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Friday Nwafor
Barthelomew Aguugo

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A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

This is the maiden edition of ATABALA. ATABALA is the name of a Tilapia fish commonly found in the waters of the Niger Delta. The journal is published by the **Department of Film & Multimedia, University of Port Harcourt** for the **Rivers International Film Festival (RIFF)** as a scholarly component of the annual film festival.

The objective of this journal is to provide opportunity for a meeting between town and gown, industry and academia in the Niger Delta and beyond.

Manuscript, editorial communications, books, books for review, subscriptions, exchange, and other correspondences should be addressed to: Professor Friday Nwafor, Department of Film & Multimedia, Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, University of Port Harcourt

(friday.nwafor@uniport.edu.ng)

Research essays must have double spacing, consistency in documentation style and maximum of 15 A-4 pages.





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LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

IBE OGBOBUIKE IBE, PH.D. (University, Port Harcourt). The decline of Nollywood's multi-part sequels: Economies of storytelling in the streaming age,

OKHUELEIGBE OSEMANTIE AMOS, Ph.D. & DIKE, MAUREEN ULOMA, Ph.D. (Centre for the Study of African Communication and Cultures, Catholic Institute of West Africa, Port Harcourt). Rethinking documentary authority in the age of Mockumentary,

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KENNETH CHIGOZIE OSUNWA, Ph.D (University of Port Harcourt). Spotlight on Rivers State: Growing a Local Film Economy Through Film Festivals.





CONTENTS

THE DECLINE OF NOLLYWOOD’S MULTI-PART SEQUELS: ECONOMIES OF STORYTELLING IN THE STREAMING AGE Ibe Ogbobuibe Ibe, Ph.D	1
RETHINKING DOCUMENTARY AUTHORITY IN THE AGE OF MOCKUMENTARY Okhueleigbe Osemhantie Amos, Ph.D. & Dike, Maureen Uloma, Ph.D.	14
PUBLICITY MANAGEMENT IN SELECTED CINEMA HOUSES IN LAGOS AND PORT HARCOURT: AN AUDIENCE MANAGER PERSPECTIVE Eziwho Emenike Azunwo, PhD & Adetunji Mary Abosedo	26
BRIDGING THEORY AND PRACTICE: THE APPLICATION OF COMMUNICATION THEORIES IN FILM PRODUCTION Moses Ofome Asak	45
ECONOMIC IMPACT OF FILM PIRACY ON THE NIGERIAN FILM INDUSTRY: A STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT Osakpolor Kross Esokpunwu & Faustina Akudo Warri	64
MEDIA MANAGEMENT AND ECONOMICS IN THE GLOBAL FILM INDUSTRY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF NOLLYWOOD, HOLLYWOOD, AND BOLLYWOOD IN 2025 Moses Ofome Asak	76
CHILDREN’S TELEVISION AND NOLLYWOOD: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SELECTED FILMS Perfecta C. Eze-puls	90
SHIFTING THE GAZE: A STUDY OF SELECTED NOLLYWOOD FEMALE DIRECTORS. Jacinta Jane Ujong, Femi Okiremuette Shaka & Nkechi Bature-Uzor	110
CLASS STRUGGLE AND THE NIGERIAN SOCIO-POLITICAL LANDSCAPE: A CINEMATIC PURVIEW OF JADESOLA OSIBERU'S GANGS OF LAGOS Augustine Ime Ette & Friday Nwafor	128
REIMAGINING NOLLYWOOD THROUGH THE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS Victor O. Ekieno & Friday Nwafor	143
SPOTLIGHT ON RIVERS STATE: GROWING A LOCAL FILM ECONOMY THROUGH FILM FESTIVALS Kenneth Chigozie Osunwa, PhD	152





NOLLYWOOD'S MULTI-PART SEQUELS AND ECONOMIES OF STORYTELLING IN THE STREAMING ERA

Ibe Ogbobuibe Ibe

Department of Cinematography and Broadcasting Studies,
Rivers State University,
Port Harcourt, Nigeria,
Email: ibe.ibe@ust.edu.ng
Or ibeoibe@gmail.com,
Phone Number: +2347035428148
ORCID: 0000-0002-1914-9716

Abstract

Nollywood's rapid expansion in the 1990s and 2000s was shaped by the Video Compact Disc (VCD) economy, where films were often released in multi-part sequels (Part 1–4) to maximize sales and sustain audience anticipation. This practice was less a narrative necessity than an economic strategy driven by technological limitations and the informal distribution system. However, the rise of digital streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Showmax have transformed production and consumption patterns, shifting emphasis toward compact, self-contained films and limited series. This study examines the decline of Nollywood's multi-part sequel economy as both a cultural and industrial phenomenon. Using qualitative methodology and comparative textual analysis grounded in Narrative Theory, this study contrasts three Old Nollywood sequels (*Issakaba*, *Billionaire's Club*, *End of the Wicked*) with three streaming-era productions (*Blood Sisters*, *Shanty Town*, *The Black Book*). Findings reveal that while Old Nollywood relied on cliffhangers and extended arcs to drive repeat purchases, streaming-era narratives favour faster pacing, binge-oriented twists, and complete resolutions within one film or season. Though thematic concerns such as justice, morality, and survival remain constant, their expression reflects distinct economic logics. The decline of multi-part sequels thus signifies Nollywood's adaptation to global market expectations and digital infrastructures.

Keyword: Nollywood, Popular Culture, Narrative Theory, Digital Streaming, Old Nollywood, Multi-part Sequels, VCD Economy

Introduction

Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry, has undergone remarkable transformation since its emergence in the early 1990s. The popularity of what is now known as Nollywood can be traced to a specific socio-political moment: the release of *Living in Bondage* in 1992. Produced during General Ibrahim Babangida's regime, a time marked by high poverty rates, low wages, and widespread political instability, the film captured the anxieties and desires of a society navigating intense transformation (Haynes, 2014, p.551). Initially operating on low budgets and fast production cycles, Nollywood quickly grew into one of the world's most prolific film industries, largely propelled by the





booming market for home video content. In its early stages, the industry was dominated by films released directly on Video Compact Discs (VCDs), a medium that strongly influenced how stories were told, structured, and consumed. One of the most distinctive features of this period, often referred to as the era of "Old Nollywood", was the widespread use of multi-part sequels. Films were frequently divided into multiple parts, commonly Part 1, Part 2, Part 3, and even Part 4, not necessarily due to narrative demands, but due to technical limitations and economic motivations.

The roots of Nollywood's Part 1–4 sequel economy can be traced to the economic crises of the 1980s. Following the collapse of global oil prices and mounting debt, Nigeria adopted the International Monetary Fund's Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), which led to currency devaluation, reduced public spending, and inflation (Aigbokhan, 1991, p.53). The rising cost of celluloid film production became unsustainable, causing the near-total collapse of the Nigerian cinema industry that had thrived in the 1970s and early 1980s. In response, filmmakers embraced affordable VHS and later VCD technology, bypassing theatrical distribution in favour of a direct-to-video model (Obiaya, 2011, p.131).

