



Social Media Platforms and their contributions to Gbenjo's Alujo Gospel Music in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Gospel music is essential in the music business, particularly in Southwest Nigeria. The musician's vocal and instrumental prowess is reflected in his cultural background and societal values, encompassing Western and African musical techniques. Despite the popularity of gospel music performances, it has been written about the role of social media platforms in promoting gospel music artists in Nigeria. Thus, the main aim of this study is to explore Laolu Gbenjo's musical works and highlight his uniqueness on social media handles such as YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram. Tracing his movement from church to social media space, Gbenjo music brought about a heavy arrangement of percussion instruments in the form of Alujo. Using ethnographic research design, this study relies on data generated from Gbenjo's Laolu social media handle. Findings revealed that, beyond the youth's harmful use of social media platforms, gospel artists use the platform for evangelism and socio-economic benefit. In conclusion, Nigerian Gospel musicians should use social media to promote and contribute to Gospel music.

Keywords: Uniqueness, Gospel music, Media, Cultural Elements, Laolu Gbenjo

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INTRODUCTION

Gospel music, a unique genre in the music industry, is known for its spiritual and uplifting messages. Daramola (2013), Dickson (1997), and Adedeji (2001) define Christian music as a broad term that encompasses all types of music with Christian texts, including those produced by the church, para-church, or non-church organizations. The uniqueness of gospel music is characterized by its cultural expression, inspirational themes, and distinctive sound. Adedeji (2015) further explains that gospel music, one of the Christian musical genres, is traditionally and theologically evangelistic, aimed at preaching the good news of Jesus Christ to save souls. He also notes that gospel musicians aim to portray Jesus as the Messiah and Saviour of the world. It is important to note that gospel music, as perceived in Africa, may differ from its North American counterpart despite some points of convergence. 'Gospel' refers to the activities and process of spreading the Christian message, also known as good news. Supporting this assertion, scholars like Costen (2004), Spencer (1990), and Halter (1955) traced gospel music as a genre of music emanating from the clandestine enslaved person religious environment of Africans enslaved in America. In light of this, the liturgy and music performed in Nigerian churches expressed hope by preaching the good news of Christ through music. Gospel music also focuses on spiritual themes centred around faith, hope, love, and redemption, distinguishing it from secular music. Laolu Gbenjo is a gospel musician whose music incorporates cultural elements, such as traditional rhythms and instruments, reflecting his cultural heritage. His songs and ministrations deliver messages of inspiration and triumph over adversity, uplifting the listeners and infusing pomposity into their lives. In addition, his music creates a rich and varied sound that distinguishes gospel music from other genres by fusing modern techniques with traditional African elements in its capacity to promote a feeling of spiritual cohesion and connection. Despite the dearth of Gospel Music in Nigeria, Laolu Gbenjo's performance brings new perspectives and vibes to his audience on social media.

Social Media

Social media is a means of communication and networking that allows people to share content, interact, and engage with others online. According to Ben Lutkevich (2023), social media is a collective term for websites and applications focusing on communication, community-based input, interaction, content-sharing, and collaboration. Gospel music, on the other hand, is a Christian music genre characterized by its religious themes and messages of faith. Concerning gospel music, social media can be a powerful tool for sharing and promoting gospel music and artists. It allows gospel musicians to connect with their fan base and reach a wider audience. Artists share their music, performances, and

updates on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. Social media also provides a platform for gospel music enthusiasts to discover new artists and songs, connect with fellow fans, and participate in discussions about gospel music. It can be used to share inspirational quotes, Bible verses, and devotional content related to gospel music. Social media has revolutionized how gospel music is distributed, consumed, and promoted. It provides a convenient and accessible channel for gospel artists to reach their audience and for fans to engage with and support their favourite artists.

Uniqueness of Gbenjo's Gospel Music on Social Media

Gospel music on social media is a new phenomenon in Nigeria, and it became more prominent during the COVID-19 pandemic. This development was well embraced by both musicians and the audience because, at that time, the whole world was shut down. However, the role of Gospel music on social media in this modern day cannot be over-emphasized. Gbenjo's music, among his contemporaries, uses social media platforms to encourage his fans to provide a unique form of musical element to entertainment, combined with music, dance, and other artistic movements. His performances are often characterized as energetic, with lively music and the arrangement of percussive instrumentation that creates a festive atmosphere for his audience. Gbenjo also showcases his cultural knowledge through traditional rhythms in the time signature 128 (Woro beat). Expressions through the incorporation of heavy traditional rhythms such as 12 8, or 68, and the rest are called woro, and 44 is called highlife, instruments such as Gangan, Omele Bata, Agogo, sekere, etc, and lyrical themes (Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, and English language). This cultural infusion adds a unique flavor to his music and highlights his cultural heritage. To do this, Laolu Gbenjo emphasizes gospel music's specific qualities, such as its impact on art, spiritual topics, cultural expression, and inspirational messages. His work demonstrates the genre's breadth and importance.

