

The Globalization of African Music Through Streaming Platforms

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Abstract

African music has experienced unprecedented global recognition in recent years, largely driven by the rise of streaming platforms and technological advancements. This study explores the critical role streaming platforms have played in globalizing African music, highlighting the opportunities and challenges faced by artists. It examines the historical evolution of African music's influence on global genres, the socioeconomic impacts of streaming on local artists and communities, and the future prospects shaped by emerging technologies and localized platforms. Key challenges, such as the digital divide, revenue inequalities, and cultural misrepresentation, are addressed alongside potential solutions. The paper also analyzes how streaming platforms have fostered cross-cultural collaborations, contributing to the sustained global popularity of African music. The findings underline the importance of infrastructure development, fair revenue models, and cultural preservation for ensuring the long-term growth and success of African music on the global stage.

Keywords: African music, streaming platforms, globalization, Afrobeats, cultural preservation, digital divide, revenue inequality

1. Introduction

African music has played an integral role in shaping the global music landscape, influencing genres, captivating audiences, and achieving significant breakthroughs in the international arena. Its rhythms, melodies, and instrumentation have been pivotal in defining some of the most popular music genres worldwide. For example, jazz, which emerged from African-American communities in the United States, owes much of its rhythmic complexity and call-and-response structure to African musical traditions. Similarly, reggae, originating in Jamaica, draws heavily from African drumming patterns and storytelling

elements, creating a genre that resonates with audiences across the globe. Even hip-hop, one of the most dominant contemporary genres, incorporates the percussive beats and narrative traditions deeply rooted in Africa. These historical contributions underline Africa's long-standing influence on the global music tapestry, serving as a foundation for countless musical innovations.

The global reach of African music has been amplified significantly through the efforts of diaspora communities. Across Europe, North America, and the Caribbean, African migrants and their descendants have acted as cultural ambassadors, using music as a means of

preserving and sharing their heritage. Festivals like the Notting Hill Carnival in London and Afrochella in Ghana have provided platforms for showcasing African music to global audiences, highlighting its cultural richness. Diaspora musicians, such as Fela Kuti, the pioneer of Afrobeat, and Miriam Makeba, whose activism and music made her an icon of South African sounds, have further solidified the global appeal of African music. By bridging cultural divides, these communities have played a key role in integrating African music into international contexts, setting the stage for its modern-day success.

In contemporary times, African music has experienced a remarkable surge in global popularity, with genres like Afrobeats, Amapiano, and Afro-fusion taking center stage in international music charts. Artists such as Burna Boy, Wizkid, and Master KG have gained worldwide recognition, earning awards, performing at major festivals, and collaborating with globally renowned musicians. Burna Boy's Grammy-winning album *Twice as Tall* and Wizkid's globally acclaimed song *Essence* are emblematic of this newfound prominence. Similarly, Master KG's viral hit *Jerusalema* became a global phenomenon, uniting audiences through social media challenges and garnering billions of streams. These successes have not only brought African music into mainstream consciousness but have also demonstrated its ability to transcend cultural and geographical boundaries. Through digital platforms and strategic collaborations, contemporary African artists have solidified their place in the global music industry.

From its historical influence on foundational music genres to the modern-day rise of African artists on the international stage, African music has consistently enriched the global cultural landscape. The contributions of the diaspora and the growing recognition of contemporary African sounds signify an era where African music stands as a powerful force in global entertainment. Its evolution is a testament to its enduring appeal and cultural significance, bridging continents and fostering a deeper appreciation of Africa's artistic heritage.

2. Role of Streaming Platforms in Globalizing African Music

Streaming platforms have revolutionized the way African music reaches international

audiences by breaking down geographical barriers and democratizing music access. Platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube, and Boomplay have created opportunities for African artists to distribute their work directly to a global audience without relying on traditional gatekeepers such as record labels or physical distribution networks. These platforms provide African artists with unprecedented visibility, enabling listeners from across the globe to discover their music instantly. By offering accessibility to international markets, streaming platforms have become vital tools in bridging the gap between African music and the rest of the world, allowing global audiences to experience and engage with the diversity of African sounds.

