Graphic Design Industry in the Post-Covid-19 Era in Nigeria

Ibiwoye, Tope Israel
Industrial Design Department,
Federal University of Technology, Akure, Nigeria

Ejem, Agwu Agwu
Mass Communication Programme,
Landmark University, Omu-Aran, Kwara State, Nigeria
&
Kanu, Emmanuel Uchenna
Department of Industrial Design, Modibbo Adama University, Yola.
emmauchekanu@gmail.com

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic affected countless businesses and brought significant changes to the global economy, principally by changing the way people live and work, and leading to serious disruptions for many industries. With the implementation of lockdowns, social distancing measures, and the shift to remote work, graphic designers and other service providers had to adapt to new ways of working and serving clients. With widespread opinions from graphic designers, industry executives, and academics that the graphic design industry was impacted by COVID-19, this research paper examines the specific impact of the pandemic on the graphic design practice in Nigeria. The objectives were to identify any changes in the way work is done and the extent to which the demand for digital design services has been affected by the pandemic, and ultimately know if there is a need for creative adaptation to meet the changing needs of clients. The study employed a mixed-method approach that includes surveys and interviews with graphic designers in Nigeria. The findings suggest that the pandemic has led to a shift towards remote work and increased demand for digital design services. The study also highlights the importance of creative adaptation in meeting the changing needs of clients during the pandemic. The research concludes by proposing recommendations for graphic designers in Nigeria to adapt to the new normal.

Keywords: COVID-19 Pandemic, Digitalization, Graphic Design, Remote Work.

Introduction

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic brought a significant impact on the global economy and various aspects of life, including the graphic design industry in Nigeria. The world has been battling the pandemic caused by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), also known as 'Coronavirus Disease 2019' (COVID-19) since November 2019. The disease was declared by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as a global health emergency on January 30, 2020, and as a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (De Bruin et al., 2020). To put the impact of the disease in context, as of June 7, 2023, there have been 767,750,853 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 6,941,095 deaths (WHO, 2023).

Nigeria has a vibrant graphic design industry (Nwankwo, 2018). The industry has a long, illustrious history that dates back several decades. The diverse culture, politics, and economy of the nation have all had an impact on the growth of graphic design in Nigeria. Nigerian graphic design has developed and grown to this day. Nigerian graphic designers are developing digital campaigns and multimedia graphics that can appeal to a worldwide audience as a result of the development of social media and digital technologies. To develop distinctive designs, they are also experimenting with new methods and trends.

In Nigeria, there is a widespread opinion from graphic designers, industry executives, and academics that COVID-19 and the restrictions that followed have affected the arts industry, including the graphic design sub-industry, in various ways, including the delivery of services, collaboration, and workflow processes (Ajose & Omotayo, 2023). It was mooted that the pandemic forced graphic designers to adapt to remote work and digital communication, which has presented new challenges in terms of communication, and collaboration and transformed the traditional graphic design practices. The industry has also witnessed a decline in income, increased competition, and changes in client needs. Despite these challenges, the industry has also seen innovative approaches adopted by designers to continue their practice.

Following those opinions cited above, there are current bodies of evidence in research (Stride et al., 2023; Khlystova et al., 2022; Haleem et al., 2020) that the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruptions in various industries, including the graphic design practice in Nigeria. There is a consensus that with the implementation of lockdowns, social distancing measures, and remote work arrangements, the graphic design industry has undergone significant changes in its operations and output (Skaggs, 2023). However, the problem to be investigated is the degree of impact of the post-COVID-19 era on the graphic design practice in Nigeria, including the specific challenges faced by graphic

designers, changes in the demand for their services, and the effectiveness of remote work arrangements in the industry.

Research Questions

This paper aims generally to explore the post-COVID-19 effect on graphic design practice in Nigeria. The questions that guided this study included the following:

1. What challenges have Nigerian graphics designers faced due to the pandemic and how have they managed to overcome them?
2. What strategies have Nigerian graphics designers employed to survive the pandemic?
3. How has the Covid-19 pandemic influenced the demand for graphic design services in Nigeria?
4. How has remote working impacted communication and collaboration with clients?

Literature Review

Graphic Design

Graphic design is a craft where professionals create visual content to communicate messages. Designers use typography and pictures to meet users' specific needs and focus on the logic of displaying elements in interactive designs, to optimize the user experience. They do this by applying visual hierarchy and page layout techniques. Graphic design is the projection of visual communications meant to convey certain messages to social groups with specified goals. Graphic design is an interdisciplinary design and fine arts field. Its practice entails employing manual or digital tools to express creativity, invention, and lateral thinking, where text and visuals are commonly used to communicate visually (Nabil & Momani, 2020).