Gbenjo's Song in Cultural Expression:

E T'oluwa

voice

E to'lu-wa la-wa o se e o e to'lu-wa la-wa o se o

4

E - su n se sa o ye E - su n se sa ko

6

ri pa kan sa e to' lu - wa la wa o se o

E To'luwa l'awa o se o	We will serve God
E to'luwa l'awa o se o	We will serve God
Esu n se sa, o ye	Satan is a pretender
Esu n se sa, kori pa kansa	Satan is a pretender,

but powerless
E to' luwa l'awa o se e o We will serve God

Gbenjo grew up in Ogbomoso as a choir boy, where he learned Yoruba words, which contributed to his music in general. His songs are in Yoruba language, motivating the audience to dance and sing along. Gbenjo's music revolves around spiritual themes of faith, hope, love, and redemption. His songs are in Yoruba, motivating the audience to dance and sing along. In most cases, when he is on stage performing and notices that the person dancing is from the Baptist, C&S, C.A.C., or Celestial churches, he immediately plays a church song to get people to spray money. Songs like "Ipinleti" for C&S, "Jerimoyama" for Celestial Church, and so forth qualify. Nevertheless, the lead vocalist or the dancers may talk in tongues while singing.

Gbenjo Songs in Spiritual Theme

Ipinle Ti Jesu



voice

I-pin-le ti Je-su fi le-le-le-yi ti Ba-ba a-la-du-ra to e-da

5

ma-se-ro-pe ko-ya-ku-ro-nibe mo-du-ro le K'rist a-pa-ta

Song	Interpretation
Ipinle ti Jesu fi leleleyi	Foundation laid by Jesus
Ti Baba Aladura nto	for the follower
Eda mase rope, oyakuronibe	Do not plan to leave.
Mo duro le k'rist Apata	I stand on Christ solid rock

The lyrics of his songs often contain biblical references and messages of encouragement, setting them apart from secular music that does not touch upon these spiritual aspects. He attended children's Sunday school as a church boy, especially at Christ Apostolic church. One of the distinctive qualities of gospel music, including Gbenjo's work, is its ability to inspire and uplift listeners. For instance, if someone does not have money to eat or pay their children's school fees. A song like "Baba mo now re soya" can lift their souls that there is hope from

God.

Gbenjo's song for inspirational and uplifting messages

Baba F'owosanya



voice

Ba-ba mo-n-fo-wo-re-san-ya Ba-ba mo-n-fo-wo-re-san-ya mi

5

o-ni-je-ko-ro ni-nu-o-dun-ta-wa-yi mi o-ni-je-ko-ro ni-nu

8

o-dun-ta-wa-yi mo-n-fo-wo-o-lo-run-san-ya mi

10

o-ni-w'-ki-sa-ke-yin-a-so

Song Text	Interpretation
Baba mo n fowo re sanya	Father I have confident in you
Baba mo n fowo re sanya	Father I have confident in you
Mi o nije`koro, ninu odun ta wa yi	Bitterness is not mine this year
Mi o nimu`koro ni nu odun ta wa yi	Bitterness is not mine this year
Mo n fowo Olorun san ya,	I am confident in the Lord
Mi o ni wo`ki sa keyin Aso	Rag is not mine.

Gospel songs deal with the immediate problems affecting Blacks and are specifically designed to help Black people surmount their lives' immediate circumstances (Spencer, 1990). Laolu's songs carry messages of hope, perseverance, and triumph over adversity, inspiring and encouraging listeners. His music blends traditional African music with contemporary styles such as R&B, jazz, and soul. Costen (2004) states that Black gospel songs deliberately combined the sacred with the secular. Therefore, it would be expected that the black gospel would find a home in and outside the liturgical space of black folks. Johnson (2008), also cited in Romanowski (1992), wrote that more recent studies provide not only new historical perspectives and connections between the three terms used to describe music associated with the Christian religion but also introduce fresh ones that connect the 'sacred' and the 'secular'. These are "Jesus rock," contemporary Christian music "and "evangelical popular music are said to be the predecessor of contemporary Christian music.