A key feature of streaming platforms that has amplified the reach of African music is the use of curated playlists and algorithmic promotion. Curated playlists such as Spotify's "African Heat" and "Amapiano Grooves" have introduced millions of users worldwide to African music, functioning as cultural gateways. These playlists are specifically designed to highlight trending tracks and emerging artists, leveraging algorithms that recommend music based on user preferences. This targeted promotion allows African music to reach audiences who may not have actively sought it out, while simultaneously enabling lesser-known artists to gain exposure alongside more established names. Algorithm-driven recommendations further ensure that African genres such as Afrobeats and Amapiano are consistently presented to listeners who engage with similar styles, fostering the growth of African music in global markets. This strategic use of technology has made streaming platforms indispensable in the globalization of African music, as they not only facilitate discovery but also sustain long-term engagement.

The success of streaming platforms in globalizing African music is evident in the achievements of numerous African artists who have risen to international prominence. For instance, Burna Boy's *Twice as Tall*, which won a Grammy, and Wizkid's *Essence*, featuring Tems, achieved massive global acclaim, with the latter becoming the first Nigerian song to chart on the Billboard Hot 100. Master KG's *Jerusalema* exemplifies the role of streaming in creating viral sensations; the track gained global recognition through YouTube and TikTok

challenges, amassing billions of views and streams. These platforms have not only amplified the reach of African music but also provided detailed analytics, enabling artists to understand their global audience demographics and optimize their strategies. By leveraging streaming tools, African artists have been able to build massive international fanbases, proving that streaming platforms are key drivers in the globalization of African music.

3. Challenges in the Globalization of African Music

The globalization of African music has introduced African sounds to a wider audience; however, this process is not without significant challenges. From infrastructural limitations to economic inequalities and cultural concerns, these barriers present obstacles to African music's sustained growth in the global market.

3.1 The Digital Divide in Access to Streaming Platforms

One of the most significant barriers to the globalization of African music is the digital

divide, which limits access to streaming platforms for both artists and audiences in Africa. Internet penetration remains uneven across the continent, with rural areas and underserved regions having limited connectivity. According to 2022 data from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), internet penetration in Sub-Saharan Africa was approximately 40%, compared to the global average of 66%. Furthermore, high data costs in many African countries make it financially challenging for users to stream music consistently. For instance, in Nigeria, streaming an hour of music on Spotify requires an average of \$0.52 in mobile data, a cost that is prohibitive for lower-income users.

These limitations disproportionately affect independent African artists, many of whom lack the resources to promote their music effectively online. Regions with lower internet access are also less likely to contribute to streaming numbers, resulting in African artists missing out on potential domestic support.

