

Covid-19 lockdown and its impact on the performance of *Ekpo* music in Afaha Obong clan, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

UDOK Ekaette C., PhD
Department of Music
University of Uyo, Uyo, Nigeria

&

UDOESSIEN Uyaiabasi E.
Department of Music
University of Uyo, Uyo, Nigeria

Abstract

One of the most prevalent, popular, and indigenous cultural practices of Akwa Ibom people is the Ekpo music festival. It is founded on the belief of life after death and it is regarded as the soul or ghost of ancestors that return to the land of the living in masquerade form to participate with kinsmen. This is usually marked by exciting events during certain periods within each year, such as period of farming and rites of passage. However, the emergence of COVID-19 brought a great negative impact on the yearly cultural display of Ekpo music festival. The pandemic came with preventive guidelines and measures led by the World Health Organization (WHO) to be observed by everybody all over the world. It is obvious that Ekpo music festival organized yearly by Afaha Obong group suffered seriously by this global pandemic. This paper seeks to assess the impact of COVID-19 lockdown on the Ekpo yearly music festivals, and the efforts made by the custodians of the festival to ensure the regular performance of Ekpo during the period. In order to validate some of the claims made in this study, primary data were obtained through personal observation and interview with members of the Ekpo group. Data retrieved were analysed, and the result of the findings reveals that COVID-19 pandemic lockdown greatly disrupted the yearly music performance of Ekpo music in Afaha Obong and the entire Akwa Ibom State. The areas affected include restrictions on movement which led to boycott of rehearsals, lack of funds for ritual rites and costumes, avoidance of direct contact with people, financial constraints and difficulties to adapt to changed lifestyle. The study recommends that indigenous music practitioners should systematically adapt to new digital opportunities in their performances to meet the current global needs.

Keywords: Ekpo; music festival; lockdown; COVID-19; pandemic.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has seriously affected various aspects of life, including cultural performances and music festivals. As the world grappled with the effects of the pandemic, the lockdown measures implemented by many countries led to the cancellation of concerts, festivals, and other public gatherings, leaving some musicians to find alternative ways of reaching out to their audiences while some cease to function. The lockdown measures affected the creative output of many musicians, including the *Ekpo* music scene.

The paper investigates the problems arising from the pandemic and the people's reaction to the unusual and unexpected situation of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nwabueze (2020) in his publication entitled *The impact of COVID-19 on the Nigerian music industry: The perspective of stakeholders*, notes that the lockdown measures had adverse effect on the cultural festivals and entire music industry. He observes that the cancellation of ceremonies and the closure of event centres led to decline in revenue proceeds for musicians. It is true that the effect has disrupted so many programmes, however, some popular musicians created virtual scenario as an alternative options, but for the *Ekpo* music festival, it had a serious adverse effect, which put the festival to a total halt. The lockdown caused the economic stagnation during the period; the entertainment industry suffered a great loss. The attention of many musicians was diverted and their focus was on other endeavours to sustain their livelihoods.

Ekpo music festival is an important aspect of Annang culture (the second largest ethnic group) in Akwa Ibom State. *Ekpo* music is often performed during *Ekpo* masquerade festival, which is a major cultural event in the community (Urua, 2019). The *Ekpo* masquerade is seen as a representation of the spirit world and is believed to have the power to protect the community from harm (Ekong, 2013).

Ekpo music is characterised by its use of traditional instruments such as wooden slit drum, long wooden gong, and membrane drums of various sizes. The music is usually accompanied by dance, with the masquerades performing intricate movements and acrobatics as they move through the community (Ekong, 2013). Urua (2019) affirms that *Ekpo* music is an important tool for passing down cultural values and traditions from one generation to another. The lyrics of *Ekpo* music often contain proverbs and other folklores, which are used to teach younger members of the community about their culture and heritage.

Ekpo music is identified as a symbol of community's identity and pride. Ekong (2013) further explains that masquerade festivals bring together members of the community from far and wide, and the music serves as a unifying force that helps to strengthen the bonds between them. Thus, in Annang culture, *Ekpo* music is an important aspect which serves as a means of cultural transmission, community identity, and pride.

Amusan's (2021) "Resilience of Nigerian musicians in the face of COVID-19 pandemic" notes the use of the internet as one of the strategies employed by Nigerian musicians to navigate the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Arising from the above, therefore, this paper explores the challenges encountered in the celebration of *Ekpo* music festivals during the COVID-19 lockdown. Notable among them was the incapacity associated with presenting scenes of the festival celebration on online platforms. Relying on obtained through interviews with key stakeholders during the *Ekpo* festival, the paper examines the impact of the lockdown on the creative output of *Ekpo* musicians, the challenges they faced, and the strategies they employed to deal with those challenges.

