

## THE DILEMMA OF DIGITAL MUSIC RECORDING IN NIGERIA – A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE CHALLENGES

**Stella N. Nwobu, Ph.D.**

Department of Music

Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University

Telephone: 08030917390, 09094142870

E-mail: [nadistel@yahoo.com](mailto:nadistel@yahoo.com), [sn.nwobu@coou.edu.ng](mailto:sn.nwobu@coou.edu.ng)

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**Jude T. Orakwe, Ph.D.**

Department of Music

Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University

Telephone: 08i87526221

E-mail: [jatomaria@gmail.com](mailto:jatomaria@gmail.com)

### Abstract

The advent of digital music recording has reformed the music industry worldwide, offering unparalleled opportunities for artists to produce and distribute their work. However, in Nigeria, the benefits of digital music recording are hindered by myriad of challenges. This review critically examines the major dilemma faced in Nigeria's digital music recording landscape, including issues of unemployment, commercial studios collapse, lethargy in music practice, lack of technical experts, and poor production processes. Additionally, the paper addresses the challenges in monetizing digital music due to a limited formal market structure. By exploring the complex interplay between technological, economic, cultural and regulatory factors. This study aims to identify the key obstacles and potential solutions for stakeholders including artists, producers, policymakers, and industry experts. This study employed a phenomenological approach in collecting and presenting a comprehensive understanding of the challenges facing digital music recording in Nigeria. This study provides valuable insights into the complexities surrounding digital music recording in Nigeria, contributing to the ongoing discourse on the future of the music industry in Nigeria. It highlights the need for enhanced industry training and more accessible resources to ensure the sustainability and growth of digital music recording in Nigeria.

**Keywords: Music, Contemporary, Consequences, Music Recording, Digital Age**

### Introduction

The rise of digital music recording in Nigeria has transformed the Country's music industry, allowing for rapid growth of all genres on a global scale. However, this transformation presents a number of challenges that artists, producers and stakeholders must navigate. Despite being home to Africa's largest music industry, Nigeria's digital music recording landscape is plagued by issues such as piracy, inadequate copyright laws, limited access to quality recording facilities, poor internet infrastructures, unemployment, commercial studios collapse, lethargy in music practice, lack of technical experts, and poor production processes. This paper provides a critical review of some of the challenges facing digital music recording in Nigerian, in its present digital configuration, but especially with regard to the consequences it entails for the actual practice of music by musicians. It examines the historical context, current trends and future prospects. An unbiased phenomenological approach is adopted in presenting the advantages as well as the abuse of the new digital approach to music production, with the abuse seen as partly responsible for the general descent of music practice into an amateurism that is concretely expressed in lack of real interest in learning the musical art and in the gradual qualitative degradation of the ancient and noble art of music.

The recording industry is a sub-section of music industry that deals specifically with the production, that is, the recording and subsequent promotion and distribution of music. In Nigeria, the recording industry is a vibrant business community formed for the creation, recording and distribution of songs and albums. The recording industry according to Ogisi (2017) is the third phase of mass musical culture which since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century made itself felt in virtually all parts of the world, cutting across cultural, ethnic, political and religious barriers as well as making ubiquitous the presence of technology in post-modern society. Ogisi disclosed that commercial recording of Nigeria popular music began early in England in 1926. In 1956, a two-track recording facility was opened in Yaba, Lagos by Decca: "This was followed by Philips with its two four-track recording studios in Lagos and in Onitsha." Citing Emeka (1989, p. 135), Ogisi further pointed out that

the participation of Nigerians in the recording business began in 1958 with the establishment of Badejo, Oshunkeye and Ogunde studios. By the early 1980s, recording companies owned by Nigerian had increased and there were 'Patsol, Badijo Sound Studios, GES Warri, C. T. Onyekwelu Studios (later merged into the Nigerian Gramophone company or Nigerphone), Tabansi Studios, Joromi studios, Jofabro studios.

