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## **NAVIGATING COVID-19: CHALLENGES AND SURVIVAL STRATEGIES FOR NIGERIAN PERFORMING ARTISTS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The global COVID-19 pandemic poses unprecedented challenges to Nigerian performing artists in the year 2020; thus, threatening livelihoods, artistic expression and mental well-being. All these in the midst of existing inadequate support systems, policies and infrastructure decay, thereby entrenching vulnerabilities. This paper therefore investigates the socio-economic and psychological impacts on the creative industry and in particular, Nigerian performing artists and identifies some survival strategies to surmounting the challenges during the pandemic. The study findings indicates that although, some of the measures put in place by the government were meant to tame the scourge of COVID-19, they eventually became the ‘nightmares’ of many especially in the creative industry across the country as their means of livelihood became threatened via job losses and so on. Thus, as a means of survival, some decided to hone their creativity by switching over to online and digital media platforms in dance, drama, music and other entertaining genres. Through qualitative methodology approach, the paper employs in-depth

interviews and content analysis of internet platforms. In addition, the paper was guided by resilience theory, which concentrated on coping techniques, transformative tactics and adaptive methods engaged in by Nigerian performing artists. Conclusively, it is imperative for all the stakeholders to build strong support, make provision for sustainable resources for mental health, government financing and regulatory assistance with adequate preparation to embracing digital space in case of future occurrence.

**Key Words:** COVID-19, Nigerian performing artists, survival strategies, creative industry, resilience theory

## INTRODUCTION

The performing arts have changed over time as a result of man's efforts to comprehend and control his surroundings. The performing artist has occasionally been forced to reinvent himself due to new directions, and this has continued to play important roles in the expression of human life. These individuals are uniquely equipped to alter the narratives in their environment by working together as a group of imaginative thinkers. Smith (2001) explains further that:

Performing artistes are people who communicate their perceptions, responses, and understanding of the world to themselves and to others (the audience). Since their first appearance thousands of years ago, the arts have been evolving continually, exhibiting the ability of human beings to intuit, symbolize, think, and express themselves through drama, dance, music, opera, theatre, and the visual arts. Each of the arts contains a distinct body of knowledge and skills that characterize the power of each to expand the perceptual, intellectual, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of human experience.

Accordingly, the performing artists has become societal 'watch dogs' that create awareness on any issues bothering the people. This is why in every society, people look forward to seeing new information and experience from performances, either on stage or in film. When any situation occurs, the performing artists begin to seek solution using their art and situate such performances in proper genres such as dance, opera, drama, pantomime and so on. This is to either call the attention of the people to the occurrence, or use their performances to create awareness that possibly gives birth to practical solutions. This was the case in Nigeria in the year 2020 when the global virus (COVID-19) broke out.

Since it is no longer news that when there was an outbreak of the dreaded COVID-19 pandemic, the whole world was greatly affected; the performing artistes were not left out as their means of survival became threatened. As soon as the spread of corona virus started to impact local and international establishments in the country, several organizations ceased to carry out their functional responsibilities in their designated institutions as there was a prolonged restriction on public life which also leads to the closure of various performing bodies and human activities in general. Thus, many industries nationwide responded to this with a variety of policy measures put in place to checkmate the spread of the deadly

virus. This was why in the midst of the pandemic, there was no doubt that people around the world turned to the performing arts and creative sector for entertainment, and as a connection to respond to the unknown. In response to the uncertainty and panic brought on by the pandemic, people all throughout the world turned to the performing arts and creative expression as vital means of solace, emotional connection and understanding. Yet the performing arts, cultural and creative industries sector undoubtedly has been hit the hardest by the pandemic. This was because during the lockdown, entertainment venues were closed, theatre and performance festivals were cancelled or postponed and amendments to allow theatres to operate as studios for recording or live-streaming productions with small cast were gazette and only the audio-visual and interactive media domain could resume operations within specified parameters. Similarly, in Nigeria, schools, market places, clubs, and theatres were shut down; while recreational and motor parks and football stadia were deserted. On transportations, both domestic and international flights suspended as inter-states movements were also affected.