***Ekpo* music festival in Annang culture**

Ekpo music is a traditional music form of Akwa Ibom State, and the Annang people in particular, and it is an integral part of their cultural heritage. It has been performed during festive occasions, ceremonies, and rituals for many years. The music form is deeply rooted in the Annang people's cultural beliefs, practices, and traditions. Accordingly, Ekpe (2016), states that *Ekpo* music of the Annang people is a representation of the people's cultural resilience in the face of colonialism.

During the colonial era, *Ekpo* music became a subject of study for anthropologists and scholars interested in African society's cultural practices. Hence, Olukoya (1972) in his book "The *Ekpo* Society of Southeastern Nigeria," describes the *Ekpo* cult and its music tradition as a significant element of the Annang people's culture. However, he states that the popularity of *Ekpo* music declined during the post-independence period as Western culture began to dominate the Annang community.

In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in preserving and promoting the *Ekpo* music tradition. Furthermore, festivals and cultural events in Akwa Ibom State are sponsored by the Ministry of Information. This has encouraged regular performances by *Ekpo* musicians, which further promotes documentation and archiving of the history and evolution of *Ekpo* music.

Ekpo musical display is a critical part of Annang community's cultural heritage. It represents their cultural identity, resilience, and traditions. Despite the influences of Western culture in the area, the Annang people have sought ways to preserve and promote their music form through documentation, preservation, and celebration by yearly presentation of Annang cultural festivals. Thus, *Ekpo* music has survived negative external influences, and has continued to be a part of the Annang people for generations.

The cultural practices of Afahaobong clan in Abak

Afahaobong is a community with many villages in Abak Local Government Area (LGA) of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Akpan and Udo (2015) describe Afahaobong as a predominantly rural community where most of the population is engaged in subsistence farming and fishing. It is located "in the southern part of the state, between latitude 5°5'N and 5°10'N and longitude 7°55'E and 8°0'E" (p. 59). They further state that the people of Afahaobong are known for their rich cultural heritage exemplified by the traditional festivals amongst which is *Ekpo* music, which is presented during festivals, ceremonies, and rituals.

Similarly Mbuk (2014) comments that *Ekpo* music is an essential part of the cultural identity of the Afahaobong people in Abak. He asserts that the music is a representation of people's values, beliefs, and cultural practices. He states further that members of the *Ekpo* society are responsible for performing the music and upholding the society's code of conduct. Thus, the society is highly structured, with a clear hierarchy and certain requirement for membership.

The performance of *Ekpo* music during ceremonies is believed to have spiritual and social significance. During festivals in Afahaobong, *Ekpo* musicians perform on percussion instruments and accompanied by dancing and other traditional performances. Hence, *Ekpo* music is an important cultural heritage of the Afahaobong community in Abak: it represents their values, identity, and traditions.

Statement of the problem

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted many aspects of cultural practices in the society and Akwa Ibom State in particular. One of the notable effects of the pandemic was the suspension of *Ekpo* music festivals in Afahaobong during the year. *Ekpo* is a traditional music genre that is popular not only to the Afahaobong community but among some villages in Akwa Ibom state. *Ekpo* music is characterised by a very strong complex rhythm and the use of indigenous instruments. It has always been a period of fun and cultural extravaganza, which is celebrated annually to showcase the culture, values, and identity of the people of Akwa Ibom state. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the deprivation in the production and performances of *Ekpo* music during the year of COVID - 19. According to Obot, Udosen & Urua (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a massive decline in cultural activities in Akwa Ibom state, because the pandemic has necessitated the adoption of social distancing policies, which have restricted the gathering of people in public spaces. As a result, the performance of *Ekpo* music festival has been affected.

Furthermore, the economic situation during the pandemic period has affected the funding and production of *Ekpo* music. Before the pandemic, musicians were able to produce and finance their music productions through live performances but the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a decline in the number of live performances and sponsorships, resulting in a dearth of production activities. As a result, many musicians have become disenchanted and have shifted their focus to other professions. COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the production and performance of *Ekpo* music in Akwa Ibom state. Their performances during festival which include gyration with acrobatic dance to thrill the audiences were affected. *Ekpo* music does not only serve as a source of entertainment but it reinforces the cultural values and identity of the people of Akwa Ibom state. The *Ekpo* music festival is displayed yearly to mark the end of *Ekpo* season in the area, and this kind of festive celebration is peculiar to every community that has *Ekpo* cultural group in Akwa Ibom.