The graphic designer's job in the communication process is that of message encoder or interpreter. They work on visual message interpretation, organizing, and presentation. Typically, the graphic design uses typographic aesthetics and the compositional arrangement of text, ornamentation, and imagery to convey thoughts, sentiments, and attitudes that words alone cannot express (Bravo, 2015). The design work might be based on a customer's desire, which is formed linguistically, either orally or in writing; that is, graphic design converts a linguistic message into a graphic manifestation (Nabil & Momani, 2020).

Early Developments of Graphic Design in Nigeria

Nigerian graphic design dates back to the early 20th century when European invaders introduced the nation to contemporary printing technology (Souza Dias, 2022). The establishment of printing press in Nigeria led to the expansion of Nigeria's printing sector and a rise in demand for graphic design services. Initially, graphic design was mostly utilized for business needs like marketing and advertising. Nigerian artists started combining traditional African symbols and themes into their works in the 1920s, giving rise to a distinctive Nigerian aesthetic. By the creation of public service announcement posters to promote health and hygiene, the Nigerian government also contributed to the promotion of graphic design (Iyama & Akpan, 2013).

Once the nation gained its independence in 1960, graphic design continued to advance quickly in the 1950s and 1960s. More conventional patterns and themes have been included in graphic design as a result of the government's promotion of nationalism and African identity. Several Nigerian artists started experimenting with new styles and methods with the establishment of regional graphic design colleges. In the 1970s and 1980s, graphic design in Nigeria expanded.

Nigeria's strong economic expansion and political stability in the 1970s and 1980s increased demand for graphic design services. Graphic designers have an unprecedented opportunity to develop advertising and marketing campaigns for oil corporations during this time due to the oil boom. Around this time, Nigerian graphic designers also started to earn prominence on a global scale by taking part in exhibits and competitions. The Association of Graphic Designers of Nigeria (AGDN), the first professional organization for graphic designers in Nigeria, was founded in 1974 and offers a venue for designers to network, collaborate, and display their work.

Today, the Nigerian graphic design industry has developed and grown to this day. Nigerian graphic designers are developing digital campaigns and multimedia graphics that can appeal to a worldwide audience as a result of the development of social media and digital technologies. To develop distinctive designs, Nigerian designers are also experimenting with new methods and trends. Also, there has been an increase in design workshops and schools, giving young Nigerian designers the training and information, they need to compete on the international stage. Also, the internet has given Nigerian designers a platform to share their work, network with other designers, and gain knowledge from other countries' design communities (Kahim et al., 2011).

Remote Work as Potential Surviving Strategy

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increase in remote working, as many companies were forced to close their physical offices to prevent the spread of the virus. This shift in

work culture has led to a significant increase in the demand for digital and online design services. Many graphic designers were forced to work from home, which presented new challenges in terms of communication, collaboration, and managing projects resulting in the need for new and innovative digital designs. This shift to remote work was made easier by the availability of technology tools such as video conferencing and project management software. The advent of the global Covid-19 pandemic, resulted in disruption business operations in various degrees, and traditional business practices have taken a significant impact (Bartik et al. 2020, Ergovan, Guo & Seiti 2021).

Methodology

The study used a mixed-method approach, including surveys and interviews with graphic designers in Nigeria. A total of 53 designers were surveyed in the quantitative procedure, whereas 5 company executives were interviewed. The survey was conducted online via Google Forms and included questions on changes in work practices, the impact of the pandemic on the demand for graphic design services, and the need for creative adaptation. It focused on the experiences of individual designers during the pandemic. The percentage-based method was the one employed to carry out the data analysis.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The data gathered from the respondents are presented below:

Fig 1: The pandemic and its positive effect on the graphic design industry in Nigeria
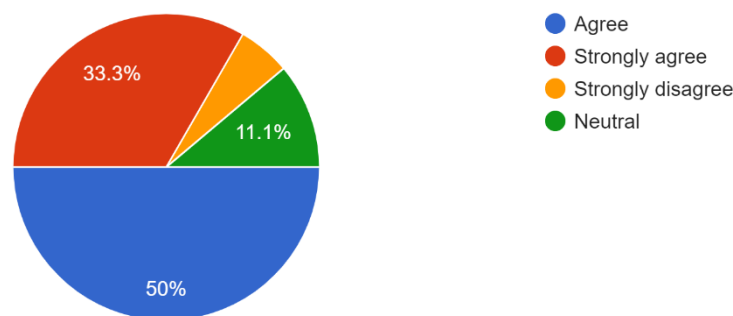
The majority (50%) of the respondents believed that the pandemic has affected the graphic design industry in Nigeria in a positive way, which is contrary to the earlier assumption of a negative effect.
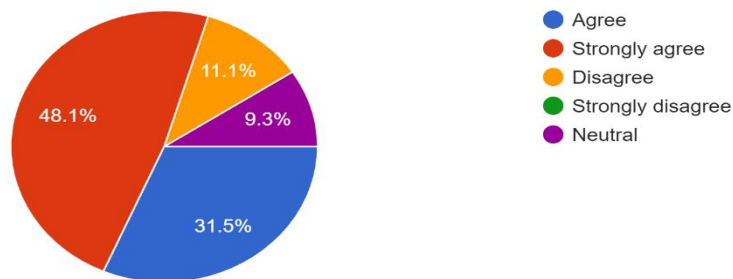
Fig 2: The pandemic and remote working opportunity for graphic designers in Nigeria
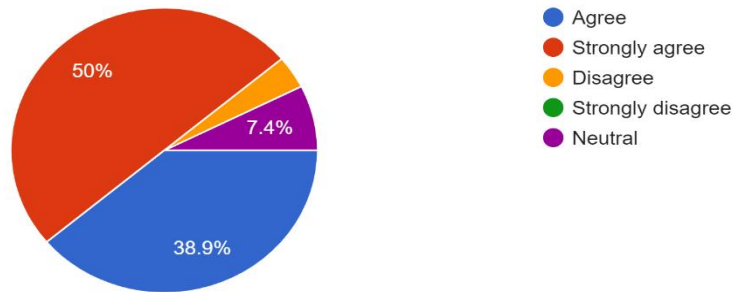
Source: Authors' Field work (2023)

There is a strong agreement by the majority (50%) of the respondents that the pandemic created an opportunity for graphic designers in Nigeria to be able to showcase their craft by working remotely.

Fig 3: Remote working has helped graphic designers in Nigeria to remain competitive

Source: Authors' Field work (2023)

There is a strong agreement by the majority (48.1%) of the respondents that the pandemic created an opportunity for graphic designers in Nigeria to be able to showcase their craft by working remotely.

Fig 4: Physical distance (remote working) affects communication and collaboration
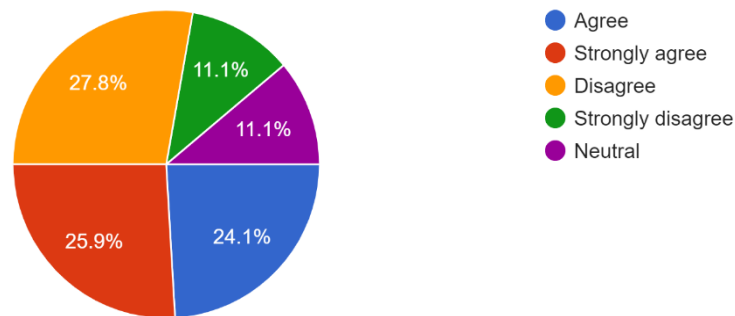
Source: Authors' Field work (2023)

A number of the respondents, (27.8%) disagreed that communication and collaboration between designers and clients have proven difficult due to physical distance or remote working. However, a sizable proportion (25.9%) strongly agreed, and (24.1%) agreed that communication and collaboration between designers and clients have proven difficult due to physical distance.

Fig 5: Remote working and time management
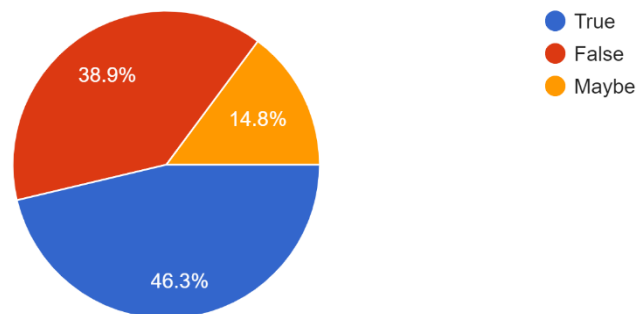
Source: Authors' Field work (2023)

A majority (46.3%) claimed that working remotely has made time management a major challenge for graphic designers in Nigeria. However, a sizable portion (38.9%) disagreed that working remotely has made time management a major challenge for graphic designers in Nigeria. The responses from the respondents are indicative of an individualistic perception of the variables.

Fig 6: Remote working as the new normal in the graphic design industry in Nigeria
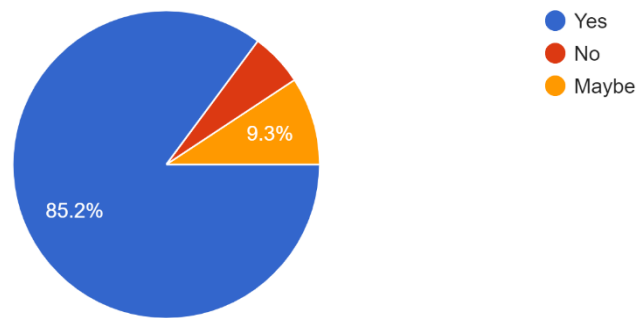
Source: Authors' Field work (2023)

A large majority (85.2%) of the respondents believed that remote working has come to stay in the graphic design industry in Nigeria.