Meanwhile, enforcing the lockdown policy in Nigeria with the use of face mask posed a serious challenge at the beginning of the measures, which seemed strict to many citizens. Thus, becoming a serious battle for various security agencies who, for instance in Lagos, to enforce as they resorted to patrolling the major and highly populated places to compel the people to wear the face masks, face shield, use hand sanitizer and observe social distancing. These measures were seen as alien to many as they soon became complicated due to the cultural beliefs, religious sentiments and other factors. Whereas, the government action was in response to some devastating news across the globe and especially from advanced nations of the world such as China, United States, United Kingdom and host of others. However, the spread of the Coronavirus soon got many apprehensive and the role played by the media cannot be over-emphasized in this direction. In the U.S for instance, just few months into the pandemic, many lives were lost and through the condolence message to the people through the media, the president, Donald Trump, who also at a point contacted the virus expresses a great concern: “we have just reached a very sad milestone with the coronavirus pandemic deaths reaching 100,000. To all of the families & friends of those who have passed, I want to extend my heartfelt sympathy & love for everything that these great people stood for & represent. God be with you”! Thus, by September, 2020 (over 200,000) deaths have been reported in the United States.

Consequently, it became imperative that different preventive measures would eventually be taken into consideration by local, state, and federal governments in Nigeria. Movement restrictions and the implementation of a lockdown caused months-long disruptions to the nation's economy, businesses, socio-political activities, and religious activities. This forced people inside, which in and of itself caused a great deal of conflict in different households. To the performing artistes, things were never the same again and many embarked upon partial operations, but with limited capacity and social distancing measures in place. All of these however, make it nearly impossible for performing artistes to remain financially viable, this, of course, comes with retrenchments and job reductions. Nevertheless, despite the current crisis and deadly virus out there, ‘the show must go on’. Thus, after reviewing a sample of policy and creative responses to these challenges, this research discovers that during the pandemic, performing artistes have

tried, and are still trying, to transpose what is essentially a communal, live and embodied engagement to a cell phone or computer screen. Moving forward, Adegbite (2021) who examines how the professionals and freelance coped with the situation during the pandemic in Nigeria, states that:

Nonetheless, a few people and performers in the country created a number of brief sketches centred around the fearsome virus, covering topics like “fear,” “precaution,” “preventive measures,” and so forth, by capitalising on the dynamic nature of electronic and social media like YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and Whatsapp. Although they applied a variety of languages, including Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa, many easily identify with the common pidgin-English as a medium for humorous performances.

Many local artists present monologues, solo dances or spoken word art on video casts, post recordings on YouTube or live-stream their work; writers and actors present live-streamed new work; digital media artists have collaborated with performing artists to develop a mode of performance more suitable for online viewing; and small-scale online festivals have popped up. Thus, this shaping of a shared space and associated embodied exchanges are at the heart of the challenge to re-imagine the performing arts and creative industry in the context of COVID-19.

Therefore, this paper highlights relevant strategies of survival for performing artistes in the creative industry along some of the responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria in 2020. More so, the study is inspired by resilience theory which is employed to distil the efforts by the performing artists during the period.

### ***Theoretical Framework***

Resilience theory examines the dynamic process of successfully navigating adversity and achieving attaining the best results. It is fore-grounded in strengths-based paradigm, which underscores the pivotal role of internal capacities (resilience factors) and external facilitators (support systems) in empowering individuals to overcome, adapt and flourish in the face of prevailing challenges. Norman Garmezy is noted to be the pioneer of the theory, in *Resiliency and Vulnerability to Adverse Developmental Outcomes Associated with Poverty*, defined resilience as “not necessarily impervious to stress. Rather, resilience is designed to reflect the capacity for recovery and maintained adaptive behavior that may follow initial retreat or incapacity upon initiating a stressful event”. Arising from two main conceptualization of resilience as explained by Egeland et al., (1993); Holling, (1973) and Werner, (1995), Masten and Obradovic concede to the definition that resilience is the capacity to take in, adjust to, and bounce back from adverse events, unforeseen challenges or obstacles. For instance, resilience is seen as “the development of competence despite severe or pervasive adversity” (Egeland et al., (1993).