Emielu (2014) traced the origin of gospel music in the West to the famous camp meetings and street revivals, as seen in the Azuza street mission revivals of the early

1900s. He also noted that Africans who had been introduced to Christianity in the diaspora found European religious music very dull and devoid of the ecstasy and hot rhythm of African music, and this made them seek opportunities to redefine European religious music in African terms. Gbenjo's gospel music, like other gospel music, has a significant cultural impact. It serves as a means of spiritual connection, praise, and worship within religious communities.

Gbenjo's Songs' Cultural Impact

kole To Yen



Song Text

Kole to yen o
Kole to yen o
To batiya un o pe o o
Kowabami jo o
Kowaba mi yo
Ore ti Baba se fun mi
....pa re ke

Interpretation

It is not up to that
It is not up to that
once it is time I will call you
Dance with me
Rejoice with me
For what the Lord has done

Idamoyibo (2007) affirms that "various forms of Yoruba traditional music have been transformed to Christian worship and other Christian religious events." Nigerian gospel songs are significant in the country's rich cultural and religious heritage and deep-rooted in Christianity. Laolu's songs serve as a medium for expressing adoration, gratitude, and devotion to God. His music fosters a sense of unity and belonging and contributes to the cultural aesthetic of these communities.



Laolu-Gbenjo is a Nigerian Gospel artist known for singing in "Alujo". He hails from the heart of Oyo State, Ogbomosho, and now lives in Lagos. He was born on 22nd May 1982. He is a Gospel Music artiste who has carved a unique niche in the Gospel-Alujo genre. He is one of the leading Gospel-Alujo artists in Nigeria and has become a global phenomenon. His music is vastly accepted, recognized, and enjoyed by different generations and all walks of life, and even the *oyinbos* are not left out. He started his musical Career in 2000, although he took a break to re-evaluate and returned fully in 2014. Laolu Gbenjo's music cuts across such that his music is primarily played globally, and his online activities have become the new entertainment for many. His peculiar and unrivaled performance has made him highly sought after globally.

He was one of the conveners of the "online praise party" that gained prominence at home and abroad, as people were vastly entertained during the compulsory stay-at-home order due to COVID. He is compassionate and performed at the Lagos State Isolation Centre, yielding to the call of humanity. Laolu-Gbenjo embodies Joy and energy, which talks so much about how he dispenses his duty. His brand has a positive and high influence on people, and he has built an enviable online presence for his brand on different platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. This iconic brand (Laolu Gbenjo) brings so much traction to other brands. He has performed for Major brands and notable individuals. Gbenjo and his band are always featured in churches during services and outside engagements such as birthdays, Weddings, and Burials, to mention a few.

Discussion and Responses

(a) How does COVID-19 affect your lifestyle?

Response: These musicians clarify that before COVID-19, they had a regular working relationship and practiced in person. However, the epidemic limited their mobility and caused them to become inert at home.

(b) Does this Epidemic affect your finances?

Responses: These musicians said yes and explained that before COVID-19, They had previously scheduled one or two performance outings in a week as their added income. Their expenses exceeded their earnings. Nevertheless, instead of increasing their money, the family lived off it. Some people lost their employment during this time due to not getting paid.

(c) How did you cope with that situation

Responses: They all concurred that someone had to be Internet literate to handle the situation. Many of them may practice and sing online using what little information they have. While some indicated it took some time to acclimate to the current trend, others claimed they were exposed to online coaching and praise.

(d) What were plans for the Future?

Responses: Many of them discussed what they need to do to meet up with this pandemic in the future. Esther Oladele opined that she needs to build herself up in technology and charity in society. Ogunsola said he would find something to do apart from music. Pastor Patric Mogan made up his mind that he would keep an open mind and expect the unexpected.

(e) Do you have any knowledge of the Internet?

Responses: All of these respondents agreed that they were partially literate on the internet using Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram, to mention a few

(f) Do you wish to be Trained online after the pandemic?