Insights from the Interview

The interviews provided additional insights into the impact of the pandemic on the graphic design practice in Nigeria. The interviewed designers reported that they had to "adapt their practices to meet the changing needs of clients during the pandemic." For example, some designers started offering virtual event design services to replace in-person events that were canceled due to the pandemic. Other designers developed designs for COVID-19 awareness campaigns and messaging.

Discussion of the Findings

It was established in the quantitative data that:

1. The majority (50%) of the respondents believed that the pandemic has affected the graphic design industry in Nigeria in a positive way, which is contrary to the earlier assumption of a negative effect.

2. There is a strong agreement by the majority (50%) of the respondents that the pandemic created an opportunity for graphic designers in Nigeria to be able to showcase their craft by working remotely.

3. There is a strong agreement by the majority (48.1%) of the respondents that the pandemic created an opportunity for graphic designers in Nigeria to be able to showcase their craft by working remotely.

4. An appreciable number (27.8%) of the respondents disagreed that communication and collaboration between designers and clients have proven difficult due to physical distance or remote working. However, a sizable proportion (25.9%) strongly agreed that communication and collaboration between designers and clients have proven difficult due to physical distance.

5. A majority (46.3%) claimed that working remotely has made time management a major challenge for graphic designers in Nigeria. However, a sizable portion (38.9%) disagreed that working remotely has made time management a major challenge for graphic designers in Nigeria.

6. A large majority (85.2%) of the respondents believed that remote working has come to stay in the graphic design industry in Nigeria.

The implications of the findings above are that the pandemic has led to a shift towards remote work in the graphic design industry in Nigeria, with 80% of the surveyed designers reporting that they had to work from home during the pandemic, and a sizable 60% stating that they had to communicate with clients and colleagues through video conferencing and other online collaboration tools. As indicated by 70% of the surveyed designers, the pandemic has led to an increased demand for digital design services, such as website design, social media graphics, and online advertising. Evidence from the findings shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought significant changes in the types of designs required, and designers have faced numerous challenges, including a decline in demand for services and limitations on physical workspaces. The shift towards remote work and increased demand for digital design services are likely to continue in the post-pandemic world. The study also highlights the importance of creative adaptation in meeting the changing needs of clients during the pandemic.

The findings of this study have implications for graphic designers in Nigeria, who may need to adapt their practices to meet the changing demands of the industry in the post-pandemic world. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the global economy and the way people live and work. In Nigeria, the graphic design industry has also felt the effects of the pandemic, with changes in the way work is done and the demand for graphic design services.

Those challenges as evident in the survey include:

a) Remote Work and Collaboration: One of the significant changes to the graphic design practice in Nigeria is the shift to remote work. With lockdowns and social distancing measures in place, many designers have had to work from home, communicating with clients and colleagues through video conferencing and other

online collaboration tools. This has allowed designers to continue working despite the pandemic, but it has also brought new challenges, such as the need for reliable internet connections and the lack of face-to-face interaction.

b) Increased Demand for Digital Design: The pandemic has also led to an increased demand for digital design services. With more people staying at home and relying on digital platforms for work, education, and entertainment, businesses and organizations have had to pivot to online platforms to reach their customers. This has led to a greater need for digital design services, such as website design, social media graphics, and online advertising.

c) Creative Adaptation: Many graphic designers in Nigeria have adapted their practices to meet the changing needs of their clients during the pandemic. For example, some designers have started offering virtual event design services to replace in-person events that have been canceled. Others have developed designs for COVID-19 awareness campaigns and messaging.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the graphic design practice in Nigeria. The shift towards remote work has allowed designers to continue working despite the pandemic, but it has also brought new challenges, such as the need for reliable internet connections and the lack of face-to-face interaction. The increased demand for digital design services is likely to continue in the post-pandemic world, as businesses and organizations continue to pivot to online platforms to reach their customers. The study also highlights the importance of creative adaptation in meeting the changing needs of clients during the pandemic. With the right tools and strategies, Nigerian graphic designers can continue to thrive despite these challenges.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that:

1. With the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions in Nigeria, the graphic designers can integrate remote working with on-site working to satisfy the interest of those who do not have absolute trust in online businesses.

2. The graphic designers should also take advantage of freelancing opportunities that technological explosion and long periods of lockdowns have necessitated.

3. Graphic designers should match the increased demand for digital design services with the adoption of global best practices.

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