These sequels became a defining feature of Nollywood's storytelling model throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Whether tackling themes of occultism, love, revenge, spiritual warfare, or societal conflict, films were often constructed in a way that stretched narratives across multiple releases. This approach was heavily shaped by the constraints of VCD capacity, as each disc could only accommodate about an hour of footage. In addition, the strategy allowed producers to extend revenue by selling several discs for a single story, capitalizing on viewers' emotional investment and desire for narrative closure. The reliance on sequels during this era also reflected the broader industrial structure of Nollywood. With limited access to formal distribution channels and almost no presence in cinemas, filmmakers had to depend on a decentralized network of marketers and video vendors to circulate their work. The commercial logic favoured quantity over compression, and as such, filmmakers adapted their stories to fit the format that would most easily circulate within this informal economy. The form and function of storytelling during this period were inseparable from the physical media and distribution strategies that sustained the industry. This economic and technological adaptation not only defined Old Nollywood's narrative structure but also created a storytelling logic where cliffhangers, episodic escalation, and extended runtime were commercial necessities (Merengwa, 2023). Understanding this origin is crucial, as the eventual decline of the multi-part sequel format in the streaming age reflects not just a change in audience taste, but a fundamental transformation in the industrial and technological conditions that once made such sequels both viable and profitable.





However, over the past decade, the rise of digital technology and the global expansion of streaming platforms have introduced significant shifts in how Nollywood films are produced, distributed, and consumed. With the emergence of platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Showmax, and YouTube, the dynamics of storytelling have been redefined by new technological infrastructures and audience expectations. Unlike the VCD model, digital platforms do not impose physical storage limitations. Instead, they prioritize user engagement metrics such as viewership duration, completion rates, and recommendation algorithms. These new pressures and affordances have contributed to a growing preference for compact, standalone narratives that deliver resolution within a single release or within the span of a limited series.

As Nollywood increasingly transitions into this digital streaming era, there has been a noticeable decline in the production of multi-part sequels. In their place, a new generation of films has emerged, often characterized by tighter pacing, higher production values, and structurally self-contained plots. The industry's creative output has become more attuned to the logic of on-demand viewing, which encourages storytelling that is easily digestible, narratively efficient, and globally marketable. Films that once unfolded across four parts now tend to resolve within one feature-length production or within a compact mini-series format. This evolution raises important questions about how narrative form adapts to technological and industrial shifts, and what it means for the identity of Nollywood storytelling in both local and global contexts.

This study examines the decline of the Part 1–4 sequel format as both a cultural and economic phenomenon within Nollywood's historical trajectory. It focuses on the decline of the Part 1–4 sequel format as a cultural and economic phenomenon, and the rise of self-contained narratives as a response to the demands of digital streaming platforms. Ultimately, this inquiry contributes to how narrative practices evolve in tandem with changing modes of production and consumption.

Multi-Part Sequels

In Nollywood, particularly during the VCD era, the sequel emerged as a significant cultural and economic factor in production planning. Much like in Hollywood, where sequels have become an integral part of blockbuster strategy, Old Nollywood producers often viewed multi-part films not simply as a means to exploit the unexpected success of an original title, but as a deliberate commercial approach embedded in the initial concept of the film. Rather than producing a follow-up only after confirming an audience's interest, many Nollywood stories were structured from the outset to be released as *Part 1*, *Part 2*, *Part 3*, or even *Part 4*. This approach ensured that narratives could be extended, audience anticipation maintained, and revenue maximized through the sale of multiple discs. Over time, this strategy shaped audience expectations; viewers became





accustomed to, and often eagerly anticipated, the continuation of popular films in successive parts. In this way, the sequel was not merely a by-product of success but a core element of Nollywood's storytelling and economic logic during the home-video era.

Economics of Storytelling

Storytelling in films is not shaped by creativity alone; it is also heavily influenced by the economic systems within which filmmakers operate. In Nollywood, the *Part 1–4* sequel era was as much an economic strategy as it was a narrative style. The manner in which stories were structured, paced, and divided during the Video Compact Disc (VCD) era reflected both technological limitations and commercial imperatives.

In the streaming era, the standards have shifted rather than disappeared. Platforms like Netflix and Showmax now impose their own metrics-based criteria, tight pacing, high production quality, and global market appeal, which encourage self-contained or limited-series formats. While this reduces the old multi-part structure, it still reflects Adorno's observation: the market continues to dictate creative boundaries, only now through algorithmic engagement data instead of physical sales figures.

From a finance and economics standpoint, the film industry has always operated within a high-risk, high-reward framework. Historically, filmmaking is a business of hits and misses, with far more misses than successes. Because of the skewed nature of returns, a small number of hit titles account for the vast majority of industry profits (De Vany & Walls, 1996). Research on the film sector consistently shows that sequels and franchises, though not remakes, offer comparatively lower risk and higher return (Filson & Havlicek, 2018). This is because producers can use market feedback from a successful first release to decide whether to invest in subsequent instalments, effectively exercising a “real option” based on proven demand.

Streaming platforms, however, have altered this risk-return dynamic. As they moved into original production, platforms such as Netflix and Showmax adopted a preference for serialized content but often commit to producing an entire series upfront. While this can reduce per-unit production costs and maintain narrative consistency, it removes the “real option” advantage, producers cannot wait to assess audience reception before deciding to continue the story. Additionally, when production companies sell films outright to a platform, they transfer both the risk of failure and the potential reward of success to that platform.

Digital Streaming and Narrative Transformation

Digital streaming refers to the real-time delivery of audio or video content over the internet without requiring full file downloads before consumption. In film and television, platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Showmax, and IrokoTV have





fundamentally altered how audiences' access and engage with media. By enabling on-demand viewing across multiple devices, streaming allows users to choose what, when, and where to watch, shifting control from broadcasters and distributors to the audience.

Parker et al. (2016) conceptualize streaming platforms as integrated digital ecosystems that create value through interactions among external partners, producers, and consumers. Similarly, Visconti (2020) observes that these platforms bridge disparate groups, such as end-users and content creators, who might not otherwise connect. Globally, the rise of streaming has transformed the production, distribution, and consumption of audiovisual content, disrupting traditional gatekeeping systems tied to physical media like DVDs and VCDs. As Tryon (2013) notes, these digital delivery models enable instant, borderless access, reaching audiences once considered peripheral.

In Africa, and particularly in Nollywood, streaming technologies have opened new avenues for distribution, monetization, and audience expansion. However, this progress exists alongside persistent infrastructural barriers, including uneven broadband penetration, unreliable electricity supply, and limited digital literacy in certain demographics (Obiaya, 2021). While streaming offers the promise of wider reach and more formalized revenue structures, its benefits remain unevenly distributed due to these systemic constraints. The entry of global platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Showmax, alongside regional subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) services like IrokoTV and EbonyLife On, has elevated Nollywood's international visibility and credibility. This global exposure has introduced new benchmarks for narrative coherence, aesthetic sophistication, and technical quality. In response, Nigerian filmmakers have pursued professional training, invested in advanced production equipment, and adopted more rigorous creative processes to meet these expectations (Obiaya, 2021).

Issakaba (2001)

Issakaba (2001) is a Nigerian action-drama film directed by Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen and produced by Chukwuka Emelionwu. Starring Sam Dede, Chiwetalu Agu, Pete Eneh, Amaechi Muonagor, and Susan Obi. The film dramatizes the exploits of a vigilante group known as the Issakaba boys, loosely based on the real-life Bakassi Boys. Through themes that have the blend of action and the supernatural, it depicts their battle against violent armed robbers and the infamous alleged sorcerer Eddy Nawgu in Anambra State. Combining themes of justice, community protection, and mysticism, *Issakaba* became one of Nollywood's most influential vigilante narratives of the early 2000s.



Plate 1: *Issakaba*Plate 2: *Billionaire's Club*

***Billionaire's Club* (2003)**

Billionaire's Club (2003) is a Nigerian occult-themed drama film directed by Afam Okereke. Starring Pete Edochie, Kanayo O. Kanayo, Fabian Adibe, Chidi Ihezue, Clem Ohameze, Patience Ozokwor, and Tony Umez, the film follows the sinister activities of a secret society whose members wield occult powers to amass wealth through ritual sacrifices and blood money. Blending elements of supernatural horror with social commentary, *Billionaire's Club* explores themes of greed, moral corruption, and the spiritual consequences of illicit wealth in Nigerian society.