Responses: All these respondents agreed that they need training on the Internet, which means they speak for most Nigerians. However, based on the discussion above and their responses, the following choir leaders were interviewed on how COVID-19 affected their lifestyle: Mr. Ogunsola Seun Adekunle (Redeemed Christian Church of God, Ikotu), Miss. Esther Taiwo Omosehin (Christ Gospel Apostolic Church, Chapel of Praise, Oshodi), Mrs. Ogunnuga Dorcas Ayobola (Divine Solution Breadfruit of Zion Ministry), Mr. Oluwafemi Samson Olukoya (Celestial Church of Christ, Ojota), Miss. Olanrewaju Olabisi (Methodist Church Nigeria, mile 2), Mrs. Afolabi Funmilayo (St. James Anglican Church, Amukoko), Mr. Folorunso Daramola (St. John Anglican Church, Okokomaiko), Mr. Adeoti John Femi (Christ et al. Church).

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF GOSPELMUSIC

Advantages:

1. Spiritual Upliftment: Gospel music inspires and uplifts individuals. It offers messages of hope, faith, and redemption, helping listeners connect with their spirituality and find solace in difficult times.

2. Positive Impact: Gospel music carries positive and

uplifting messages, promoting love, unity, and perseverance. It can potentially bring about positive changes in individuals' lives, fostering a sense of motivation and empowerment.

3. Cultural Preservation: Gospel music often incorporates cultural elements, reflecting the artist's cultural heritage. This helps to preserve and celebrate diverse cultural traditions, allowing listeners to connect with their roots and appreciate their cultural identity.

4. Sense of Community: Gospel music has a vital communal aspect. It is often performed and enjoyed within religious communities. It brings people together through shared beliefs and experiences, fostering community and belonging.

Disadvantages:

1. Limited Reach: Gospel music has a dedicated fanbase but may have limited appeal beyond religious and spiritual circles. The lyrics' explicit religious themes and references may exclude a broader audience who may not connect with or resonate with the spiritual messages.

2. Stereotyping and Exclusivity: Gospel music can sometimes lead to the stereotyping and exclusion of artists within the music industry. It may be seen as a niche genre and not given the same recognition or opportunities as mainstream music, limiting gospel artists' exposure and career growth.

3. Lack of Diversity: Due to the strong association with religious themes and traditional musical elements, gospel music may be perceived as lacking in sound and subject matter. This can restrict the genre's ability to experiment with new styles and attract a broader audience.

4. Cultural Limitations: Gospel music on social media often reflects a specific community's cultural and religious practices, which may limit its ability to resonate with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. This can hinder its crossover appeal and potential for global recognition. It is important to note that these advantages and disadvantages can vary depending on personal preferences, beliefs, and cultural context.

Laolu Gbenjo's Contributions to Gospel Music

Through the exploration of Laolu Gbenjo's gospel music and the uniqueness of gospel music as a genre, this case study contributes to knowledge in various ways:

1. **Cultural Appreciation:** The study highlights the importance of cultural expression in gospel music, particularly in incorporating traditional rhythms, instruments, and lyrical themes. Ajirire and Alabi (1992) show gospel music as being rooted in the Christian religion, even though, in recent times, it has been associated with social and entertainment music because of its popularity. This understanding fosters an appreciation for diverse cultural traditions and promotes cultural preservation.
2. **Spiritual Impact:** The study emphasizes gospel music's profound spiritual impact, showcasing its ability to uplift and inspire listeners. This contributes to understanding music's role in expressing and nurturing spirituality.
3. **Artistic Fusion:** Gbenjo's music, blending traditional African music with contemporary styles, sheds light on the artistic fusion within gospel music. Adedeji (2007) submits that gospel music may be defined from an African perspective as a type of Christian music that preaches the 'good news' of Jesus Christ made famous through public performances, electronic media such as radio, television, the recording world, and the Internet. It is a branch of Christian music that has become popular and well-grown but in divergent dimensions. This offers insights into the creative processes of creating unique and diverse sounds within the genre.
4. **Community Building:** The study highlights its role in fostering community, unity, and belonging within religious circles. This understanding helps recognize gospel music's social and cultural significance beyond its artistic qualities.
5. **Genre Development:** By exploring the distinctive qualities of gospel music, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the genre's evolution and potential for further diversification. The link of gospel music in Nigeria to Pentecostalism is evident in the definition of Nigerian Gospel music by Adegbite (1994), as a new type of church

music brought about by the move of religious fanaticism which has resulted in the proliferation of Christian churches in Nigerian society". Emielu (2010:293), in Babalola (2003:29), asserts that African Pentecostalism can be appreciated

