

THE INTERSECTION OF ART AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN NIGERIAN ART PRACTICE

Jeremiah Unimke & Bojor Enamhe

Abstract

The emergence and application of digital technology have greatly revolutionized the process of design and art practice generally. Digital technologies have become an integral part of contemporary art practice to the degree that traditional techniques are on the verge of less patronage in the age of artificial Intelligence that offers the luxury of speed, precision and reproduction. This integration of technology into art-making results in varied applications locally and globally, giving rise to diverse forms of digital expression. In Nigeria for instance, artists have employed the potential of digital tools to explore and maintain the rich and diverse Nigerian cultural heritage and traditional aesthetics. This paper draws from the works of these artists to advance the creative potential of technology for fostering indigenous aesthetics. Through a literature review and interviews with artists, designers and cultural practitioners, this paper establishes the contributions of selected artists to the ongoing digital revolution. By exploring the intersections and interactions between these domains, the paper seeks to contribute to ongoing scholarly discourse on the role of technology in fostering creativity, innovation, and cultural exchange in contemporary Nigerian society.

Introduction

The role and application of digital technologies in design and art practice signify a notable paradigm in today's global society (Manovich, 2001). This shift largely constructs a new and dynamic prism for understanding, perceiving, and interpreting art. Digitization is becoming a global culture that permits every aspect of human activities and endeavours, including art and design. As global cultures diffuse, less dominant cultures are likely to be suppressed or face outright decline. The question of maintaining cultural content in the face of digital

proficiency becomes necessary to maintain relevance and identity. It goes further to establish how cultural narratives are shaped, shared and interrogated in the age of new media. The link between digital technologies and art-making gets stronger by the day with the continuous advancement and upgrade in digital software and programs. Beyond the existing symbiotic relationship between technology, art and society, there exists another level of cognate interfusing of key stakeholders in the art world occasioned by the new order. The merging, which could be termed a digital melting pot in the artistic

process, brings a whole aura of freshness to the creative process that demands a conscious effort to unlearn and relearn new modes of art-making to stay afloat in the digital stream of ideas and techniques. The artists, media, the message, and the audience have become intermixed to a profound degree. What this means is that the key players in the art domain are intricately interlinked as opposed to what was obtainable in previous times. Paul (2015) buttresses this fact that artists benefit from digital tools, which provide unprecedented opportunities for experimentation, collaboration, and expression while Gere (2008) asserts that the medium through which art is created and consumed experiences a shift, with digital platforms offering expansive and accessible channels for artistic distribution. Collaboration and sharing have become dominant features that define art practice in the digital era.

In contrast, traditionally, content in art was perceived as the innate quality of an object that simplifies meaning, message and interpretation. Content as a requisite attribute of art has been redefined to imply the holistic make-up of any creative expression in the digital space. For instance, a photograph of a work of art circulated in social space

becomes content in a different context and application as meaning and message. Content becomes a holistic approach of the artist, his creative instincts, ideas and techniques. The content itself becomes more dynamic and interactive, facilitated by digital technologies that enable multimedia experiences and user engagement. Moreover, audiences are empowered to actively engage in the artistic journey, interacting with artworks in novel ways and contributing to the creative process and cultural dialogue surrounding them (Bishop, 2012).

By exploring the intersections and interactions between these domains, the study seeks to contribute to ongoing scholarly discourse on the role of technology in fostering creativity, innovation, and cultural exchange in contemporary Nigerian society. To say the least, digital tools offer unprecedented capabilities for experimentation, manipulation, and collaboration, empowering artists and designers to explore new creative possibilities (Paul, 2015). The current sharing culture opens a new form of ownership, participation and interaction through the proliferation of social media and platforms. This democratization of the creative process enables individuals to easily

create, share, and engage with art and design, bypassing traditional gatekeepers and perceived hierarchies and limitations of previous eras (Katz, 2012). Whereas, the democratization of the creative process makes art and design more accessible to a wider audience within record time (Jenkins, 2006). Fleischmann (2012) argues that one more factor that can be deciphered is the fact that the democratization of the creative process has led to the emergence of hybrid practices that blur disciplinary boundaries and incorporate elements from multiple fields while Gere (2008) thinks that, digitalization has reshaped the way people perceive, consume, and interact with art and design, influencing everything from exhibition formats and museum experiences to art market dynamics and cultural identities. Throwing more light on digital technologies, Benkler, (2006) insinuates that such has facilitated the formation of collaborative networks and communities of practice, enabling artists, designers, technologists, and audiences to connect, collaborate, and co-create across geographic and disciplinary boundaries.