***End of the Wicked* (1999)**

End of the Wicked (1999) is a Nigerian supernatural horror film directed by Teco Benson, written and produced by Helen Ukpabio under Liberty Films. Starring Charles Okafor, Hilda Dokubo, Alex Usifo, Helen Ukpabio, and Ramsey Nouah, the film explores themes of witchcraft, spiritual warfare, and Christian deliverance. Featuring cinematography by Solomon Nwoko, editing by Iyke Okafor Nwoko, and music by Stanley Okorie, it gained notoriety for its controversial portrayal of alleged child witches, which was linked to a rise in witchcraft accusations against children in Nigeria during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Combining elements of religious drama and supernatural horror, *End of the Wicked* remains one of the most debated films in Nollywood history for its cultural and social impact.



Plate 3: *End of the wicked*

Old Nollywood's Part 1–4 Sequel Economy: *Issakaba*, *Billionaire's Club*, and *End of the Wicked*

The films *Issakaba* (2001), *Billionaire's Club* (2003), and *End of the Wicked* (1999) represent three of Old Nollywood's most influential and commercially successful multi-part productions, each embodying the economic and narrative logics of the VCD era. Despite their thematic differences, vigilante justice in *Issakaba*, occult wealth in *Billionaire's Club*, and spiritual warfare in *End of the Wicked*, they share structural, economic, and cultural features that typify the *Part 1–4* (and beyond) sequel model.

All three films were conceived and executed in a period when VCD technology imposed physical constraints of 60–90 minutes per disc. Rather than compressing their stories into a single release, producers used this limitation as an economic opportunity, segmenting narratives into multiple purchasable parts. This strategy maximized profits through repeat sales while sustaining audience anticipation. Each instalment ended with a carefully placed cliffhanger, whether a sudden supernatural revelation, a suspenseful confrontation, or an unresolved moral crisis, designed to compel viewers to acquire the next disc.

The VCD Economy and the Rise of the Multi-Part Sequel

During the 1990s and early 2000s, the limitations of VCD technology, roughly 60–90 minutes per disc, shaped the structure and pacing of Nollywood films. This constraint, combined with the decentralized and highly informal distribution network, created strong economic incentives for producers to release films in multiple parts. A story that could have been told in a single feature was deliberately stretched across *Part 1*, *Part 2*, *Part 3*, and sometimes *Part 4*.

According to Adorno (1991, as cited in Bahruddin, 2017), once mass audiences begin to form, the industry develops standardized practices to ensure consistent



commercial success. These standards establish conditions that filmmakers must meet for their work to appeal to the market and achieve high sales figures. The success of previous films, measured primarily by audience size and revenue, becomes the benchmark for subsequent productions. As a result, creative freedom is increasingly constrained, with filmmakers' ideas shaped or even limited by industry-imposed requirements. This process leads to the production of films that are relatively similar in structure, theme, and style (Bahrudin, 2017). Key elements such as plotlines, recurring lead actors, familiar settings, and predictable resolutions are replicated across productions to maintain market appeal. In this context, high sales figures from film adaptations, sequels, prequels, and remakes reinforce the industry's tendency to reproduce familiar formulas. The logic is that if a particular narrative or format achieved commercial success once, it can be replicated with minimal risk.

In the viewpoint of the culture industry, repetition occurs when popular culture products satisfy the spontaneous wishes of the public, resulting in high viewership. Films based on adaptations, sequels, prequels, and remakes are products of popular culture that promise profitability. Market segmentation becomes clearly defined, and once a film attracts a large audience, it is almost certain that the industry will produce a sequel, prequel, or remake. The success of the first film serves as a benchmark for generating profits in subsequent productions. In Nollywood, films such as *Issakaba* (Parts 1–5), *Billionaire's Club* (Parts 1–4), and *End of the Wicked* (Parts 1–4) exemplify this repetition model. While these later instalments are not identical to the originals, they retain enough familiar elements to ensure audience recognition and interest. This repetition is part of the cultural industry's marketing strategy to sustain sales by leveraging established narratives and audience loyalty.

High sales from successful titles reinforced the tendency to reproduce proven formulas with minimal deviation. Standardization extended to narrative devices: cliffhanger endings at the close of each part, runtimes tailored to VCD capacity, and thematic inclusions such as romance subplots even in unrelated genres. These conventions ensured market predictability but constrained narrative diversity. From a narratological perspective, these films often employed a cyclical structure of tension and resolution, with each part ending on a cliffhanger to encourage immediate purchase of the next instalment. Examples such as *Issakaba* (Parts 1–5), *Billionaire's Club* (Parts 1–4), and *End of the Wicked* (Parts 1–4) demonstrate how producers capitalized on audience investment by prolonging narrative arcs. This was not simply a matter of creative style; it was a calculated economic model where more parts meant more sales.

The persistence of the multi-part format also shaped audience habits and cultural expectations. Viewers came to anticipate that a single film would be released in multiple





volumes and that the story would only be resolved in later parts. This habituation meant that sequels were not perceived as optional add-ons but as an inherent part of the film experience. In line with the culture industry theory, this repetitive structure functioned as a marketing strategy. Creating stories that demanded continuation made Nollywood producers ensured sustained audience engagement and loyalty to specific actors, directors, and production houses. Over time, these sequels became part of the culture of Nigerian popular entertainment, reinforcing both the narrative style and the commercial model. In the streaming era, films with similar narrative scope would likely be reimaged as limited series rather than four or five separate “parts.” The same core themes, justice and protection, moral corruption, spiritual deliverance, could remain, but their structure would be shaped by platform-driven engagement metrics such as completion rates and binge-worthiness. Instead of cliffhangers designed to sell the next VCD, episode endings would aim to sustain continuous viewing within a single platform environment.

Blood Sisters (2022)

Blood Sisters (2022) is a Nigerian crime-thriller miniseries created in collaboration between Netflix and Mo Abudu’s Ebonylife TV. Directed by Biyi Bandele and Kenneth Gyang, the four-part series stars Ini Dima-Okojie, Nancy Isime, Kate Henshaw, Wale Ojo, Deyemi Okanlawon, Gabriel Afolayan, and Kehinde Bankole. With music composed by Kulanen Ikyo, the series blends suspense, melodrama, and social commentary to tell the story of two best friends whose lives spiral out of control after a wealthy groom goes missing, and is later found dead, on his wedding day. Set in Lagos, *Blood Sisters* explores themes of friendship, loyalty, domestic abuse, and family power struggles, marking Netflix’s first Nigerian Original series and earning critical acclaim for its performances, production quality, and authentic depiction of Nigerian.

Shanty Town (2023)

Shanty Town (2023) is a Nigerian crime thriller miniseries created by Xavier Ighorodje and Chichi Nworah, directed by Dimeji Ajibola, and produced by Chinenye Chichi Nworah. Executive producers include Chinenye Nworah, Ini Edo, and Charles Okonkwo, with cinematography by Jonathan Kovel and editing by Holmes Awa and Dimeji Ajibola. The six-part series stars Chidi Mokeme, Ini Edo, Richard Mofe-Damijo, Nse Ikpe-Etim, Sola Sobowale, Nancy Isime, Zubby Michael, and Shaffy Bello. Released on Netflix on 20 January 2023, the series follows Scar, a ruthless crime boss in a Lagos underworld settlement, and the group of captives who band together to fight for their freedom. Blending political intrigue, action, and social commentary, *Shanty Town* explores themes of power, exploitation, and survival, earning multiple nominations at the 2023 Africa Magic Viewers’ Choice Awards.