During the pandemic, Nigeria's creative industry shown remarkable resilience as professionals and independent performers deliberately used social media and electronic platforms to enhance their creative capacities, to inform, enlighten, educate the citizens, and in a bid to maintain artistic continuity, whose existence was threatened by the global scenario.

## **Performing Arts/Artists: Conceptual Clarifications**

Performing arts is a collaborative art form which combines words, voice, movement and visual elements to express meaning. The field of performing arts encompasses not only live improvised and scripted work, but also dramatic forms such as film, television and other electronic media (Arsem, 2011). Within the performing arts, there are multiple specific domains of expertise with domain-specific demands. Performing arts involves various disciplines from dance, music, theatre, illusions, opera, performance art, etc. Garoian (1999) expresses that:

Performing art is a performance scripted or unscripted body action that is displayed before a spectating audience. Performance art is traditionally interdisciplinary skill that involves live display of expertise in fine or media arts. The presentation of such performance may be done when the performers themselves are present or absent.

The Performing artists are creatively exploring different area in humanity to widen the scope of art. They employ different platforms for the display and enacting their arts mostly on stage and in film. In discharge of their duty, they can only be fulfilling when there are spectators (audiences) to see or watch their works, whether live or recorded. The purpose of their arts is to inform, educate and entertain their audiences. According to Torrens, (2014), performing arts involves the use of human as its main material to achieve the conception from the standpoint of the playwright without the intention of the performer him/herself. Because of this reason, performing arts is a form of creative activity that is performed in front of an audience such as drama, music and dance” Performing arts can further be seen as doing both singing and dancing together, it also includes opera, theatre, magical art, mime, spoken word, recitation illusion performances, public speaking and lately stand-up comedy. According to Miller (2019):

Performing arts is a form of art where artists use their voices, and bodies to convey a message or artistic expression. In performing arts there are ways by which opinion, emotion, feeling, or taste are expressed through performance like, theatre, public speech and more. Performing arts are basically arts that promote skills dovetailing into performance when an audience is present to appreciate the exhibition of such skills. It attracts several other arts to thrive and it is a convergence in another way.

Miller (2019) continues further by clarifying the major elements that make the arts unique among others that, performing arts is a form of art where artists use their voices and bodies in other to devolve message or artistic expression. Similarly, in the performing arts, artistes are either creators of works of art such as composers, playwrights, and choreographers or performers such as musicians, conductors, actors, and directors. Sometimes they are both. Although they are at the core of the performing arts, artistes however, in their own submission, Alper & Wassall, (2000) believe that classification of performing arts as a field of study or profession is not as straight to define as it looks. Performing arts therefore about the examination and resolution of fundamental human issues, and is built on understanding and presenting interactions between people. In this context, performing arts as a creative industry, during the turbulent times of the COVID-19 outbreak is critically evaluated along with its contentious trends among the performing artistes, especially in Nigerian creative industry. This perhaps explains why in the report of OECD.org (2020), it is stated that the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and related policy responses (e.g. public health measures, lockdowns, emergency economic and social measures) on sub-national

government finance is significant. This suggests that the ripple effects of COVID-19 are global also saw the outbreak dovetailing into the year 2021 in some countries. For instance, Ningsih, et.al (2023) gave account of how the government policy affected the people in ‘many aspects, includes art events’. The reveals that the creative industry suffered greatly across nations during the period and its effects resonates through the following year. However, the consequences vary from one country to the other.