He further stressed that recording as the fulcrum of the music industry in Nigeria started in the 1920s and advanced so steadily that in the 1970s, it became a principal factor in the evolution of Nigerian economy in general and the entertainment industry in particular (p. 503).

Music recording involves every areas of music represented on disc. In Nigeria, before embarking on recording, it was the standard practice for recording companies to ascertain the viability of the pieces their clients intended to record before embarking on full scale production for the target market. This system aided the development of recording to Nigeria. On this, Ogisi (2017) noted that the development of recording in Nigeria was from the onset shaped by economic considerations which saw recording companies and merchants setting up trade outlets to take advantage of the potentially huge market that was in the offing.

### **The Advent of Digital Recording**

Digital music recording system, a system that swept across the entire recording process cropped up in Nigeria when music artistes, who have been thriving under analog music recording over decades, opted for a cleaner and more refined sound out-put. As a matter of fact, digital system of music recording changed the way in which music is produced and sold, and influenced the role of the studio engineer and producer in the production process (Udozor, 2021).

Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century and even as late as the 1950s, music recording process was through analog. Most recording studios in Nigeria during this period used analog recording process, a technique used for the recording of analog signals which among many other possibilities enables the analog audio for a later playback. This process was characterized by a physical recording mechanism similar to the vibrations in air pressure of the original sound. But such mechanism can often deteriorate and fluctuate because the recording is analog.

The advent of computer into the music industry since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century changed the structure of the music recording industry which is now guided by cyber technology which refers to the tools, systems, and practices related to the use of computers, networks and other digital devices for processing, storing and transmitting data. With the change of recording technology to digital sound output, the entertainment trajectory of music industry experienced drastic changes in the ways of sound and voice recording. This was more so with the advent of widespread digital distribution of music via the internet. Some recording studios in Nigeria now use digital recording equipment, which limits the number of available tracks only on the basis of the waxing consoles or computer hardware interfaces capacity and the ability of the hardware to cope with processing demands.

### **The Basic Differences between Digital and Analog Recording**

Analog recording can be described as the earliest system of music recording which involves capturing sound waves through microphones and converting them into an electronic signal so that they can be recorded. Ogisi (2016) notes that "analog recording involves the use of audio data on the multi-track system, which had the advantage of overdubbing of musical instrument expression". He further listed analog recording equipment, hardware machines to include a data machine, reel to reel machine, analog mixer, effect machine, amplifier, microphones and so on". Speaking on this issue, Chimex, a recording engineer (2022), avers that "analog recording is more of the olden or earliest recording practice, which is done without the aid of computer while digital is the newer practice done with the aid of computer" (Personal communication, 15<sup>th</sup> July, 2022).

Analog recording is a technique used for the recording of analog signals which among many possibilities, allows an analog audio for later playback. Its signal uses a continuous range of values that help to represent information with low signal bandwidth. Analog signals provide more accurate representation of a sound and its signal is continuous. The bandwidth of an analog system is dependent on the physical capabilities of the analog circuits.

However, in digital era, the computer is at the heart of music production. Digital recording is a method of sound recording in which an input audio waveform is sampled at a regular interval through the use of MIDI and DAW. MIDI

(Musical Instrument Digital Interface) is a technical standard that allows electronic musical instruments, computer and other devices to communicate, synchronize with each other and standardize the way instruments and devices send information about musical notes, pitch, timing and other parameter. Though MIDI does not transmit sound, it gives instructions that can be recorded, edited, and played back as software or hardware that supports MIDI standard, making it widely used in music production, live performances, and recording studios.

Ogisi (2016) equally asserts that digital data works through the use of MIDI apparatus and DAW (Digital Audio Workstation) such as the computer, music workstation like electronic keyboard, sequencers and outboard effects like compressors, equalizers, reverbs, digital mixing, a console and sound cards etc. Adedeji (2016) in Ofochebe (2020) asserts that nowadays, the music industry involves a modern concept of non-physical features of music, where and in which sophisticated communication technologies and innovations are now used to recreate and preserve all kinds of music.