Plate 4: *Blood Sisters* (2022)

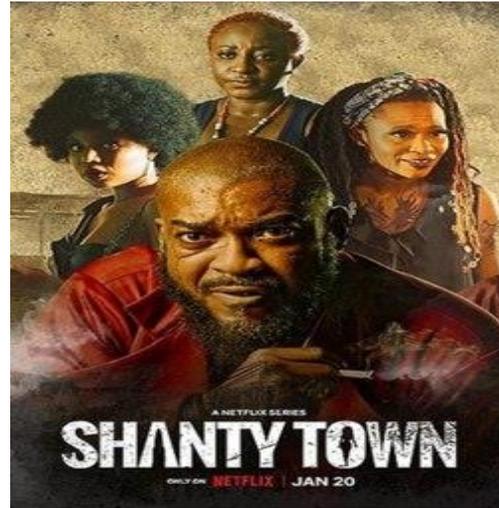


Plate 5: *Shanty Town* (2023)

The Black Book (2023)

The Black Book (2023) is a Nigerian crime thriller film produced and directed by Editi Effiong, co-written with Bunmi Ajakaiye, and produced under Anakle Films. Executive producers include Uyai Effiong, Kemi Lala Akindoju, and a consortium of Nigerian tech entrepreneurs such as Kola Oyenyin, Ezra Olubi, Odunayo Eweniyi, Gbenga Agboola, Kola Aina, and Olumide Soyombo. The film features cinematography by Yinka Edward, edited by Antonio Rui Ribeiro, and an original score by Kulanen Ikyo. Starring Richard Mofe-Damijo, Ade Laoye, Sam Dede, Ireti Doyle, Shaffy Bello, and Alex Usifo, the Netflix-released feature follows Paul Edima, a reformed hitman turned church deacon, who is drawn back into Nigeria's criminal underworld to seek justice for his wrongfully accused and murdered son. Produced with a \$1 million budget, making it one of the most expensive Nollywood productions to date, the film blends action, political intrigue, and moral reckoning, and has been compared to *John Wick* for its intense revenge narrative. *The Black Book* premiered globally on Netflix on 22 September 2023, becoming the first Nigerian film to reach the platform's worldwide No. 1 spot.



Plate 6: *Black Book* (2023)

Narrative Restructuring and Thematic Reorientation in the Streaming Era

The streaming era, exemplified by *Blood Sisters* (2022), *Shanty Town* (2023) and *The Black Book* (2023) has radically altered the conditions under which Nollywood narratives are conceived and delivered. All three productions are multi-episode limited series, yet they diverge from Old Nollywood’s sequel logic in critical ways.

First, the platform context, Netflix, imposes no physical storage constraints, enabling fluid pacing and episode lengths dictated by story needs rather than VCD capacity. This allows for denser narrative compression and more complex interweaving of subplots. For instance, *Blood Sisters* balances its murder-mystery premise with social commentary on domestic abuse and elite corruption, delivering thematic closure within four episodes. Similarly, *Shanty Town* develops multiple intersecting arcs, the captives’ rebellion, Scar’s criminal empire, and the political conspiracy, all resolving by the final episode without requiring a “Part 2” release. Second, the binge model encourages “retention-friendly” structures. Instead of withholding core resolutions across separate releases, these series employ mid-season twists and escalating stakes to sustain viewing momentum. Episodes often end with reversals or revelations, akin to Old Nollywood cliffhangers, but the key difference is immediacy: the next episode is instantly available, removing the commercial gap between installments.

Structural Shift

The comparison between Old Nollywood’s multi-part sequels and the streaming era’s limited series reveals fundamental changes in narrative construction. The comparison between both eras reveals several key shifts:

Aspect	Old Nollywood Multi-Part Sequels	Streaming-Era Limited Series
Narrative Duration	Extended across 4–5 parts; delayed resolution	Compressed into 4–6 episodes or a single film
Pacing	Repetition of conflict cycles; deliberate prolonging	Faster pacing; higher density of plot events
Resolution Strategy	Cliffhanger endings to compel purchase	Mid-episode or end-episode twists to sustain binge
Economic Model	Profit per disc sold; segmentation increases sales	Subscription-based retention; complete story for engagement
Audience Experience	Anticipatory waiting between releases	Instant continuation; binge consumption
Character Development	Gradual across multiple parts	Concentrated within a single season

Thematically, both eras address similar concerns, but the delivery mechanism changes how these themes are experienced. Narrative Theory illuminates this shift: the medium's constraints (VCD storage vs. streaming capacity) directly shape the *syuzhet*, pacing, and resolution structure. The economic imperatives of each platform, transactional sales vs. subscription retention, result in distinct narrative economies. Where Old Nollywood's cliffhangers delayed gratification as a sales tactic, New Nollywood's twists serve to maintain immersion within a single platform session.

Conclusion

The decline of Nollywood's Part 1–4 sequel model reflects more than just a change in audience preference; it marks a profound transformation in the industry's technological, economic, and narrative foundations. In the VCD era, multi-part sequels emerged as both a creative and commercial strategy shaped by the physical limitations of the medium, the informal distribution economy, and the culture industry's emphasis on standardization and repetition. Films such as *Issakaba*, *Billionaire's Club*, and *End of the Wicked* thrived on extended story arcs, cliffhangers, and audience habituation, sustaining a cycle where narrative form and profitability were intertwined.

In contrast, the streaming era, exemplified by *Blood Sisters*, *Shanty Town*, and *The Black Book*, operates under a different set of industrial and technological imperatives. Without the constraints of physical media, stories are now compressed into self-contained formats or limited series designed to retain viewers within a subscription-based model. Narrative Theory underscores this shift, illustrating how the medium's constraints and economic logic directly shape the *syuzhet*, pacing, and resolution strategies. The transition from transactional VCD sales to engagement-driven streaming platforms has redefined what constitutes an "effective" story in Nollywood, aligning creative decisions with global market expectations and digital consumption patterns. Ultimately, the move away from the Part 1–4 sequel economy is not a loss of cultural identity but an adaptation to evolving modes of production, distribution, and audience engagement.

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Filmography

- Issakaba. Directed by Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen, produced by Chukwuka Emelionwu, OJ Productions, 2001.
- Billionaire’s Club. Directed by Afam Okereke, starring Pete Edochie, Kanayo O. Kanayo, Fabian Adibe, and Patience Ozokwor, OJ Productions, 2003.
- End of the Wicked. Directed by Teco Benson, written and produced by Helen Ukpabio, Liberty Films, 1999.
- Blood Sisters. Created by Mo Abudu and Ebonylife TV, directed by Biyi Bandele and Kenneth Gyang, Netflix, 2022.
- Shanty Town. Created by Xavier Ighorodje and Chichi Nworah, directed by Dimeji Ajibola, Netflix, 2023.
- The Black Book. Directed by Editi Effiong, co-written with Bunmi Ajakaiye, Anakle Films/Netflix, 2023.