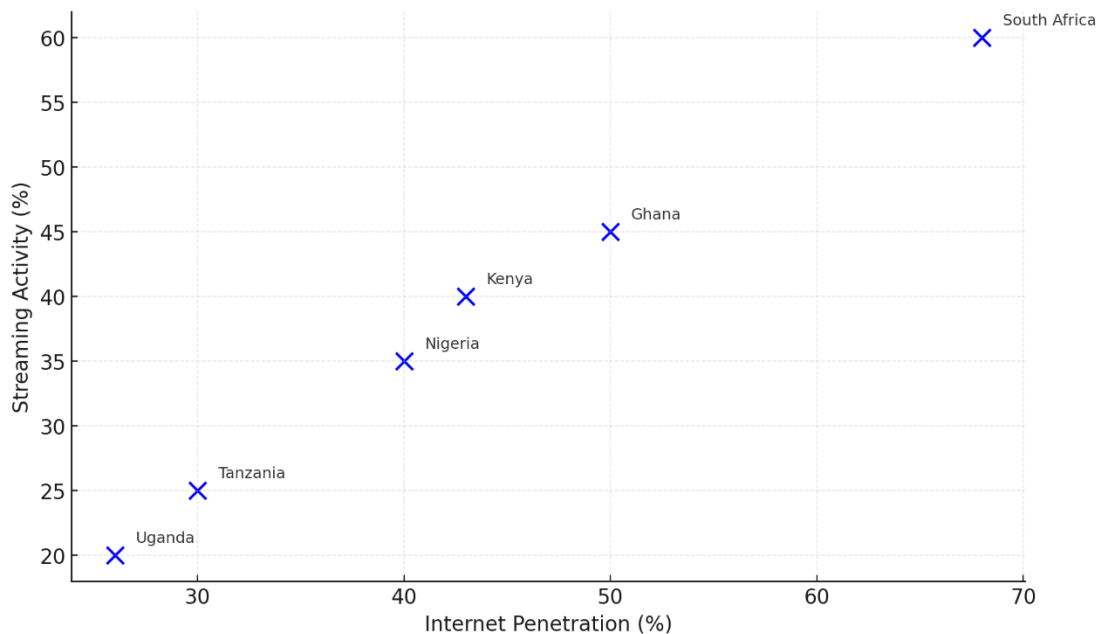


Figure 1. Internet Penetration vs. Streaming Activity in Africa

This scatterplot compares internet penetration rates across African countries to the average streaming activity on major platforms like Spotify and Apple Music, showing a clear correlation between connectivity and music engagement.

3.2 Revenue Inequalities Between Artists and Platforms

The revenue-sharing model of streaming platforms is another significant challenge for African artists. Streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music allocate the majority of their revenue to major record labels, while independent artists, including many Africans, receive only a small fraction of the revenue generated from their streams. On average,

Spotify pays between \$0.003 and \$0.005 per stream, meaning an artist needs millions of streams to generate substantial income. However, many African artists, particularly those in emerging markets, struggle to achieve such high numbers due to limited global exposure and the digital divide.

For example, while an internationally recognized artist like Burna Boy may earn

significant revenue from global streams, smaller independent artists in Africa often find it challenging to earn a livable income from streaming alone. This inequality is exacerbated by the fact that artists from developed countries often benefit from better marketing and streaming infrastructure, giving them an edge in capturing audience attention.

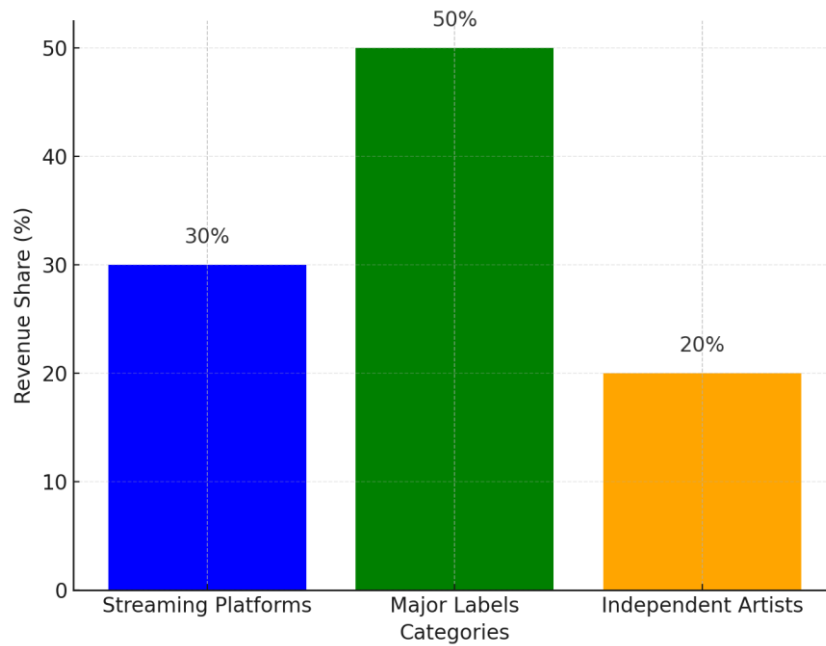


Figure 2. Revenue Distribution on Streaming Platforms

This bar chart illustrates the revenue distribution on streaming platforms, showing the significant portion of income retained by platforms and major labels compared to what independent artists receive.

