'big brain' to survive the hard-economic times. The early hip-hop music of the time was then referred to as "Bongo Flavour" (Nganyagwa 2005). The Kenyan variation that emerged during the pandemic is therefore, is a recreation of the Tanzanian variation albeit with subtleties in rhythm, melodies and the Kenyan Swahili which the Tanzanians refer to as *Kiswahili cha bara* - or inland Swahili as opposed to *Kiswahili sanifu* -or standard Swahili.

During the pandemic, *bongo* music in Kenya became popularized by Otile Brown, Susumila, and Willy Paul among others. These Kenyan artistes not only used *bongo music* to entertain and calm the anxieties of the listeners, but as Otieno (2021) notes, pop music is also used to educate, preserve the histories, and to communicate. For example, Mulemi (2021) notes that bongo's "... initial and subsequent lyrics blend contemporary transnational with local genres or styles and poignant footage of the COVID-19 medical facts and emergencies" (p.26). Young people particularly were intrigued by this genre. In a study on Kenyan popular music in secondary school music curriculum, (Adhiambo, 2021) found that young persons' favourite popular music genres were *Bongo flava* and Rhythm and Blues.

4.8 Alternative

The merge between modernity and traditional heritage has led to the creation of "Alternative" also known as *Nu Nairobi*, is a Kenyan genre which has been enhanced by technological advancements in musical instruments and composition software. Alternative music is music outside mainstream media and usually with a very niche and loyal following (Njogo, 2018). In Kenya, Alternative music has been popularised by monthly shows where alternative artistes create music to showcase and create awareness about their music (Writes, 2021). This genre exhibits the use of western synthesized instrumental sound in addition to traditional musical instruments such as the *nyatiti* (a Kenyan harp with 8 strings) which led to the sub-genres such as *Nyatitronix*, and *Bengatronix* which merges benga musical elements with synthesized sound (Njogo, 2018). Notable Kenyan alternative artistes include award-winning artistes and the founder of 'Blankets and Wine Festival' Muthoni the Drummer Queen, Tetu Shani, Serro, Noel Nderitu, Just A Band and upcoming artiste Zalali. Alternative music in Kenya has been exposed through 'Pawa 254', a sundowner event held twice a month by "non-commercial, East African artists who are committed to creating socially conscious music that educates and uplifts society" (Rajula, 2015).

Another notable event in Kenya is *Café Ngoma*, which is an awarding event organized by media and entertainment company *Café Ngoma* whose aim is to expose and promote Alternative music artistes, businesses and personalities in Kenya (Café Ngoma, 2022).

4.9 Rhythm'n Blues (R&B)

The term 'Rhythm'n Blues' (R&B) was coined by Jerry Wexler, an American music journalists and famed record producer who intended to use it as a marketing device in American popular culture in the late 1940s (Hopkin, 2021). Shortly thereafter, R&B became a part of the larger continuum of Black music created in the United States as derivative of musical convergence of blues, big band swing, and gospel. This genre has continued to grow around the world and Kenya is not an exception. Even though the R&B genre has an influence on the ethnic composition, class, and geographical location of the audience, this genre seems to enjoy popularity across generations in Kenya. This is mainly because the media houses disseminate it for the masses through radio stations, record shops, and music industry publications which all help with its propagation (Brackett, 1994). During the pandemic, R&B genre saw a rise in consumption with younger musical icons such as Sandra Solit, Ethan Muziki, Nikita Kering', and Noel Nderitu increasing their online musical presence of the genre.

5. Conclusion

This paper aimed at examining how Kenyan popular artistes mitigated the disruptions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found that the ban of public gatherings and live concerts and the closures of entertainment hubs such as bars and restaurants limited the artistes' abilities to produce and disseminate their music. This situation left them with no options but to turn to digital spaces to not only meet the demands of their music consumers but also for the sustainability of their businesses. This move gave rise to many digital live concerts on social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. The artistes offered online payment options so that their consumers could purchase tickets in order to get web links for performances. Kenyan popular artists used online payment services such as Mpesa – the leading mobile money transfer service in Kenya- for their local following, and CashApp- an online payment application introduced in the USA and Canada, for their international following. This unconventional method created new opportunities for artistes to share their music without the need of expenses for live venues thus providing an opportunity for artistes to launch their music creativity online with limited expenses.

The study indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic and the government bans on all entertainment businesses inspired Disk jockeys to produce their art by mixing music online. Record producers closed their rental studio spaces and began recording music from their own residential homes in order to reduce costs of renting recording studios. The home recording studio became a trend and is now popular among young aspiring record producers. The artistes codified the use of home digital spaces and continued to create, perform, and disseminate their music. The study showed that Kenyan popular artistes created music with health themes such as wearing of masks and sanitizing to promote safety awareness during the pandemic. Current trajectories indicate that pop music-making modalities in Kenya have been revamped following post-pandemic initiatives and recovery from the economic downturn following the pandemic. Digital pop music streaming has become a popular dissemination model as musicians continue to produce music at home for the consumer market and much less from rented recording studios in the urban centers. The removal of COVID-19 restrictions in public life has brought back live music events with a marked rise in demand. This research shows the COVID-19 pandemic impacted emerging pop artistes inspiring them to identify the digital platform as a trend for production, performance, and distribution of their music. The overall impact of COVID-19 on the pop music industry created the opportunity for pop artistes to become innovative in novel ways that thwarted the threat of the pandemic against the backdrop of the rapidly changing technological milieu in pop music production and consumer pathways in Kenya.

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