Further, Adedeji cites Hesmonhalgh (2013) who asserts that digitalization makes the copying of information easy and occupies less disk space and bandwidth than in other non-print media experienced through computers without much distress. That is why the recording industry was the first cultural industry to utilize digitalization. Ologundudu and Ayokunmi (2020, p. 195) define digital recording as “a music generated through the aid of computers and other electronic data-processing machine.” The techniques of computer technology permit the indexing of specific genres or type of music and have proved useful in the analysis of style, tonal and harmonic structure and the process of composition. In digital recording, the analog wave is sampled at same time interval and then turned into numbers that are stored in the digital device. Digital recordings provide access to any part of the recording in an instant and its music is extremely portable as well. Thus, one can create tunes at home, with mobile apps, one can access, edit and recreate music from a mobile device.

Compared to analog process, digital production is neater and smoother and can be used to achieve high quality sound. Apparently, digitalization gives room for correction after the dubbing. Udozor (2022) differentiates analog recording and digital recording thus: “the major difference between analog and digital recording is [in] the major technological advancement in the storage system. Whereas in digital recording, we have disk, hard drive and compact disk for storage but in analog, it is just [the] analog tape” (Udozor interview, June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2022).

The sharp differences between analog and digital recording can also be seen from the problem of roughness associated with analog tapes, as well as the kind of noises that can always appear in the analog recording; but on the contrary, in digital registration, one tends to get a clean, noiseless sound production. Next, from the musical perspective, Udozor avers that shift from analog to digital came as a result of lapses, faults and complaints that musicians were getting from tape recording and tape storage. Some tapes eventually depreciate and become degraded such that the owner may not be able to access his/her data anymore. The improvement came with the digital invention which came into fullest prominence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **The Current Recording Practices**

It was Efurhevwe (2017) who asserted that there are three typologies in the history of recording in Nigeria. She described the earliest as the analog which involves the use of audio data on the multi-track system. In short, it is a system of recording on tapes. Such production is achieved using manual equipment to mixing, mastering and pasting the sound data unto a vinyl. In analog recording practice, audio data are generated by recording artistes, and this may include singers, musicians (including session musicians and musical ensembles) usually with the assistance and guidance from record producers and audio engineers. Such recordings were traditionally made in recording studios which were rented for a daily or hourly rate in a recording session. Recording process during this time requires recording studio – a specialized facility for sound recording, mixing and audio production of instrumented or vocal musical performed spoken words and other sounds.

The second recording practice that emerged was digital recording, which involves the use of digital data through the use of midi apparatus and DAW and music work-station. It is created by changing the physical properties of the original sound into a series of numbers, the numbers that are then stored and read back for reproduction. Computer then becomes the heart of music production and advances in digital recording technology [and] allowed many producers and artists to create home studio using high-end computers and digital recording programs like protocol, thus, bypassing the traditional role of the commercial recording studio.

The third and latest typology of music recording is the analog-digital studio which is configured to suit or accommodate both analog and digital data in a single domain. In this practice, any music production that involves external instruments apart from MIDI sequencing is analog-digital type. Chimex (2022) describes it as a kind of combination of digital and analog to achieve greater sound and for more efficient production. The analog attachment to digital is like when everything is not in software, but played live into computer which can be digitalized, edited and transformed into various forms which cannot be done directly during analog time. Most studios now do analog separation – which is a process of converting midi sequenced work to analog by waving (exporting) each instrument (Nwobu, 2022). In analog separation, when a particular beat is sequenced as midi, it can then be converted to analog in order to be able to mix it to sound as analog. Once exported as wave, the sound engineer can bring it into stereo channel where he can twist the sound as wanted. Once waved in a stereo channel, the sound can be manipulated as wanted and desired.