Contribution to Nigerian Music

The case study on the uniqueness of gospel music, mainly focusing on Nigerian gospel artist Laolu Gbenjo, can make valuable contributions to Nigerian music education in several ways:

1. **Cultural Appreciation:** Nigerian music education can benefit from exploring gospel music as a cultural expression. By studying Gbenjo's incorporation of traditional Nigerian rhythms (Highlife et al.), instruments (Gangan et al., etc.), and lyrics (Yoruba and English) in his music, students can develop a greater appreciation for their cultural heritage and diversity.
2. **Spiritual and Moral Education:** Gospel music inherently carries spiritual and moral messages. Incorporating these songs into educational curricula or extracurricular activities can allow students to explore and develop their spiritual and moral values. It can also foster a sense of empathy, compassion, and social responsibility among students. He can mentor some music students in higher institutions, and even Moslems can adapt their singing style by sighting Qur'an text, referencing Alhaji Ere Alaslatu, who sings like Yinka Ayefele.
3. **Music Education:** Studying gospel music, including its unique sound and fusion of different musical genres, can enhance music education in Nigeria. It can expose students to diverse musical styles, broaden their musical knowledge and appreciation, and inspire them to explore and experiment with different musical elements. Unlike the olden days, Christianity was for Juju, and Moslem was for Fuji, so modernization has changed our mentality. According to Usiobaifo (2021:13), technology gives significant opportunities to improve pastor education, spread the gospel, and develop Christian knowledge in this new information age. Technology has positively impacted the production and dissemination of Nigerian praise and worship songs. It has increased accessibility, improved recording quality, facilitated promotion and marketing, enabled collaboration, and made distribution easier

4. Community Building: Gospel music often serves as a source of unity and community within religious circles. Incorporating gospel music and its themes of unity, love, and faith into educational activities can create a positive and inclusive school environment that fosters a sense of belonging and promotes social cohesion. Moslem now dances to Gbenjo's music both on media and live band on stage. Nigerian praise and worship songs can promote social change. The lyrics of these songs can sometimes address issues such as poverty, corruption, and political instability. When believers sing these songs, they express their faith and call for change in their communities. This can raise awareness of important issues and inspire people to act. Overall, Nigerian gospel songs positively impact individuals and communities. They can help to increase spiritual growth, encourage hope and resilience, promote unity, and empower social change. These songs are a valuable resource for believers looking for ways to grow in their faith and make a difference in the world.

5. Historical and Cultural Context: Exploring gospel music in the Nigerian context can provide students with insights into the historical and cultural background of the genre. It can offer opportunities to discuss the influence of Christianity in Nigeria, the role of music in religious worship, and the evolution of gospel music within the country. By incorporating the case study on the uniqueness of gospel music into Nigerian education, students can gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for their cultural heritage, develop music skills and knowledge, nurture their spirituality, and promote community values and unity

Conclusion

Gospel music, exemplified by the work of Laolu Gbenjo, holds a unique position within the music industry. It offers a range of advantages, including spiritual upliftment, positive impact, cultural preservation, and a sense of community. The genre's focus on spiritual themes and inspirational messages provides listeners with encouragement and hope. Additionally, incorporating cultural elements reflects the artist's heritage, preserving diversity and fostering a sense of cultural identity. However, there are also certain disadvantages associated with gospel music. These include its limited reach beyond

religious circles, the potential for stereotyping and exclusivity, lack of diversity in sound and subject matter, and cultural limitations that may restrict its appeal to a broader audience. Despite these limitations, gospel music continues to impact and resonate with individuals who connect with its messages of faith and inspiration. It is a powerful musical expression and spiritual connection for many people, contributing to its enduring popularity and cultural significance. By exploring Laolu Gbenjo's gospel music, we gain insights into the distinctive qualities of the genre. The blend of cultural expression, spiritual themes, uplifting messages, and unique sound create a genre that offers a unique and enriching musical experience. As gospel music continues to evolve and diversify, it will undoubtedly maintain its influence and significance within the music industry.

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PICTURE

Laolu Gbenjo's Picture (2024) <https://treadybeatz.com/artist/laolugbenjo> retrieved on February 1, 2024. 6; 05 pm