Development of Digital Arts in Nigeria

The evolution and development of digital arts stems from the emerging cultural forms, and

local practices in the global space. Nigeria's rich art terrain provides a vibrant background for understanding the origins and humble beginnings. A brief excursion into this rich heritage will provide a clearer view of the evolution of contemporary digital design in Nigeria. Chiemeké, (2015) thinks that Nigeria is renowned for its cultural richness and historical legacy, boasts an extensive heritage of conventional artistic expressions and traditional art forms such as pottery, weaving, and wood carving have held profound significance within Nigerian society for generations while Cole (2013) further asserts that, "characterized by their vivid hues, intricate motifs, and symbolic representations, these artistic traditions epitomize the essence of Nigerian cultural aesthetics". According to Akomolafe (2017) "following the colonization of Nigeria by the British during the late 19th century, the introduction of Western art and design principles profoundly influenced the Nigerian artistic landscape". Notably, the infusion of digital technologies into these traditional art forms has precipitated the emergence of innovative hybrid art forms, blending conventional techniques with digital tools. According to Aderinto (2018), "the advent and proliferation of digital technologies, encompassing the internet,

social media platforms, and digital art tools, have engendered a seismic shift within Nigeria's creative industries".

However, the availability of personal computers, along with the introduction of software such as Adobe Photoshop and CorelDraw, have provided Nigerian artists with powerful tools for image manipulation, graphic design, and visual storytelling. Okeke-Agulu (2015) thinks that Nigerian artists possess a level of digital technology awareness and proficiency that is competitive on a global scale. The huge variety of Nigerian modernism can be attributed to the complexities of its great history and the constant combination of old and new forms. Furthermore, the internet plays a crucial role in the growth of digital art, offering Nigerian artists a global stage for exposure beyond their local environment. Okeke-Agulu (2015) posits that "platforms such as Instagram and Twitter act as digital galleries, allowing artists to display their works and engage with a diverse international audience". This exposure leads to international recognition and fosters collaborative opportunities for Nigerian digital artists. Nigerian artists are harnessing the power of digital platforms to transcend geographical boundaries and connect with global audiences, marking a

significant departure from traditional modes of artistic dissemination.

Moreover, the economic implications of this digital revolution are not left out as it has revolutionized the commercialization of art in Nigeria. Traditionally, artists relied on local galleries and exhibitions to showcase their works and reach potential buyers. By leveraging digital tools and platforms, artists are driving innovation and economic growth within the creative industries, which contributes to alleviating the economic status of Nigerian artists as well as significantly contributing to national economic development and in turn driving national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This wave of innovation extends to various areas of art such as fashion, sculpture, graphics, animation, ceramics, and painting, as well as digital art forms. These entrepreneurial initiatives are thriving, contributing to employment generation, skills development, and wealth creation across the world. The collaboration in the digital age enables artists to push the boundaries of creativity and cater to diverse consumer preferences. This influx of innovative and creative products and services not only enriches Nigeria's cultural heritage but also positions the country as a hub for creative excellence and

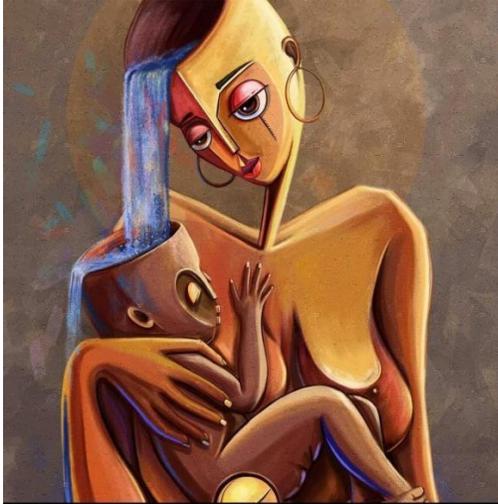
entrepreneurial innovation in the global space.

Review of Related Works

To establish the contributions of selected artists to the ongoing digital revolution and the ongoing scholarly discourse on the role of technology in fostering creativity, innovation, and cultural exchange in contemporary Nigerian society, the works of three Nigerian Artists, Adetoro Debas, Mike Unimke and Olajide Opeyemi Ezekiel will be examined in the light of technique, forms and cultural content. These artists are selected as examples of the numerous Nigerian artists whose works express the use of digital tools for designing while maintaining indigenous ideas, forms and content.

Adetoro's style and approach adopt the stylistic feature of abstraction with a masterly handling of geometrical forms with a touch of cubism. His works, *Mother's Cradle* (plate in the face of moral decadence.

1) and *Dear Mama* (Plate 2) capture the influence of a mother in the life of her child, which is profound and central to African and family life. According to him, "The affinity between a mother and child is beyond calculation because care is what every mother would do to get the safety of her child. Until you become a woman, you will not understand the reason why the first human to forgive is your mother." The works in the *Motherhood* series are digitally painted prints. The themes speak of love, care, motherhood, nurturing, and upbringing. These are some of the qualities that are lacking in modern homes due to the busy nature of modern life and demands. Therefore, it could be said that through his works, Adetoro calls attention to the vital place of child upbringing in sustaining and maintaining the morals and ideals that help to colour and restore the moral fabric of society



Mother's Cradle, Adetoro 36" x 48" inches,
2023, (www.tomiwaadelagun.com)



Dear Mama, Adetoro 36" x 48" inches,
digital prints, 2024,
(www.tomiwaadelagun.com)