In this recording practice, there are other software like harmony engine, value audio etc. that helps to harmonize, swap, change notes and tweet voices among other functions. They are mostly useful where recording singers whose voice is bugged with ever-shifting tonality. With the aid of computer, even some vocals are enhanced during performances.

### **Consequences of the Current Practices**

Many issues are associated with the current music recording practices especially in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria, which have implications for overall profitability. These include the collapse of some commercial studios, laziness, unemployment, conventional marketers' relapse among others.

#### **1. Commercial studios collapse**

Over time in the history of recorded sounds, the process of capturing music and transmitting it into a marketable product has radically changed. The digital environment has virtually turned the perennial system of recording upside down. In the past, working a record from the studio to the final customer used to be a lengthy process, involving a swath of creative individuals: musicians, engineers, producers, manufacturers and business people who are experts in the business of music but presently, with the advent of computer into the music industry, any amateur artist can simply produce an album just merely working on the laptop. Not only that, even with band lab app on a smart phone, one can now record music without ever going to studio.

Now, the introduction and evolution of digital studio has – as a matter of consequence – resulted the collapse of most commercial studio, especially in the eastern part of Nigeria. It has made it easy and possible for musicians, engineers or producers to have a recording or MIDI facility in the convenience of their homes, apartments or personal places of business. Almost anyone can now afford, construct and learn to master one personal digital production facility or the other. Nwobu (2022) avers that most studios have collapsed because they could not cope with the negative effects or impacts of digital recording practices (Nwobu interviews, 2023). Chimex (2022) concurs with Nwobu thus:

Digital recording practices brought studios to people's door steps [such] that some people can even carry their studio equipment in one travelling bag, equipment like laptop, USB sound card, one microphone, booth phones and go into one room to make production. Such practices affected big commercial studios [to the extent] that most of them went into extinction (Chimex interviews, 2022).

Some of the affected commercial studios in the South-eastern part of Nigeria include:

- Rogers All Stars Awka
- Melody Studios Nawfia
- Unit 2 Studios Enugu
- Vititon Studios Owerri
- Eweson Studios Onitsha
- Abba Father Digital Studios Awka
- Spartan Studios Awka
- Vinas Studios Onitsha
- Denis Akwa Studios Onitsha among others.

#### **2. Unemployment**

The advent of digital technology in music production has served to offer the musicians wider range of sophisticated equipment for all kinds of desired musical and sound effects. Modern-day digital audio workstation has packed the functionality of a full-fledged record studio into a single laptop, technology has optimized the recording process. Ogisi (2017) argues that “since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century mankind has come to take music for granted because technology of

sound recording has made it ubiquitous that it is no longer necessary to engage musicians or to personally make music for one's need. This has created unemployment among session men."

During the period of analog production, all vocal parts are recorded together, thereby creating job opportunities to session men and women to earn their living. But presently, digital recording or production has deprived many session employees such job opportunities. This is because a single person can take up the whole production alone by simple exploitation of the possibilities of digitalization. With sophisticated instruments, a sound engineer can single-handedly perform a task that could have been performed by many session musicians who could have been placed under contract to provide their services for hire, thus depriving such musicians of fees or regular wages formerly proffered for their services. Consequently, many session musicians are now jobless and unemployed despite the mass shift in recording business. In essence, digital innovations have made artists less dependent on the traditional players in music industry.

### 3. Lethargy in Music Practice

Another consequence of the contemporary digital recording practices in Nigeria is lethargy in music practice. Some digital producers – including even musicians – find it difficult to engage in assiduous rehearsals. Indeed, the digital manipulation of sound recording can be argued to be directly responsible for the reduction of rehearsal opportunities. The need for constant rehearsal is no longer felt since the instrumentalists are no keener to practice. Some producers just use their ears, and with the aid of the computer mouse, simply heap up a meaningless mass of rhythm and sounds as music production. Such laziness is observed not only on the part of instrumentalists but also is similarly exhibited by vocalists who cannot sing well without the aid of the sequencer. Many producers and amateur musicians are no longer prepared to toil for months or years to master their instruments since they know that the electronic keyboard could give them whatever sound effect or tone quality they desire. They rather prefer programming of instrument line rather than playing it live. They prefer manipulating and transposing the keyboard instrument rather than real and actual key. Onyeji (2015:14) points out the same difficulty, to wit, that skill acquisition in music studies is waning fast. Students go through their university music studies without acquiring the capacity to efficiently perform music.