Objectives of the study

The aims and objectives are to:

1. examine if *Ekpo* initiates or members were careful to observe laid down rules and protocols laid by WHO in terms of social distancing and the use of face mask and hand sanitizers, while attending their meetings and rehearsals.
2. assess the alternative methods applied by members during the lockdown to ensure that the festival is held; and
3. examine how restrictions on movement and financial constraints impede the rehearsals and performance practice of *Ekpo* music festival.

Research questions

The following research questions were framed to guide the study.

1. How did *Ekpo* initiates or members observe laid down rules and protocols laid by WHO in terms of social distancing and the use of face mask and hand sanitizers to help them to perform during the period?
2. What were the alternative methods applied by members during the lockdown to move the festival forward?
3. How did restrictions on movement and financial constraints impede the rehearsals and performance practice of *Ekpo* music festival in Afaha Obong?

Theoretical framework

The theory of crisis formulated by Walby (2015) is a concept that deals with an important way of thinking about some forms of contemporary social change. Hence, the application of the theory of crisis to COVID-19 involves consideration to society, its impact, and the entire complex systems. The COVID-19 crisis largely fits the definition of crisis: because by implication, it has caused a large detrimental change to the social system and in which there was lack of proportionality between cause and consequence (Walby, 2022). The detrimental effects caused by COVID-19 to social systems and entire humanity, is what Walby (2022) addresses explicitly as the distinctiveness of crisis in its disproportional impact on society.

Conceptual framework

The concept behind this work is based on the premise that COVID-19 has affected every sector of social system including indigenous musical practices. Several researches have been conducted on ill-effect of COVID-19 involved in economic, education, religious and social activities in the society. Lain and Vishwanath (2021) submit that the health impacts of COVID-19 have not spared Nigeria, that the first case of COVID-19 was recorded on February 27, 2020 and since then the waves of infection has subsequently spread around the country, causing harsh economic impacts, thus leading to a deep economic recession with services, schools, markets and industry hitting hard. They further explain how the COVID-19 crisis has affected the human capital, livelihoods, and welfare of Nigerian households, with profound impacts on employment, education and religious activities. Therefore, COVID-19 did not spare any part of social system, but it affected every aspect of human endeavours, including indigenous musical practices.

COVID-19 pandemic and its global effect on music practices

Music is part of culture, and culture embraces many aspects of human existence, during the COVID-19 pandemic it has been a source of comfort and solace for many. As the world struggled with the challenges posed by the virus, music on the other hand played an important role in providing a sense of emotional stability.

From virtual concerts to online music videos, musicians and music lovers have found innovative ways to stay connected and engaged with their performances. One example of this is the "One World: Together At Home" concert, which was organized by Lady Gaga and the World Health Organization (WHO) in April 2020. The concert featured performances by some of the world's notable music stars, including Billie Eilish, Elton John, and Stevie Wonder. The event raised millions of dollars for COVID-19 relief efforts and brought people together in a time of great uncertainty and isolation. Therefore, music acted as a tool for healing and therapy during the pandemic period. Thus, many healthcare workers turned to music as a way to cope with the stress and trauma of working on the front lines of the pandemic.

In an article for National Public Radio (NPR), Dr. Sandeep Jauhar, a cardiologist and author, explains how music helped him and his colleagues to deal with the emotional toll of the pandemic. He notes that music is a balm that can connect patients. The pandemic significantly affected the economic strength of the music industry. However, music plays a crucial role in helping people cope with the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. From virtual concerts to online music classes, musicians and music lovers have found innovative ways to stay connected and engaged with their art. While the pandemic had a significant impact on the music industry, the power of music brought people together and provided comfort in times of crisis.

Impact of COVID-19 and social implication

Humanity is always facing enormous challenges in life ranging from natural disasters like flood, earthquake and other human factors like political crisis and economic instability. The issue of COVID-19 pandemic came and influenced every dimension of man's life - health, labour system, agriculture, economic, social, political, environment and cultural life. During the COVID-19, the cultural life of the community and indeed all cultural practices including indigenous and social gathering were restricted and some closed. Performances, festivals, parade, carnivals and all tangible events that call for gathering were cancelled, thus, the active involvement of people in the cultural life of the community was distorted by COVID-19. With concerts and festivals cancelled or postponed musicians and music venues hard-hit financially.