RETHINKING DOCUMENTARY AUTHORITY IN THE AGE OF MOCKUMENTARY

Okhueleigbe Osemhantie Amos & Dike, Maureen.D. Uloma

Centre for the Study of African Communication and Cultures, Catholic Institute of West
Africa, Port Harcourt, Nigeria
Corresponding email: Okhueleigbe@ciwa.edu.ng

Abstract

Documentary as a genre has historically been regarded as a truthful representation of reality, even though not all documentaries explicitly claim objectivity. The emergence of the mockumentary challenges this assumption by adopting documentary aesthetics while fabricating its content, creating a form of *faux realism* that blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction. This study examined how faux realism in mockumentaries destabilized documentary authority and influenced audience perceptions of truth, trust, and media literacy in an era increasingly defined by mediated uncertainty. Anchored on Bill Nichols' (2017) modes of documentary representation and supported by media ecology theory, the research employed a quantitative design. The population comprised university students and media practitioners drawn from five Nigerian universities: Hensard University (22), Edo University (18), University of Agbor (3), the Catholic Institute of West Africa (20), and Ambrose Alli University (30), giving a total sample of 120 respondents selected through purposive and convenient sampling techniques. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using univariate descriptive statistics. Findings indicated that faux-realism significantly influenced audience perception, with 81% of respondents acknowledging that mockumentaries effectively mimic documentary authority through cinematic techniques, while 73% agreed that exposure to such forms increased critical awareness of media construction. Results further revealed that faux-realism simultaneously eroded automatic trust in factual media and enhanced cognitive engagement, thereby stimulating reflective verification behaviours. The study concluded that mockumentary, when responsibly developed and critically consumed, functions not as a deceptive form but as a reflective and educational tool that redefines truth-telling in contemporary media culture. The study recommended guided discussion, media literacy instruction, and transparent production practices that could strengthen audience discernment.

Keywords: Audience Trust, Documentary, Faux-Realism, Media Literacy, Mockumentary.

Introduction

From the earliest cave paintings to modern streaming platforms, humans have been relentless storytellers. Humanity's stories are not only for entertainment; but they serve as tools of memory, instruments of persuasion, and vessels of truth. Among these storytelling forms, documentary has often stood apart, carrying a certain dignity, a reputation for objectivity, for truth-telling, for showing life "as it really is." This





reputation, what Nichols (2017) calls the “indexical contract,” has historically made the documentary one of the most trusted genres in media.

Yet truth in media has never been absolute. Even in the golden age of documentaries, filmmakers made choices: framing a shot, editing a scene, selecting an interviewee, each decision shaping perception as much as reflecting reality. Propaganda documentaries such as Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will* (1935) or advocacy work in civil rights struggles illustrate that documentaries have long walked the fine line between revelation and rhetoric. Plantinga (2005) reminds us that documentaries are not transparent windows but truth claims, subject to the fingerprints of their makers.

It is against this backdrop that the phenomenon of mockumentary emerges. Mockumentary adopts the style and techniques of documentary, handheld cameras, serious narration, “talking head” interviews, but fills them with fictional, exaggerated, or outright absurd content. The result is faux realism: a realism in form but falsity in substance, so convincing that viewers are compelled to question what they once assumed to be unshakable truth. The genre does not merely parody; it destabilizes the very authority of the documentary voice.

In a cultural climate often described as “post-truth” (McIntyre, 2018), this destabilization echoes powerfully. Today, misinformation spreads with the velocity of a tweet, and satire often circulates as fact before corrections catch up. Mockumentaries mirror this climate. They offer audiences the uncanny experience of trusting, doubting, and laughing all at once — exposing just how fragile our anchors of certainty have become. The collapse of certainty is no longer a by-product of media but one of its defining features.

The implications extend beyond cinema. Faux realism intersects politics, journalism, and everyday communication. Reality television stages the “real,” while news outlets sometimes blur into entertainment. Fake news websites mimic the structure of investigative reporting. In each of these cases, faux realism becomes a cultural condition rather than a cinematic device. It reveals not only how easily authority can be staged, but also how desperately audiences seek something to believe in.

Still, mockumentary is not merely destructive. Its genius lies in its paradox: it deceives to enlighten. By tricking viewers into belief and then exposing the trick, mockumentary teaches a vital lesson in media literacy. Roscoe and Hight (2001) argue that the genre acts as a mirror, reflecting the contractedness of all documentary forms and reminding audiences that every representation carries fingerprints of bias, perspective, and intention. Thus, faux realism simultaneously destabilizes authority and empowers critical spectatorship.





Audiences, too, find pleasure in this play of deception. Films like *This Is Spinal Tap* (1984) or series such as *The Office* invite laughter by exaggerating the ordinary and presenting it as if it were factual. Humor becomes the Trojan horse by which social critique is smuggled into the mainstream. Through comedy, mockumentary delivers both entertainment and epistemological shock, teaching viewers to laugh even as they rethink their assumptions about truth.

Yet danger persists. When faux-realism seeps unchecked into public discourse — in fake news, manipulated footage, or staged propaganda — the collapse of certainty risks producing cynicism or apathy. If nothing is true, then everything is permitted. This darker horizon underscores why the study of mockumentary must move beyond genre analysis to engage with its broader social, cultural, and political consequences. It is within this tension — between risk and revelation, collapse and critique — that this study is situated.

Qihao and Arthur (2016), *Examining Suspension of Disbelief, Perceived Realism, and Involvement in the Enjoyment of Documentary-Style Fictional Films*, aimed to model relationships among perceived realism, suspension of disbelief, narrative involvement, and enjoyment for documentary-style fictional films. The study was anchored on the narrative involvement and perceived realism frameworks and adopted an experimental design (viewing study). The population comprised indeterminate film viewers, with a random sample of 205 participants assigned to view one of two documentary-style films. Major findings indicated that perceived realism and suspension of disbelief differentially predicted emotional and cognitive involvement, with higher perceived realism enhancing enjoyment. The authors concluded that the documentary form measurably affects engagement through distinct cognitive mechanisms. They recommended that media researchers disentangle perceived realism and disbelief suspension in faux-realism studies and employ validated multi-item measures.

Konijn, Bijvank, and Brad (2009), *Emotions, Bias, and Perceptions of Realism in Audiovisual Media*, sought to test whether induced emotional states influence viewers' perceptions of realism and bias in audiovisual media. Grounded in the affect-as-information and emotions-in-media-processing frameworks, the study used a laboratory experimental design with emotion induction procedures. The population included university students and adult volunteers, and the researchers created experimental groups with sufficient N (above 100) for between-group comparisons. Findings showed that emotional involvement heightened perceived realism and reduced critical scrutiny, demonstrating that affect amplifies faux-realist effects. The study concluded that emotional states moderate perceived authenticity in documentary-style works and





recommended that future research control for or measure emotional arousal when examining realism perceptions.

Schantz (2018), *The Doc, the Mock and the What? Events of Realing, Mockumentalities and the Becoming-Political of the Viewing Subject* (PhD dissertation, University of Gothenburg), empirically explored audience experiences when films blur documentary and fiction boundaries and the political dimensions of such encounters. Drawing on materialist-affective theory and Deleuzian media-material assemblage, the work employed a mixed-methods design combining viewing experiments, qualitative interviews, and affect-tracing. The population comprised general film viewers in Sweden, with purposive and experimental sampling of participants across sub-studies (typically $N \approx 60$ in total). Findings showed that ambiguous documentary-fiction films triggered variable affective and interpretive responses, occasionally sparking political reflexivity. The author concluded that faux-realist works generate heterogeneous experiences rather than uniform deception and recommended mixed-method designs combining affective metrics and audience interviews for nuanced understanding.

Formenti (2014), *When Imaginary Cartoon Worlds Get the “Documentary Look”*: *Understanding Mockumentary Through Its Animated Variant*, investigated how animated mockumentaries make viewers aware of fictionality while invoking documentary realism. Anchored in genre theory and reflexive documentary studies, the study adopted a qualitative textual analysis with small audience observations, using *Surf’s Up* and selected *The Simpsons* episodes as cases. The population consisted of animated-film viewers, sampled purposively (a small convenience group of 15 participants). Instruments were textual analysis protocols and observation notes capturing viewer comments. Findings indicated that animation’s overt artificiality prompted early reflexivity about media codes, but documentary aesthetics still shaped perceived authenticity. The study concluded that the “documentary look” functions cross-medially to cue realism and recommended using animated mockumentaries pedagogically to teach documentary codes and critical viewing.