Harping on the present penchant for automated digital sound in music production, Nwobu (2023) indicates thus:

Digital recording practices have killed music recording in the sense that one can produce rubbish sounds and with attune software, it can be corrected. Such practice has turned musicians into lazy people. Currently, there are some music software like harmony engine for harmonization value audio that helps swap notes and treat voices which are mostly useful where you have singers that are not steady on key (Nwobu interview, May 20<sup>th</sup> 2023).

Concurring to this, Agu (2011) noted that availability and use of the technologically advanced instruments appear to have made majority of Nigerian musicians lazy and incompetent. Most Nigerian musicians now prefer achieving their goals through the easiest means. In the era of analog production, all vocal parts are recorded together. Many backup singers are used and a number of them rehearse very strenuously. However, the present digital economy of recording practice has led to a situation in which somebody can come for recording unprepared, believing that computer will be used to enhance his/her sounds. Such musicians usually become failures during live performance. Indeed, one can hardly find expert musicians or music groups that can perform variety of tunes on a live stage. Fact is that many contemporary musicians rely on pre-recorded CDs or digital sound files of the tracks they intend to execute to accompany or back them up when invited to perform live on stage (Chimex interview, 2022).

### 4. Poor Production Processes

Most Nigerian musicians now concentrate or rely on kinds of music which could not have been created without the use of computer. This has greatly robbed off the natural feeling of music that comes from inner perception. Ologundudu and Ayokunmi (2020) assert that "the computer has... caused some devastating effects to music industry especially in Nigeria because it is multipurpose and portable." They further stress that musicians – especially the young upstarts and startups – unduly took advantage of it to demonstrate their presumed natural talents, thereby flooding the music industry with substandard music products.

Obviously, as a result of the rampant unemployment of Nigerian youths, lots of shallow knowledge of music entrepreneurship is now paraded in the music market by young amateurs. Recorded works are presently produced by persons who lack basic training in the business of music production. Onno (2014) in Efuvrhere (2017) notes that most of the producers are young people who are faced with unemployment and thus venture into any available business opportunities like music recording, production including being musicians without acquiring the needed skills for the art, producers without the necessary skills often end up pirating the production of recorded music

Going further on this, Ologundudu and Ayokunmi (2020) affirm that many youths who could not find their feet in the job market after graduation resort to flooding the market with substandard, quack and pirated music products as a way of keeping busy and making quick money. Along same line, Kargbo (2006) in Efuvrhere (2017) indicate that "the

music industry is now populated with people who do not have professionalism and interest to make good musicians or good music people. People now run labels when they have no idea about music.”

Now, these half-baked musicians celebrate mediocrity and never make efforts to know the proper way of handling music production and business. Consequently, they lower the standard of the music profession by giving out poor services, thereby making it appear as though our country Nigeria does not have standard professionals in music and sound engineering, who can give a world-class music recording.

##### **5. Collapse of Conventional marketing system**

In the first decades of the 2000s, the music industry underwent drastic change with the advent of wide spread digital distribution of music via the internet, which includes both legal or legitimate music purchase from online music stores and illegal file sharing of songs. Therefore, it can be argued that this change of business mode from hardcopy CD sales to pure virtual (online) sales is one of the consequences of the revolution orchestrated by the globalized digital economy. The possibility of a pirating or bootlegging a CD by ripping it into digital marketable files constitutes an existential threat to the welfare of the artist as well as the conventional CD marketer, what with all the losses he or she incurs from the renting of a shop and all such vagaries and in clemencies associated with the everyday job of trading. This would keep killing and diminishing talents while pushing the music industry down. The effect according to Udozor (2022) is that it discourages people from going to studios since their original works are susceptible to the criminal activities of bootleggers with all the adverse economic consequences this portends for them. Naturally – and sadly so – as the unfettered proliferation of sites for digital bootlegging and piracy continues unabated, one may prognosticate the possible final elimination of the CD as a format of digital information preservation. The negative economic and informational consequence can only be imagined.