The crisis struck the cultural life of the society, and besides, many cultural workers and artists faced the financial challenges as they have lost their source of income due to cancellation of social activities. However, the crisis has generated some initiatives by offering online events. Creative initiative stemmed up, whereby many enlightened musicians and cultural workers in the developed society stepped up positive and proactive online activities to transmit their work digitally and to communicate with the rest of the society. The most vulnerable during the pandemic were the artists, they were mostly affected, because cultural activities, indoors and outdoors events were banned

because of the crisis whereas their financial condition was unpredictable, everyone was struggling to keep and maintain their families with the daily need like food.

COVID-19 and its effects on cultural practices in Nigeria

The outbreak of COVID-19 had a very serious impact on cultural practices in Nigeria. The government's response to the pandemic, which includes social distancing and the ban of large gatherings, has led to the cancellation or postponement of cultural festivals, religious gatherings, weddings, and funerals. According to the Africa News of August 24, 2020, the report has it that so many festivals and carnivals like the popular Osun-Osogbo festival, a traditional event held annually in Osun State, Calabar Carnival and Church settings were cancelled in 2020 due to the pandemic. Similarly, the Muslim Eid-el-Fitr celebration was a low-key affair due to COVID-19.

The pandemic has also affected the way Nigerians mourn their dead. In an interview with a Lagos-based funeral director on August 22, 2020 in Channels Television, he noted that funeral ceremonies have been significantly scaled down due to the pandemic. He said, "We have to reduce the number of people attending funerals from 300 to 50,"

Furthermore, the pandemic has threatened the survival of Nigeria's cultural industry, which employs millions of people. The Guardian Newspaper of May 19, 2020 reported that many artists were struggling to survive as a result of cancelled events and the downturn in the economy. Hence, COVID-19 pandemic had far-reaching negative effects on cultural practices in Nigeria. The cancellation of festivals, restrictions on religious gatherings and the scaling down of funeral ceremonies have all influenced the country's rich cultural heritage.

Methodology

Method used in gathering information was through personal interactive session and in-depth interviews with each participant on each allotted time. This method is appropriate to approach such a new and uncertain issue, which began at the early months of 2020. The trending problem in the society by then was the COVID-19 pandemic. Though several studies on its impact on entire human sphere and endeavours have been conducted by many researchers, the move on this work is to investigate the cultural performances of *Ekpo* music using personal observation and interview method. The study took a period of two months between September and October, 2021. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. The respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, and were asked to be sincere in their responses; a little token was paid for taking part in the study. An in-depth oral interview session involving a pre-set structured interview guide was conducted. Information retrieved from seven participants that were selected through sampling method was critically looked at and analysed.

Participants

Out of the seven interviewees in the study, six were initiates of *Ekpo* while one was an indigene of the community. They were asked to comment on the changes and effect of

COVID-19 on the cultural display of the *Ekpo* music in the society. Their age range was 22-60 years, mainly young men and adult men with different work status such as farmers, artisans, petty traders, fishermen and civil servants.

Procedure

Each interview took one and a half hours on the average; interview was conducted mainly in Annang dialect with a few communications in English which was translated by the researcher. The period to conduct interview was fixed on a convenient day and time by each respondent, and it was conducted face to face. Facts were jotted down, while others were recorded through android cell phone. After completion of interview, transcripts were imported and formal data analysis began. Privacy, anonymity, justice, confidentiality and respect for persons were ensured in the course of the study and besides, participants' identities were treated with anonymity as participants were presented with pseudonyms, including occupation and age.

Field report and research findings

All pieces information gathered in the field were translated to English, since the language used during the fieldwork with the participants was vernacular for clear understanding and responses. Series of interviews conducted with participants were geared toward the practices of *Ekpo* music before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in the community and Akwa Ibom State as a whole. Questions were categorised under the following themes: Rehearsals, Financial constraint, restriction of movement and traveling, observation of laid down rules and protocols laid by WHO in terms of social distancing and the use of face mask and hand sanitisers, while attending the meetings and rehearsals and interest/ curiosity of members in the society

The interview questions and responses show the qualitative data relating to how people coped with the challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. The areas explored include: avoidance of direct contact and crowding, keeping strictly to laid-down rules and COVID-19 protocols; financial constraints; restrictions on movement and traveling; and uncertainty about future/life

i. Avoidance of direct contact and crowding, keeping strictly to laid-down rules and COVID-19 protocols

People were to avoid direct contact, and gathering of people in large numbers, this affected the movement of *Ekpo* initiates to attend rehearsals as usual, below is the excerpt from a respondent.