Burgers and Brugman (2023), *How Satirical News Impacts Affective Responses, Learning, and Persuasion: A Three-Level Random-Effects Meta-Analysis*, synthesized experimental evidence on how satirical and faux-news formats influence learning, affect, and persuasion. Based on entertainment-education and satire-effects theory, the design was a meta-analysis of 54 experimental studies ($N \approx 14,000$ participants). Data were coded from published experiments measuring persuasion, affect, and learning outcomes. Results showed statistically significant mean effects for satire on affect ($g = 0.27$) and learning ($g = 0.19$), but with large heterogeneity across studies. The authors concluded that satirical and faux-realist formats can educate and engage audiences under certain





conditions and recommended standardized outcome measures and moderator reporting (e.g., ideology, prior knowledge) to advance cumulative theory.

Brugman (2021), *Adding Nuance to the Study of Political Humor Effects: Experimental Research on Juvenalian Satire Versus Horatian Satire*, aimed to compare satire types and their effects on cognition and emotion. Guided by satire typology and persuasion theory, the study used a randomized between-subjects experimental design with an online population of $N = 324$. Participants were randomly assigned to view satirical clips differing in tone. Instruments included exposure stimuli, pre-/post-attitude and emotion scales, and credibility measures. Results revealed that Juvenalian satire increased critical scrutiny while Horatian satire enhanced enjoyment but not reflection. The researcher concluded that tone influences faux-realist outcomes and recommended that educators select faux-realist examples depending on whether critical analysis or entertainment is the goal.

Richards, Miller, and Vise (2021), *Engaging Audiences with Behind-the-Scenes Science Media*, compared different behind-the-scenes formats—including faux-documentary style—for their educational engagement potential. Drawing on entertainment-education and engagement frameworks, the study used mixed-methods experimental design. The population consisted of public science-media viewers ($N = 210$), recruited through convenience sampling. Instruments included viewing tasks, questionnaires assessing engagement and learning, and qualitative feedback forms. Results showed that formats using documentary aesthetics increased curiosity and learning, particularly when paired with guided explanations. The authors concluded that faux-realist techniques can enhance science communication when contextualized and recommended pairing such content with guided discussion to avoid confusion.

Jaakkola (2022), *Factual Programmes and the Media and Information Literacy Agenda*, examined the pedagogical role of factual programming in promoting media literacy. The study, grounded in media-and-information-literacy (MIL) theory, employed a qualitative policy-practice design involving interviews and classroom observations. The population included educators, students, and broadcasters, with purposive case sampling ($N = 32$). Instruments were interview guides and classroom observation protocols. Findings demonstrated that analyzing documentary and faux-documentary codes improved students' discernment and interpretive skills. The study concluded that structured academic strategies enhance MIL outcomes and recommended incorporating guided viewing and debate into curricula.

Zaryan (2017), *Truth and Trust: How Audiences Are Making Sense of Fake News*, explored how audiences define and negotiate fake news and its implications for





media trust. Based on audience-reception and trust theories, the study used a mixed-methods design combining qualitative interviews and surveys. The population comprised adult media consumers in Sweden, with purposive sampling of 40 interviewees and a survey of $N = 200$. Instruments were semi-structured interview guides and trust-perception questionnaires. Findings showed that exposure to ambiguous or faux-realist content reduced automatic trust but encouraged factchecking among some respondents. The researcher concluded that faux-realism complicates trust but can encourage verification behaviour and recommended media-literacy interventions emphasizing transparency and source verification.

Techniques of Faux-Realism in Mockumentaries (RQ1)

Analysis of responses under this theme shows a strong consensus that mockumentaries successfully employ the stylistic and technical conventions of documentary realism. Across the three items, the agreement rates remain consistently high, ranging between **80.2% and 81.1%**, with a mean score of **3.58**, exceeding the **3.00 threshold**. This indicates a high level of recognition among respondents that mockumentaries deliberately use *interview setups*, *archival footage*, and *handheld camera movements* to achieve authenticity. The minimal variation in the mean values ($SD \approx 0.02$) demonstrates uniformity in perception, suggesting that respondents reliably identify faux realism as a defining narrative and visual strategy.

Theme 2: Audience Perception and Interpretation of Truth-Claims (RQ2)

To the second theme on **audience perception and interpretation of truth-claims**, results show a moderately high agreement level, with mean scores ranging from **3.00 to 3.40** and an average mean of **3.25**. Although **61.3%** of respondents affirm their ability to distinguish mockumentaries from true documentaries, higher percentages (**73.9%** and **75.7%**) acknowledge that mockumentaries challenge their understanding of media truth and accuracy. The pattern of responses suggests perceptual ambivalence: while audiences maintain a sense of distinction, they also experience cognitive dissonance triggered by faux realism. Statistically, this theme records greater variability ($SD \approx 0.18$), indicating differing levels of interpretive confidence among viewers when confronted with hybrid factual-fictive media.

Theme 3: Implications of Faux-Realism for Media Literacy (RQ3)

The data show particularly high levels of agreement in this cluster, with percentages between **77.5% and 84.7%** and an average mean of **3.56**, well above the threshold. The standard deviation of approximately **0.05** across the items suggests strong internal consistency. Respondents overwhelmingly acknowledge that exposure to mockumentaries sharpens awareness of *media manipulation*, *visual evaluation*, and *bias*





recognition. The statistical strength of this pattern reflects that faux-realism functions not merely as entertainment but as a potent catalyst for developing media-critical competencies.

Theme 4: Effect of Faux-Realism on Audience Trust (RQ4)

Under this theme, responses demonstrate moderate but significant agreement, with percentages ranging from **66.7% to 72.1%** and a composite mean of **3.26**. Though lower than the literacy-related scores, the means still exceed the decision threshold, signifying that faux-realism exerts measurable influence on media trust perceptions. The data reveal that exposure to mockumentaries engenders a cautious, questioning stance toward journalistic and documentary content. The consistency of means ($SD \approx 0.05$) indicates stable agreement that faux realism introduces a recalibration of trust rather than a total rejection of factual media.

Theme 5: Strategies for Enhancing Critical Engagement with Faux-Realism (RQ5)

Statistical evidence from this theme shows robust agreement across all items, with mean scores tightly clustered between **3.56 and 3.59** ($SD \approx 0.01$) and agreement percentages averaging **80.8%**. These figures indicate widespread endorsement of *academic discussions, guided viewing, and media literacy workshops* as effective strategies for cultivating critical media engagement. The high consistency of responses underscores that respondents perceive structured educational and public interventions as reliable means of strengthening discernment amid the realism–fiction blur created by mockumentaries.

Discussion of Finding

This study found high levels of agreement that mockumentaries employ interviews and archival-style footage (81.1%, $M = 3.60$) and camera techniques such as handheld shots and zooms (80.2%, $M = 3.55$) to imitate authentic documentary aesthetics. These findings corroborate the observations of Qihao Ji and Arthur Raney (2016), who demonstrated experimentally that perceived realism in documentary-style fictional films significantly predicted audience involvement and enjoyment, indicating that technical mimicry can evoke genuine emotional and cognitive engagement. Similarly, Cristina Formenti (2014) affirmed that documentary aesthetics, when applied even to animated works, trigger audience perceptions of authenticity. However, the present results extend these earlier works by quantitatively establishing that faux-realism achieves not only stylistic resemblance but also audience agreement on its authenticity markers. While Ji and Raney emphasized psychological engagement as a mediating mechanism, the current findings foreground audience recognition of cinematic codes, suggesting a dual process of both aesthetic and cognitive imitation.