### ***The Performing Artistes in the Pandemic Era***

Prior to the beginning of 2020, performing artistes around the world were living a life that had largely remained the same for decades. They were working in studios and performing at live shows with big plans for the coming year. Their usual mode of performance had always been an outdoor method. This implies that a lot of people (audiences) have to patronize different dance halls, clubs, event places or theatres and cinemas in order to get informed, enlightened and entertained. Then, the COVID-19 corona virus pandemic struck the world and changed everything. Following the lockdown of markets, schools, cinemas, clubs, offices, parks, churches, mosques and other public places in order to checkmate the community spread of the virus, performing artistes had to re-imagine their habits and reschedule their calendars for the foreseeable future (Alé-Chilet, Jorge & Atal, Juan & Dominguez-Rivera, Patricio 2020). Working populations across the world begin to see their livelihoods and careers collapse or transform overnight as a result of the global pandemic and the responses of individual governments. Hence, the corona virus disease which is well regarded as COVID-19 is a highly transmittable and pathogenic viral infection caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), which emerged in Wuhan, China and spread around the world. According to El-Erian, (2020), “Genomic analysis revealed that, the SARS-CoV-2 is phylogenetic-related to severe acute respiratory syndrome-like (SARS-like) bat viruses, therefore bats could be the possible primary reservoir. The intermediate source of origin and transfer to humans is not known, however, the rapid human to human transfer has been confirmed widely”. More so, ‘there is no clinically approved antiviral drug or vaccine available to be used against COVID-19. However, few broad-spectrum antiviral drugs have been evaluated against COVID-19 in clinical trials, resulted in clinical recovery (Riou & Althaus, 2020). Initially, the perception was that the COVID-19 pandemic would be localized in China only. It later spread across the world through the movement of people. The economic pain became severe as people were asked to stay at home, and the severity was felt with travel bans affecting the aviation industry, sporting event cancellations affecting the sports industry, the prohibition of mass gatherings affecting the events and entertainment industries (Horowitz, 2020).

Consequently, we can conveniently summarize and comparatively analyse the emergence of COVID-19 infection and previous human corona virus severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus (SARS-CoV) as a sudden economic disruption which is not only destructive but also has spillover implications in several industries and various sectors all over the nation. That is why it eventually created untamed shocks and setbacks in almost every area of human endeavor. For this reason, it is essential to examine how some Nigerian performing artistes thrived and were being largely affected during the widespread of the coronavirus.

Performing artistes were largely affected more than many other occupations. Due to the nature of their job which entails mingling with human beings and having close contact with one another during rehearsals

and productions, their job faced almost a complete extinction during the period. This is because during COVID-19, they work in extremely precarious conditions; their careers and mental health have been made additionally vulnerable by prolonged lockdown. The pandemic exacerbated the difficult health and financial situation faced by many performing artistes. Hence, some artistes lost a lot of job engagements, invite to feature in others films and stage performances, draining of their finances, and the resultant mental health issues became rampant and issues to contend seriously with by the performing artistes in this period (Palamar, 2020). More so, the public health measures implemented at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic restricted large gatherings, which included performances with minimal live audience in theatres, auditoriums, and other venues. Gathering in groups was identified as high-risk for SARS-CoV-2 transmission, and thereby placed significant limits to the number of people gathering at locations per time. The measures were included in others that were put in place as essential public health tools and guidelines for reducing community transmission. Sadly enough, as a result of the social distancing measures in full force, the multiple income streams on which some performing artistes rely on crumbled. While the various measures put in place were meant to curtail the spread of the virus on one hand, on the other; it created another tension among the Nigerian multi-ethnic and religious enclave. This is because while some embraced parts of the measures with open heart, some kicked against it. Adegbite (2021) gives an instance in the area of frequent and thorough hand washing with soap and running water, as well as the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer - a practice that some religious adherents disapproved of due to their belief that alcohol consumption is forbidden. Additional measures include avoiding large gatherings, using face and nose masks, sneezing into one's bent elbow when appropriate, maintaining a minimum of 1.5 metres (5 feet) of space between oneself and another person who is coughing, remaining in self-isolation, and designating a special place to go if one is experiencing any symptoms related to the virus and so on. Further on this, Amzat, et.al (2020) draws out some other devastating effects of the measures on the populace that the consideration of a further lockdown has some dilemmas: there are both intended and latent consequences. The lockdown and stay-at-home directive exact adverse effects on peoples' livelihood-with disproportionate effects on the vulnerable population, most of whom are daily income earners

That many businesses suffered a great setback is an understatement, the artistes for instance has their major sources of income affected. These included performances at occasions (concerts, theatre productions, advertising voiceovers and studio for soundtracks, private bookings such as weddings and parties, film and television work, and so on). This in addition, led to sharp cut drop in revenues generation while as it lingered, it also puts the financial sustainability of many artistes at risk. Some who housed or employed artistes in their payrolls also reduced the wages while some employers of artistes laid off many in order to cut their meager budget. This further caused some with repercussions for the value chain of their suppliers, from creative and non-creative sectors alike. Many performing artistes lost their source of livelihood especially those they could secure through live performances and this caused some to even source for another diverse means of generating alternative incomes such as production of skits with one or fewer cast. The creative performing artistes leveraged on the prevailing situations to making discoveries of something meaningfully relevant and different. Some in this category of the performing artistes were seen engaging their potent tools such as their voice, creative instincts of information to educate and enlighten the people in the country against the precarious new normal. Some of these artistes at the height of the pandemic were able to navigate through to some extent the difficulties that were associated with the