##### **Conclusion**

From the above exposé, one sees that the perennial and conventional recording field is built around pools of talented individuals: musicians, engineers, producers, manufacturers and business people who are experts in music industry, who work together for a common goal, namely, production and selling of music. Production of good music is not necessarily dependent on the kind of equipment a recording studio has but mainly on the quality knowledge, vision, expertise and professionalism of the resource personalities that are available or involved.

The evolutionary stage in the business of music-making and music production was ushered in with the advent of technology which saw the introduction of sophisticated modern equipment and instruments in the process of music production. These advances in digital recording technology have led many producers and artists to create home studios using high end computers and digital recording programs like protocols, thereby bypassing the traditional role of the commercial recording studio. Consequently, recording practices has witnessed a dwindling of fortune and more importantly the decline of professionalism in music-making and production.

Safeguarding professionalism in music recording in Nigeria would demand emphasis on possessing adequate aural strength, capacity for musical articulation, contemplative mind as well as sound and objective evaluation and acceptance of the required music performance skills from those who possess it. But the current recording practice in Nigeria shows that some Nigerian musicians have lost their skills, knowledge, good judgment and abilities that are expected of them as professionals. This lack comes as a result of cultivating wrong attitudes towards the challenge of acquiring musical skills. The net consequence is the influx of unskilled personnel with insufficient experiences – and even armed with quackery – into the music industry.

##### **Recommendations**

A primary exigency for tackling the challenges of the digital revolution in music production is to create cyber technological awareness, so that musicians can have a follow-up knowledge on how to deal with the digital revolution in music production, a trend about which so many people – including the musicians themselves – are not yet conversant. Such enlightenment campaign can be championed by music faculties in Nigeria. Creating discussions among musicians, producers and studio engineers will help in integrating purposefully the goodies or advantages of the digital in music production while checkmating excess like digital bootlegging and piracy.

Similarly, music producing organizations would need to create forum for musicians to be educated especially in the usage of internet since digital advancement and internet work in pari passu. Music producers should create such an awareness as to demonstrate to or convince musicians especially upcoming artistes that the digital cum internet revolution should be seen as a means to an end but not the end itself. As a matter of fact, it is a stepping stone to move

to a higher ground for musicians. There is need for musicians to be thoroughly groomed in matters that has to do with the gamut of music entrepreneurship so as to maximize sales and, ipso facto, subsequent productions. Next, there is need for stakeholders in music production to synergize among themselves since music production ought not just to be one-man affair. Digital technology could be of optimum value and use if room is created for various strata of music experts to contribute in order to create richer productions that are free from monotony and narrow creativity that comes when only one person is involved in the production.

Nigerian government should be of immense help in controlling the situation in music recording in this digital age. In collaboration with the music bodies/unions like PMAN, COSON, MORAN among others, policies that will guide the music recording industry should be formulated and the trade unions ensure the implementation. Such policies will serve to safeguard the minimum standard that is expected from musicians engaged in music production. On the side of the academia, music scholars would do well to write and attract funds in order to be able to promote, on a wider scale, standard musical works across the entire country. Consumers of music products should be educated on the adverse effects of illegitimate usage of internet for free download of music on the musicians whose survival is tied to the legally approved distribution of the music products that they are illegally stealing via non-legit means, namely, download. In the long run, awareness of the importance of encouraging the musicians should be in the fore.

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