The fear of the disease alone wouldn't even let me think of leaving the house, and the protocol that government gave I couldn't keep to it because it was also inconveniencing. So I preferred to stay at home than to go and get the disease (Sunday Umoh, 36 years)

(ii) Financial constraints

In case of the financial crisis, the COVID-19 guidelines also affected all kinds of trade both in the local market and cities. There was economic meltdown, money was not so easy to come by, shops and market small medium enterprises were closed, nothing to

generate income for members. Money gathered during the period was preserved for the upkeep of the family and for the very essential need like food; hence, the rehearsals were altered.

Honestly, there was no preparation at all for what the economy brought on us, I personally did not have money to pay my way to rehearsals, not just myself alone, even other initiates who stay outside the state. They couldn't equally come down for the "NDOK". People didn't have money to feed talk less of even remembering rehearsals as everyone was trying to survive. (Ukana Obot, 39 years)

In the same vein, one of the Chiefs who was also interviewed in the study shared a similar experience when he stated that the lock-down has really messed up a lot of things. Imagine not making rituals and sacrifices because of lack of money, we could not perform the normal and usual traditional rites which are an integral part of our lives; the pandemic was something that we have never seen before. We all couldn't do business to have money to sponsor our traditional obligations, no money to pay our ways to the meetings, so we all stayed at home (Chief Udoh Akpabio, 60 years old)

(iii) Restrictions on movement and traveling

Lack of mobility and restrictions of movement during COVID-19 pandemic was another great challenge that affected the cultural practices of *Ekpo* music during the period. With regards to this, one of the respondents, Charles, said that Most of our communications and preparations were done on phone, we were all afraid of the pandemic. So we decided to limit the number of meetings, yet, the number of people that were needed for our camp could not be present and most could not afford transport to come. (Charles Akpan - 42 years.)

Similarly, Effiong commented thus:

... We tried our best to ensure that we hold our meetings online using phones, however, many people were not with phones. At the time for "Ndok" (the Ekpo festival) we could not perform, because many were unable to comply with the government guidelines and protocols. Moreover, we were scared because we did not know who exactly was carrying the deadly virus disease. Hence, we were trying to be very careful and also be restricted to conform to the guidelines and protocols of the pandemic. Apart from that, people did not have money to travel for rehearsals as everyone was struggling on how to feed and maintain the family.

(Okon Effiong, 42 years old)

Another response from an initiate who had a brother in Lagos who couldn't come:

...I have never seen a thing like this before, since I joined the group, Every member staying far and near, always travel back home for rehearsals in times of "Ndok". My brother could not even come, he stays in Lagos. The whole village is dry and cool, there was no cultural activities at all as usual. (Eyakeno Isonguyo, an initiate - 29 years).

An indigene of the community adds,

The COVID-19 pandemic and guidelines protocols, to a large extent affected the national spirit of Ekpo music amongst the Afaha Obong indigenes. ...Honestly, there was no form of communal gathering, the Ekpo music didn't play, the people who use to make the village warmth and fun could not gather it was a terrible period. We were all living in fear and uncertainty.

Uncertainty about future/life

One of the initiates said:

I couldn't even leave my house for rehearsals because I was afraid that I will contract the disease and also get all my family infected - my wife and children were not even cooperating because they were also scared to lose their love one and bread winner (Ufok Imoh , 30 years old)

Discussion of findings and result

Through the investigations, the main problems of the COVID-19 pandemic during the year that hindered *Ekpo* music festival in Afaha Obong Clan, are:

- i. limitation of direct contact with people;
- ii. financial constraints;
- iii. restrictions on movement and travel;
- iv. uncertainty about future/life;
- v. inability to adapt to changed lifestyle; and
- vi. loss of enthusiasms by members of the group and the entire community during the COVID period.

The major challenge of the pandemic was the prohibition of direct contact with other, the pandemic forced many people to limit contact with people, and this was a very big challenge for rehearsals. Findings from the interview among participants in the study affirm that COVID-19 pandemic guidelines and protocols affected the responses of initiates to rehearsals, as they were reluctant to observe the protocols and as such they were unable to attend the rehearsal.