Covid-19 virus and associated fear. This was therefore, achieved through health-based dramatic performances and short comedy skits and using four major arms of the performing arts, like dance, drama, music and media arts to communicate clearly in the various languages of the people in the country. Some adopted the generally acceptable pidgin English to pass some salient information about the spread of the virus, how to prevent its spread and what to do when in contact with the infected people. This action was done to complement the concerted efforts of the health agencies (as put together by the government and private organizations). From many of these creative efforts, many more people were sensitized and better informed since people, including the children seems to retain most of what they see on television, video and social media. Apart from creating awareness, the performing artistes weaved many of their storylines around comic nuances by calving out some funny names. This approach later paid off as it contributes in no small way towards the reduction and spread of deadly virus.

Similarly, the COVID-19 pandemic caused major changes to how performing artistes practiced and rehearsed as it brought many live performances to a halt. Restrictions were put in place to reduce transmission risks for those who work or volunteer in the sector, and for audiences attending performances which resulted to a poor theatre culture and low audience patronage. At this point, massive digitalization coupled with emerging technologies, such as virtual and augmented realities, created new forms of experience for performing artistes. With the lockdown, many public and private providers moved content on-line for free to keep audiences engaged and satisfy the sharply increased demand for cultural content. However, poor network signals most times constituted a hitch in accessing online performances by many Nigerians. The adverse effect of cost of data constituted another setback during this period thus making life difficult for many who ordinarily were willing to subscribing in order to get entertained.

However, while the provision of free and digitally mediated content is not sustainable over time, it has opened the door to many future innovations for performing artistes. To capitalize on them, there is a need to address the digital skills shortages within the performing arts sector and improve digital access beyond large metropolitan areas, with the additional consideration that the digital access does not replace a live performance experience or all the jobs that go with it but serves as one of the top survival strategies in the Nigerian creative industry during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

All these were subsequently complemented by various academic conferences that were held across the globe (both virtually and physically) immediately after the lockdowns for more awareness campaigns, education on the global suspicions about taking the vaccine against the virus when it was eventually released, the people's distrust of government policy and preventive measures, and so on.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The work adopts qualitative research method which is used to collect data for the entire article as drawn from the review of some related existing works on the subject. To further enhance the discourse, some artists works were examined and our engagement of a few numbers of performing artists in Ilorin (North-central, Nigeria) also aided the work while descriptions and analysis of some of the efforts by the performing artistes in order to survive during the pandemic were carried out.

### **Data Analysis**

The data that were used included some oral discussions with artistes, videos and personal experiences of the writers who were also engaged in different creative endeavours during the period in order to sensitize the people in their localities. For instance, one of the writers produced about 9-minute socio-religious comedy skit in Yoruba language titled “Iberu Coro” – the fear of coronavirus and was released on youtube in a bid to help alleviate the tension and fear that gripped the populace then in Nigeria. (Watch on [Ìbèrù còró mobile youtube/adesina adegbite/2020](#)). This is just one out of many skits that were produced by

## **FINDINGS**

### ***Survival Strategies of Covid-19 Outbreak in the Nigerian Creative Industry***

While the demand for performance and creative content throughout the lockdown period was high, digital access became more critical than ever before. The pandemic thus, serves as an opportunity in disguise, as well as an avenue for reflecting upon the trends and developments of oft-neglected areas in the Nigerian creative industry. In this view, the COVID-19 pandemic has, amongst other things, exposed the linear revenue streams of the entertainment space, forcing most of the talents to start thinking of new ways of generating incomes beyond the traditional offerings in the industry. It was evident during the peak of the pandemic that live events and huge gatherings were not possible forcing most of the talents to look for creative ways to stay afloat and connect with fans. People with multiple skill sets and creative minds used the opportunity to diversify into other creative sectors. For instance, a lot of comedians pivoted into online skits while others launched YouTube shows in a bid to maintain their fan base and generate incomes. An out-of-the-box kind of thinking was required going forward. Therefore, what were the survival strategies/mediums adopted by the performing artistes in the pandemic era? They are highlighted as follows:

#### ***i. E-Entertainment During the Lockdown***

Following the effects of the ravaging virus and the restrictions and other difficulties that the people experienced at the period, which led to the shutting of theatres; the Nigerian performing artists took

advantage of the digital space. This served as the major platform that was largely utilized by performing artistes to engage people (the audience) during the COVID-19 outbreak. The beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic lockdown brought so many positive innovations. The private sector and the government resumed meetings via skype, webinar and zoom to communicate and deliberate on important issues. Likewise, the performing artistes were left with the option of using YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Telegram and Instagram to do their shows and short skits. There was feedback from fans that used Mark Zuckerberg's Facebook and Instagram to make requests from entertainers on what kind of performance, dances and songs they wanted and as well expressed their feelings of the performances. Several creative minds in the country were coming to limelight with new strategies in every circumstance as the pandemic provided new opportunities for creativity. For instance, performing artistes like the Hip-pop award-winning artiste, Tu Face Idibia, in conjunction with the International Breweries PLC, makers of the Trophy Extra Stout, had an E-concert. The idea was to bring fun and hope to thousands of people in the comfort of their homes and was the first of its kind. In a related development, another group of artistes Asa and Davido organized a show through music steaming platform Udu X live stream on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2020 and there was yet another major e-concert by popular musicians Flavour and Phyno which was hosted on Instagram live sessions. It was one way of overcoming the boredom created by the Covid-19 pandemic. Similarly, the viewers of DSTV Africa had a great time every Saturday enjoying the live show on television. The Owambe feeling was brought every Saturday to many homes of the viewers as a way of making them forget the challenges of the Coronavirus lockdown. The host of the show Yaw was able to attract notable Nigerian artistes who performed with live bands on television and the people made the request through various social media platforms. Bovi, one of the notable Nigerian comedians also hosted an E-Concert, called *Naira Win Verbal Concert*, during lockdown where viewers were exclusively entertained. There was also a wonderful innovation introduced by Ice Nweke for the virtual convention for dancers. The idea was to use professional dancers like Kafayat Oluwatoyin Shafau known as Kaffy to train a generation of dancers online through creating numerous jobs and opportunities through that process. In fact, the popular filmmaker Tunde Kelani during the lockdown was also able to release on YouTube the adaptation of the novel published in 1952 by Amos Tutuola titled the *Palmwine Drunkard*; uploaded on youtube May 3, 2020. It was one of those resilient steps taken by the artists in Nigeria to ensuring that the people, who are already devastated by the effects of the virus, are entertained by all means. This is in consonance with the popular saying in Nigerian theatre parlance that 'no matter what, the show must go on'. Tunde Kelani, the producer, states that the attempt was made for the viewers at that period to enjoy the:

tribute to the golden era of the classic Yoruba Travelling Theatre in this adaptation of folk-opera – by Kola Ogunmola and written originally by Amos Tutuola...the adaptation stars Segun Adefila, Choreography by Dayo Liadi and directed by Tunde Awosanmi. The play was recorded during the presentation at the Lagos Black Heritage Festival in 2016.

Prior to the period in 2019, a popular Nigerian performing artistes, Davido, released on YouTube his hit 'Blow My Mind' which was accessed by about 40 million viewership; have many viewers switched over to even during the pandemic and the number of viewership surged. Many creative artists are forced onto the digital space as a result of the restrictive measures in place across the country. The Internet has long been a connector beyond the physical. Now, it's the only reason people are able to see their faraway loved ones and complete remote projects with their co-workers amid pandemic-prompted social distancing.