Another artist whose works are discussed is Olajide Opeyemi Ezekiel. Olajide's expertise as a graphics designer extends beyond mere technical proficiency; which encompasses a

deep understanding of effective communication principles. In the digital space, where attention spans are fleeting and competition for engagement is fierce, Olajide stands out for his ability to create visuals that captivate and resonate with audiences. His experience in the digital world has honed his skills in utilizing various design elements such as colour, typography, layout, and imagery to convey messages in a manner that is both impactful and aesthetically pleasing. Whether he is designing, marketing, branding, social media graphics, or multimedia presentations, Olajide's works consistently showcase his talent for marrying form and function. His work, "The African Queen" (plate 3), is a stylized figure with exaggerated and elongated narrow neck bearing stylized facial forms underneath a colourful gele, portraying the flamboyance of a peacock. The entire work, form, beads, and adornment speak eloquently of the celebrated African subject of beauty. According to him, the piece addresses the "girl child" syndrome, whose identity is swimming in the pool of global tide and on the verge of being drawn. Western ideologies seem to define the values and expectations of the girl child in the current societal milieu. This extends beyond morality, and dignity, to adornment. The African must stay true to her identity and

convictions in the global scheme of events. According to him, we must reject not only the stereotypes that others hold of us but also the stereotypes that we hold of ourselves. His other work, "Celebration", is another digitally painted piece with effects of brush strokes that depict African dancers and communal living. Festivity is an integral part of African life. The era of the internet has had a serious impact on communal existence to a large extent. His work is a reminder of the significance of communal living and sharing.



Celebration, Olajide Opeyemi Ezekiel 24" x 44" inches, digital print, 2024,



African Queen, Olajide Opeyemi Ezekiel
36" x 45" inches, digital print, 2024,

The works of Mike Unimke show a different approach to image handling. He explores the creative skill of digital reprography by employing digital tools to manipulate photographs of cultural festivals. Through the use of advanced software, he imbues the images with innovative stylistic effects, offering a fresh perspective on African cultural celebrations. His artistic endeavour serves as a profound and insightful means of engaging with the iconography of African festivals. His work titled Melody Makers and Dancers (Plate 4 and 5) shows a diverse array of traditional instruments, ranging from drums and percussion instruments to stringed instruments and wind instruments. Each instrument carries its unique timbre, contributing to the rich auditory experience that resonates throughout the festival grounds. The synergy between the melody makers and the festival participants creates a harmonious fusion of sound and movement, elevating the festive mood into a

multisensory celebration of culture and tradition.

It is pertinent to state that, Nigeria art has passed through different stages of growth. The narrative can be drawn from particular individual artists, or a group of artist (untrained) art schools with stylistic characteristics. The influences and inspirations are taste, globalization and patronage. Technology and culture are somewhat intertwined. While culture forms a bulk of shared experiences, technology defines the tools, techniques and methods for the creative process. However, according to Pineda (2014) the term "technoculture" describes the intersection of technology and culture, where technology is seen as a cultural force that shapes and is shaped by societal values, beliefs, and practices. In this context, technoculture recognizes that technology is not just a tool, but a carrier of cultural values and meanings that can shape and transform cultural identities, social relationships, and power dynamics.



Melody Maker, Mike Akambende 36" x 44" inches, digital print, 2024,



Dancer, Mike Akambende 24" x 44" inches, digital print, 2024,

Conclusion

The paper captures the role and impact of digital technology in the creative process and what some Nigerian artists have done so far. The emphasis is their focus on indigenous concepts as a vehicle for cultural exchange. The works of Adetoro Debas, Mike Unimke, and Olajide Opeyemi Ezekiel demonstrate the adept use of digital tools in designing while maintaining indigenous ideas, forms, and content. Their art pieces showcase

Nigerian cultural aesthetics, exploring themes of motherhood, identity, communal living, and celebration. This fusion of tradition and innovation has positioned Nigeria as a hub for creative excellence, enriching its cultural heritage and contributing to the global digital arts. As technology continues to evolve, it is essential to recognize the potential of digital technologies in shaping the future of Nigerian art and design. By embracing these advancements, artists can be classified by their artworks, societies, styles, subjects, materials, techniques, periods (eras) and technologies as they apply in the current milieu.

Recommendations

From the discussions above, the following recommendations are made:

In the age of digital revolution, artists should imbibe the use of digital tools to enhance their creative process, explore new ideas, and reach a wider audience. This calls for continuous learning and emphasis on digital art education for artists. The a need for artists

to stay updated with the latest digital tools and technologies that are useful to the creative process by attending workshops and training sessions to enhance their skills and knowledge.

More artists in Nigeria can take advantage of digital technology to promote cultural exchange, preserve indigenous content, and drive innovation. By sharing their cultural heritage and aesthetics on online platforms, they can foster cross-cultural understanding and access global audiences. Collaboration and sharing within the art community can further encourage openness and innovation. Additionally, digital technologies can be used to document and preserve Nigerian cultural heritage for future generations. By experimenting with new digital techniques, artists can push the boundaries of creativity and contribute to the country's economic growth, providing employment opportunities and driving entrepreneurship in the creative industry.

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