3.3 Cultural Misrepresentation of African Music

As African music becomes more mainstream globally, there is a growing risk of cultural misrepresentation and commodification. Streaming platforms and global audiences often favor simplified or stereotypical representations of African music, prioritizing upbeat, rhythmic tracks while neglecting the diverse and complex musical traditions across the continent. This can lead to a homogenization of African music, where niche or traditional sounds are overshadowed by more commercially viable genres like Afrobeats.

For instance, while Afrobeats has gained immense popularity, other equally significant African genres, such as Gqom from South Africa or Taarab from East Africa, remain

underrepresented on global playlists. This imbalance often reflects the preferences of platform algorithms, which prioritize what is most likely to perform well commercially rather than showcasing the full spectrum of African music.

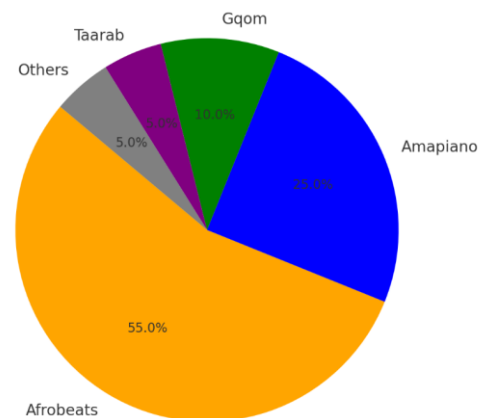


Figure 3. African Genres in Global Playlists

This pie chart shows the representation of

various African genres in curated playlists on Spotify and Apple Music, highlighting the dominance of Afrobeats compared to other styles like Amapiano, Gqom, and Taarab.

4. Socioeconomic Impacts of Streaming on African Artists and Communities

The rise of streaming platforms has brought significant socioeconomic impacts on African artists and their communities, reshaping the music industry in unprecedented ways. By democratizing music distribution and eliminating traditional barriers, these platforms have created new financial opportunities, stimulated local economies, and fostered cultural collaborations that extend far beyond the continent.

One of the most notable impacts of streaming is the financial empowerment of independent African artists. Without the need for traditional record labels, many artists can now distribute their music directly to a global audience, retaining greater control over their creative output and income. For instance, artists like Simi and Mr Eazi have built lucrative careers independently, leveraging streaming platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music to monetize their content. Tools like streaming analytics provide insights into listener demographics, helping artists target markets and refine marketing strategies. Although the revenue-per-stream model remains modest, the ability to reach millions of listeners globally has significantly enhanced earning potential for those who achieve high engagement.

In addition to benefiting individual artists, streaming platforms have contributed to the growth of local music industries across Africa. Cities like Lagos, Johannesburg, and Accra have emerged as vibrant music hubs, attracting investments in production studios, live event management, and marketing agencies. Streaming demand has created ripple effects throughout these ecosystems, generating employment opportunities for producers, videographers, sound engineers, and promoters. The rise of localized streaming services like Boomplay and Mdundo further amplifies this impact by catering specifically to African audiences, offering affordable pricing models that suit local markets. These developments have strengthened the foundation of Africa's music economy, positioning it as a key player in the global music landscape.

Furthermore, streaming platforms have enabled unprecedented levels of cross-cultural collaboration, bringing African artists into partnerships with global superstars. Collaborations like Beyoncé and Wizkid's *Brown Skin Girl* or Burna Boy and Ed Sheeran's *For My Hand* have showcased African talent to wider audiences while enriching the global music scene with unique African influences. These partnerships are not only artistic but also cultural exchanges, bridging continents and fostering mutual appreciation of diverse traditions. Streaming platforms facilitate these collaborations by breaking down logistical barriers, providing a shared digital space for artists to connect and create.

In summary, the socioeconomic impacts of streaming on African artists and communities are far-reaching. By opening financial doors for independent creators, driving the growth of local music ecosystems, and enabling cultural collaborations on a global scale, streaming platforms have redefined the opportunities available to African music. As these platforms continue to evolve, their role in shaping Africa's music industry is likely to expand further, bringing even greater benefits to artists and communities across the continent.

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