Hence, as live performance opportunities stopped, humors were created by several comedians during the pandemic through the internet. Humour was created by these artistes to engage people not to fall into depression and since laughter is a symbol of hope, it becomes one of the greatest needs of life during the time of the crisis. It served as a connection, for helping everyone in the nation feel a sense of togetherness that “we are in this together” thereby educating and assuring the people that life will get back to normal again. It was also for defusing fear and anxiety, for helping everyone re-establish a sense of psychological control and a sense of social connection. On the face of it, there is evidence for humor’s beneficial effects utilized by internet comedians in the pandemic era. Consequently, all these and many more strategies were sustainable strategies put in place by these creative artists/institutions to still keep people’s interest in the consumption of the arts when the pandemic is over or put differently, in a post-COVID-19 era.

Furthermore, the pandemic has its pros and cons, as arts predominantly are propelled by the energy, immediacy, and spontaneity that live in the present and also for posterity. Additionally, it is believed that, despite the widespread of the COVID-19 outbreak, the resilience display of the artists kept them on the track. Looking critically at various measures put in place then and how the artists responses propelled awareness and opened new vista for discovery, the paper considers these as “turning the wheels” in the creative industry:

***i. Distancing Measures***

Maintaining physical distancing of at least 2 meters served as an important control measure for reducing transmission via large respiratory droplets and short-range transmission of the virus. Physical distancing was observed with strict adherence in some theatres and open spaces that were used for rehearsals and productions. This was maintained between members or choirs, bands, dance companies, and theatre groups wherever possible, particularly during rehearsals and instruction. Face-to-face arrangement of performers were minimized as same was observed between performers and the audience, technical staff, and venue staff, with reduction in mingling before or after rehearsals or performances totally discouraged. Although, maintaining physical distancing became more challenging in dance and theatre settings, this was creatively adapted in order to reduce the potential for close contacts and to avoid performers crossing through the breathing space of others. While on the other hand, assigning performers with designated areas on a stage/floor was clearly spelt out to prevent overlapping of portfolios and schedules of performance areas. More so, limited roles were shared out to limited numbers of cast (dancers inclusive) and sometimes, members of same households were given roles, since they knew their status by the time.

***ii. Personal Responsibility***

The crucial role that personal responsibility played in defining an individual’s susceptibility and transmission risk to others by highlighting the interplay between various agencies, behaviour, and public health, during the pandemic cannot be over-emphasized. Different performance-based and government orientation agency awareness also contributed significantly to how people took their safety personal and serious. For instance, those who were immune-compromised or vulnerable to infection have been informed to take personal responsibility of staying at their various homes, including the elderly ones.

Persons who are sick or have tested positive for COVID-19 or may have been exposed to known cases of COVID-19 were also counseled to self-isolate according to local public health advice. The potential for transmission via pre-symptomatic and asymptomatic persons that required additional measures in order to reduce the risks of transmission were taken into consideration. Some groups equally considered forming performance or rehearsal cohorts to limit the number of interactions within a larger company. Limiting the number of social contacts outside of a performance company or cohort in addition assisted to reduce the potential for members of performing groups to be exposed to infection from the wider community. Members of a group or performing arts company relied on others practicing safe personal behaviours outside of the group, such as physical distancing and mask wearing when in public and practicing good hand washing hygiene during and some months after the period.

### ***iii. Reducing Density and Duration***

Crowding makes it difficult to maintain physical distancing and allows for rapid accumulation of exhaled aerosols, which can be transported on air currents. There may be no safe physical distance to reduce risks to a negligible level if one or more infected persons, or a super-emitter with a high viral load, is present in an enclosed space. Reducing the density of participants and the duration they spend in a space can reduce the potential exposure dose. Despite the social distancing measures in place, large performing groups still practiced abstinence from some activities that were meant to hold in closed, unventilated rooms/places. Maximum occupancy limits or moving activities to larger spaces was observed to further reduce the concentration of exhaled air in a space.

### ***iv. Face Masks***

The use of face coverings whenever possible while around others can block emissions of droplets and reduce the spread of COVID-19, but it was noticed that the wearing of masks alone does not remove transmission risks entirely. To reduce reliance on masks while performing, some theatre companies adapted reduction in speaking roles in their performances, while some considered the use of voice-over narration as an alternative. Where masks were used, the most effective were those that fit well, without gaps around the nose bridge, chin, and sides, and those made of materials that effectively block the movement of both droplets and aerosols. Many Nigerians resorted to the use of specially customized and homemade masks and adaptations of traditional motifs to make them look attractive. Masks such as singers' masks were also adapted for use during rehearsals and few performances. However, only fewer number of audiences were allowed into halls for viewing in some situations and that happened in few cities such as Lagos, Ibadan (Oyo State), Ilorin (Kwara State), Osogbo (Osun State) with strict adherence to the measures and when the lockdowns were already relaxed sometimes in December, 2020.