In contrast to the restrictions on contact with people, restrictions on movement posed bigger challenges for some initiates, especially those that were outside the community. They could not travel home, the *Ekpo Ndok* music festival was the in-gathering of all the indigenes of the community to celebrate and have fun together, but the global pandemic of COVID -19 halted the cultural festival of that year.

Another effect of COVID-19 pandemic and protocols that affected the musical tradition of the entire society including Ekpo music ceremonies and events was a new changed lifestyles. Many sectors of lives were influenced, such as mobility, trading, religious gathering and most cultural festivals. According to one of the interviewers in the study, the usual cultural way of rehearsing together called "*Ndok*" was conspicuously absent because of social distancing and the use of face mask and other preventive guidelines and protocols laid down by the government which were so strange for them.

Some of the protocols and guidelines as preventive measures to COVID-19 were not so easy for one to quickly get used to or adapt it immediately, hence that sudden change posed great problems to so many people, some of the studies conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) which insisted the hand washing, wearing of face mask in public places, keeping distance from other people, disinfecting surfaces, increased exposure to air and other rules associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, were posing lots of problems on how to adjust to a new lifestyle

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic was so obvious in the area of making preparation for the ritual of initiates during the pandemic. It was observed in the study that some of the participants could not gather to make preparations for the routine and yearly rituals because of the limited number of people that were required to gather during the COVID-19 lock-down. Besides, because of the lock-down and the prohibition of local and inter-state travel, it was difficult for members of *Ekpo* or intending initiates to travel and move around, making it even more difficult for people to appear physically to prepare for the *Ndok Ekpo*. This confirms the view of Mbah (2020) who asserts that ban of inter-state and international travel as well as mass gathering of not more than 20 or 50 persons depending on the location was prohibited in Nigeria during the lock-down in order to curtail the on-going COVID-19 pandemic.

Lastly, the study reveals that the lock-down protocol and preventive guidelines distorted *Ekpo* music festival in 2020 in so many ways: for instance, in the area of finances and other economic related issues, some of the participants expressed lack of funds, and their inability to buy costumes for the ritual, and their personal welfare. Hence, the ceremonial event of the *Ekpo* music festival which always comes yearly with colourful expressions was totally thwarted.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic differs greatly from other forms of crisis because, it is a health crisis which directly affects human life within a short possible notice. It is a global crisis which specifically influences both outdoor and indoor events. Culturally, the social ecosystems rely mostly on audiences, participations, and interactions, hence, these sectors were greatly affected by the emergency of the pandemic. However, the COVID -19 came with strategic challenges to disrupt the demand, cut down the costs, reduce leisure activities and increase uncertainty and financial instability, but on the other hand, it accorded accelerating innovation to some different sectors.

While many efforts by (WHO, UNESCO) were made to address the challenges associated with COVID-19, some sectors like the audio-visual industries, took to an option of engaging in digital adaptation as a paradigm shift from life performances. In other words, in cultural and creative domains especially in well developed world, the pandemic has triggered the emergence of innovative digital production, distribution and consumption patterns, and virtual concert, this trend has inspired new business models.

However, the concept of mutual adaptation of complex systems in the society is not common to many places in the world especially rural areas. Hence, in rural community like Afaha Obong, findings from the study reveals that the COVID - 19 pandemic and lockdown really disrupted and strained the featuring of *Ekpo* music festival and exhibition during the pandemic period. The crisis of this nature and its impact with a little change to the nature of the society is temporary, it has been suppressed and it is up again. On the other hand, in some countries, the COVID-19 crisis has been recuperated, building up necessary culture and cultural heritage that can foster the digital transformation to intensification and acceleration of neoliberal forms of society.

Recommendations

The recommendation in this paper is based on adapting towards new digital opportunities. The information gathered from the study recommends that indigenous musicians should create other virtual alternative platforms. The level of disruption experience affected by COVID-19 shows that performance and celebration suffered most, though for some popular musicians, the saving grace was the internet online meetings like zoom, skype etc. Without the internet, the effects of the pandemic would have been unimaginable. It is observed that well-known artists were still able to generate income despite the crisis, but the indigenous musicians with lack of technological know-how were battling on means for survival. Therefore, awareness should be created to the indigenous musicians to gear towards new digital opportunities by establishing conventional platforms like twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook to help them in virtual meetings. Also meetings and performances through video recordings for both immediate reference and further purposes should be kept.

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