Also, the findings of this study show that 61.3% of respondents agree that they could distinguish mockumentaries from real documentaries, though 73.9% also admitted that viewing such works challenged their understanding of reality ($M = 3.36$). These results parallel the mixed outcomes reported by Konijn (2009), whose experimental data showed that emotional involvement heightened perceived realism and reduced critical scrutiny, suggesting that audiences' cognitive boundaries between fiction and fact are fluid. Miriam von Schantz (2018) similarly observed heterogeneous audience reactions in Sweden, where exposure to mockumentary-style films elicited both critical reflection and temporary confusion about authenticity. The convergence of these findings supports the argument that faux realism activates simultaneous recognition and suspension of disbelief. Yet, in contrast to von Schantz's qualitative emphasis on affective heterogeneity, the present quantitative data highlight a broader consistency—most respondents experience perceptual challenge without total deception. Thus, while previous studies noted ambiguity as effective or political, the current evidence identifies it as a measurable cognitive tension within media interpretation.

In the same way, the next finding showed substantial agreement that mockumentaries heighten awareness of media manipulation (84.7%, $M = 3.62$), enhance critical evaluation of visual content (81.1%, $M = 3.57$), and aid in identifying media bias (77.5%, $M = 3.49$). These outcomes align strongly with Mika Jaakkola's (2022) study, which demonstrated that factual programming integrated into media-literacy instruction significantly improved students' interpretive competence. Similarly, Olivia Richards (2021) reported that faux-documentary formats increased curiosity and learning outcomes when paired with guided discussion. Together, these findings confirm that exposure to faux-realist texts can cultivate critical discernment when contextualized through reflective engagement. Unlike Jaakkola's pedagogical focus, however, the current results derive from spontaneous audience responses rather than formal instruction, indicating that even unstructured exposure to mockumentaries fosters cognitive vigilance. This suggests that faux-realism operates as an informal media-literacy tool, enhancing awareness of manipulation and bias without explicit educational scaffolding.

Further findings indicated that 66.7% of respondents agree that mockumentaries reduce automatic trust in journalistic and documentary content ($M = 3.19$), while 71.2% expressed post-viewing skepticism ($M = 3.28$) and 72.1% questioned factual credibility ($M = 3.31$). These results are consonant with Stella Zaryan's (2017) findings, which revealed that exposure to ambiguous or faux-realist content reduced automatic trust but simultaneously increased fact-checking behaviors. The present study, however, adds a quantitative dimension to Zaryan's qualitative insights, showing a measurable pattern of





cautious skepticism rather than generalized distrust. Furthermore, these findings partially diverge from Ji and Raney's (2016) conclusion that higher realism enhances enjoyment; in the current context, realism appears to provoke critical doubt rather than mere pleasure. The difference may arise from content valence and framing—documentary-style fiction designed for humor or irony may evoke suspicion instead of immersion. Consequently, faux realism emerges as both a destabilizing and self-reflexive force in the ecology of media credibility.

The final finding showed over 80% agreement that academic discussions (81.1%, $M = 3.59$), guided viewing and media-literacy workshops (81.1%, $M = 3.57$), and public debates (80.2%, $M = 3.56$) improve understanding and discernment of truth in faux-realist media. These outcomes corroborate the recommendations of Burgers and Brugman (2023), whose meta-analysis established that satirical and faux-news content can be educational when accompanied by reflective framing and moderator cues. Likewise, Brugman (2021) observed that tonal variation in satire influences critical engagement, implying the need for pedagogical selectivity in example choice. The convergence across these studies underscores the importance of structured interpretive scaffolds—classroom discussion, media-literacy training, and public dialogue—as mediators that convert faux-realism from deceptive simulation into a critical learning resource. The present findings extend prior evidence by demonstrating widespread public receptivity to such interventions, suggesting that audiences value contextualization as a means of navigating media ambiguity.

Largely, the convergence between this study and earlier empirical works demonstrates that faux realism simultaneously reproduces and interrogates the authority of documentary form. This study results reinforce insights from prior scholarship: realism cues enhance authenticity perception but also cultivate skepticism and literacy when critically framed. Divergences primarily concern audience affect, where earlier experimental works (e.g., Ji & Raney, 2016; Konijn, 2009) emphasized affective immersion, the current findings emphasize cognitive vigilance and interpretive reflexivity. This shift likely reflects evolving media cultures in which audiences are increasingly aware of hybrid genres and skeptical of informational certainty. Thus, faux realism emerges as a paradoxical but potent tool: its imitation of authenticity fosters both trust suspension and critical awakening, positioning mockumentary as a medium uniquely suited for cultivating media literacy in contemporary digital environments.

Conclusion

Mockumentary as a creative form occupies a delicate but powerful position in contemporary visual culture. While it borrows the realism and authority of the documentary form, its intent lies more in reflection, critique, and social commentary





than in deception. However, this hybrid nature makes it necessary for both creators and audiences to exercise ethical and intellectual responsibility. For creators, the task is to balance satire with clarity, ensuring that creative mimicry does not compromise public understanding. For audiences, it calls for heightened media awareness and critical discernment to appreciate art without mistaking fiction for fact. In this way, mockumentary remains a valuable communicative and educational tool—capable of entertaining, questioning, and enlightening society without distorting truth. The verdict of this study is clear, and it is that mockumentaries, when responsibly developed and critically consumed, enrich the media landscape as tools of reflection and education rather than sources of misinformation.

Cinematic techniques, such as handheld camera work, interviews, and archival visuals, into film and communication curricula to help students critically decode the aesthetic markers of documentary authority and distinguish stylistic imitation from factual authenticity.

Media literacy programmes should emphasize cognitive and emotional awareness exercises that train viewers to recognize how affective immersion influences their judgment of realism, thereby equipping audiences to navigate blurred fact–fiction boundaries without succumbing to confusion or misinformation.

Educators, broadcasters, and cultural institutions should employ mockumentaries as pedagogical tools within guided viewing sessions, prompting participants to identify manipulative visual strategies and bias indicators as a means to strengthen independent analytical thinking and media discernment.

Journalists and documentary producers should adopt transparent storytelling practices, such as explicit disclaimers, behind-the-scenes features, or “meta-documentary” framing, to rebuild credibility among audiences who have become increasingly skeptical due to the prevalence of faux-realism.

Academic departments and public communication agencies should institutionalize structured discussion forums, workshops, and debates on faux-realism, ensuring that audiences engage reflectively with satirical and mockumentary content, transforming passive viewership into active, critical interpretation.

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PUBLICITY MANAGEMENT IN SELECTED CINEMA HOUSES IN LAGOS AND PORT HARCOURT: AN AUDIENCE MANAGER PERSPECTIVE

Eziwho Emenike Azunwo

&

Adetunji Mary Abosedo

Department of Theatre and Film Studies, Faculty of Humanities

¹Rivers State University, Nkpolu- Oroworukwo, P.M.B. 5080

Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

Email: emenike.eziwho@ust.edu.ng

Corresponding Author Email: folash22@gmail.com

Abstract

The expansion of multiplex cinemas in Lagos and Port Harcourt has intensified competition, making effective publicity essential for audience engagement and cinema patronage. Despite increasing reliance on digital platforms, limited research examines how cinema audience and marketing managers implement and integrate publicity strategies in the Nigerian context. The study adopts a convergent mixed-methods design, combining questionnaires administered to cinemagoers with qualitative interviews conducted among cinema audience/marketing managers in four selected cinemas Silverbird Cinema, Viva Cinema, Genesis Cinema and Film house Cinema across Lagos and Port Harcourt. Quantitative data measured publicity exposure and attendance influence, while qualitative data explored managerial decision-making and channel coordination. Findings show that social media, influencer promotion, and digital word-of-mouth are the dominant drivers of awareness, while traditional publicity remains relevant for reach and credibility. However, gaps exist in retention-based communication, including limited use of loyalty messaging and feedback systems. The study concludes that integrated digital-traditional publicity strategies strengthen audience engagement and attendance behaviour, highlighting the need for more coordinated, audience-centred communication approaches in Nigerian cinemas.