### ***v. Ventilation***

According to research, ventilation is essential for eliminating airborne germs and reducing the risk of respiratory infections, influenza, and COVID-19. This underscores the significance of ventilation in minimizing airborne virus concentrations (UK Health Security Agency, 2021). Thus, moving activities outside wherever possible was followed. Since outside air can help to dilute infectious particles to low levels and air flow can help to disperse particles, unlike when inside, performing artists gave

consideration to good ventilation when they gather. That was the reason for when moving theatrical activities to larger rooms with good air exchange was suggested among members in order to experience good air flow during their rehearsals and performance space.

***vi. Cleaning and Disinfection to Reduce Contact Transmission***

Control measures for contact outlets include good hand hygiene practices (use of hand sanitizers was employed, with free distribution sometimes at rehearsals and performance venues) and routine cleaning and disinfection of surfaces, as well as reduction in sharing of equipment, props, musical stands, instruments, costumes, microphones, and food and drinks was observed. Where the use of shared microphones was inevitable, the use of disposable foam screens was considered, which was changed between performers followed by disinfection of surfaces where applicable. Performers were also encouraged to keep their costumes apart from others and wash and clean them after each use in performance. Similarly, attempt was made to making the performers changed to their costumes and adorn their make-up during preparation offstage. A lot of precautions were also taken for hair and make-up done outside/offstage in term of safe keeping of individuals combs, brushes and make-up kits/materials. Guidance on cleaning and disinfection procedures and materials was provided before and after performances for the artists to ensure a thorough process is followed, while avoiding damage to the performance instruments.

***vii. Considerations for Audiences***

While measures were established regarding the maximum number of seats and specific requirements for members of audience to enter the theatre venues in order to attend live performances, the policies in place promoted social distancing among the audiences during the ticket collection process, their seating arrangements, mask wearing, proper hand hygiene, and respiratory etiquette. More so, communication with audiences prior to events allowed various organizers to clearly set out COVID-19 safety protocols, to provide screening questionnaires regarding symptoms and exposures, always requesting those who may be ill to stay at home, and to gather information for contact tracing following the event if needed. Although, some guidelines that recommended to the audiences not to sing along, engage in prolong cheering, jumping, dancing, and laughing extensively while in the halls were not followed. This became difficult request, but for future occurrence, provision of audiences with alternative ways to join in such as humming, clapping, or providing hand-held noisemakers, which allow audiences to engage and to express their appreciation for the performance without vocalizing it ought to be the way out.

Despite some initial difficulties, it has been observed in the paper that, of a truth, the COVID-19 epidemic has spurred creativity and transformed the theatre experience. Thus, the advanced technologies to improve pre-recorded content viewing experiences, immersive hybrid performance systems that would integrate physical and virtual components, and improved face mask technology for better vocal clarity and expression, as well as sophisticated personal protective equipment that integrates into costume design

to enable closer proximity, are just a few examples of how this transformation could have been more effective, as experienced during the pandemic in Nigeria, especially in the creative industry.

## **CONCLUSION**

The pandemic highlighted the resilience of Nigeria's performing arts sector. Amidst disrupted consumption patterns and economic adversity, digital platforms emerged as transformative catalysts for innovative content creation and future growth, however, due to some limitations, the performing artists could not explore to the fullest many advantages in the technology in order to take their arts to the hybrid theatre space.

Thus, this paper therefore suggests that now is the ideal moment for Nigerian performing artists to completely embrace the performance-digital environment! As a result, the paper suggests that more focus be placed on the ways that the performing arts sector supports the sustainability of societies worldwide, not only in the social and economic sectors, but also in the ecological and medical ones. Furthermore, performing artists everywhere, especially in Africa, should better explore and uphold the connection between science and the arts.

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