Keywords: Cinema publicity, Digital technology, Audience engagement, social media promotion, Influencer marketing, Nigerian cinema industry, Silverbird Cinemas, Viva Cinemas

Introduction

The Nigerian film industry, Nollywood, has emerged as a vital cultural and economic pillar, with cinema houses in major cities such as Lagos and Port Harcourt acting as key venues for film exhibition and audience interaction (Omosho et al., 2025). This resurgence in theatrical screenings reflects broader improvements in infrastructure and a growing preference for communal viewing experiences amid competition from digital streaming platforms (Aondover and Aondover, 2023). Publicity management, viewed through the lens of audience managers who handle patron feedback, loyalty initiatives, and promotional activities, is essential in driving attendance by creating synergies





between film content and viewer expectations (Jonathan, 2024). This section examines the causal links between publicity efforts and patronage growth, while addressing contradictions like affordability barriers and the shift toward digital distribution, synthesizing insights into how these dynamics shape contemporary Nigerian cinema culture.

The transition from video-era dominance to theatrical resurgence began in the mid-2000s, with multiplex developments in Lagos signalling a renewed emphasis on cinema as a social space (Omotosho et al., 2025). In Port Harcourt, similar patterns emerge, where cinemas integrate into urban lifestyles, projecting local narratives that reinforce cultural identity (Aondover and Aondover, 2023). This evolution interconnects with global influences, as Nigerian audiences navigate perceptions of local films against Hollywood standards, often leading to causal preferences for high-production-value content unless countered by targeted promotions emphasizing cultural resonance (Madichie, 2010). Audience managers play a pivotal role here, leveraging interpersonal strategies to bridge these perceptual gaps and foster loyalty.

Publicity strategies in Nigerian cinemas increasingly blend traditional methods with digital tools, creating synergies that enhance reach but also reveal contradictions in accessibility (Jonathan, 2024). For example, social media campaigns amplify film visibility cost-effectively, causally linking online buzz to box office performance, yet limited internet penetration in certain demographics hinders equitable engagement (Adeyeye and Nwaoboli, 2023). In Lagos, residents highlight comfortable facilities and diverse screenings as drivers of cinema preference, with high mean scores indicating strong causal influences on entertainment choices (Omotosho et al., 2025). This builds on findings from Port Harcourt, where publicity focused on community events cultivates repeat visits, evolving from resource-constrained approaches to hybrid models that integrate feedback loops (Nworgu, 2022).

Audience managers' perspectives reveal multidisciplinary intersections, drawing from marketing and cultural studies to address how publicity reshapes viewer biases (Banjo and Umunna, 2022). Strategies such as promotional incentives causally motivate attendance, particularly when countering affordability issues that disproportionately affect lower-income groups (Omotosho et al., 2025). Contradictions arise in the tension between theatrical exclusivity and streaming convenience, prompting evolutionary adaptations where cinemas position themselves as premium social experiences (Jonathan, 2024). In university and urban settings alike, funding limitations drive innovative, low-cost publicity like carnivals, synergizing with digital outreach to sustain engagement (Bardi and Diakpomrere, 2022).



The aim of this study is to explore publicity management practices in Nigerian cinema houses from the viewpoint of audience managers in Lagos and Port Harcourt, focusing on how these practices influence audience engagement in a competitive media environment.

Historical Development of Cinema Exhibition in Nigeria

The development of cinema houses in Nigeria, particularly those featured in this study Silverbird Cinema, Genesis Cinema, Filmhouse Cinema, and Viva Cinema represent the growth of a modern cinema culture in the country. Each of these cinema chains has contributed to shaping the Nigerian cinema industry and has responded to the growing demand for a more engaging and high-quality movie experience. Their development reflects broader trends in the Nigerian entertainment sector, including the rise of multiplex cinema, changes in audience preferences, and the increasing impact of digital media.

Silverbird Cinema

Silverbird Cinema, part of the Silverbird Group, was one of the pioneers in the modern cinema business in Nigeria. Established in 2004, Silverbird Cinema introduced the concept of multiplex cinema in Nigeria, offering audiences a variety of films on multiple screens. Its first cinema was located at the Silverbird Galleria in Lagos, an upscale shopping mall that also houses retail outlets and entertainment facilities. The introduction of Silverbird marked a departure from the traditional single-screen cinemas that had been common in the country.



Figure 1: Photo of Silverbird Cinema

Source: Field Work

Silverbird quickly became a key player in the Nigerian cinema industry by offering a modern and comfortable viewing experience. The cinema featured high-quality sound



systems, digital projectors, and spacious seating arrangements, making it a popular choice for moviegoers seeking more than just a film but an entire entertainment experience. Over the years, Silverbird expanded its reach to other cities like Abuja and Port Harcourt, further solidifying its position as one of the leading cinema chains in Nigeria. Additionally, Silverbird played a significant role in the promotion and screening of Nollywood films, contributing to the mainstreaming of the Nigerian film industry (Awodiya, 2018).

Genesis Cinema

Genesis Cinema, established in 2008, is another significant player in the Nigerian cinema industry. Genesis Cinemas offers a mix of international films, Nollywood productions, and independent films, targeting a broad demographic. The cinema chain has earned a reputation for its high-quality screening facilities and customer service. The Genesis Cinemas chain operates across various cities, including Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Enugu, among others.



Figure 2: Photo of Genesis Cinema

Source: Field Work

Genesis Cinema is known for its innovative approach to cinema, offering state-of-the-art facilities such as digital projection, 3D screenings, and modern sound systems. The cinema chain has also pioneered the introduction of premium movie experiences such as the IMAX and VIP screenings, catering to high-income individuals and those seeking more exclusive experiences. The growth of Genesis Cinema reflects the increasing demand for modern, world-class cinema facilities in Nigeria and the desire for more options beyond the traditional viewing experience (Ogunleye, 2019).

One of the key factors that has helped Genesis Cinema thrive is its strategic location within popular shopping malls, such as the Genesis Mall in Lekki, Lagos. These locations not only attract moviegoers but also encourage foot traffic from shoppers and mall visitors, thus increasing the visibility of Genesis Cinema. Additionally, the chain





has become known for its support of local Nollywood films, showcasing a diverse range of Nigerian and international content to its audience (Sanda, 2020).

Filmhouse Cinema

Filmhouse Cinema, established in 2012, is a relatively newer but rapidly growing cinema chain in Nigeria. Filmhouse has become one of the most prominent cinema chains in the country, expanding its presence in key cities like Lagos, Ibadan, and Port Harcourt. The cinema chain is known for offering modern and innovative cinema experiences with high-definition screens, advanced sound systems, and comfortable seating arrangements.

Filmhouse Cinema's rapid expansion is driven by its ability to attract a wide range of audiences, including those from the middle and upper-class demographics. Filmhouse's development strategy involves opening cinemas in prime locations, including shopping malls and leisure centres, which has helped them build a strong following. Additionally, Filmhouse' commitment to showcasing a variety of film genres, including Nollywood films, Hollywood blockbusters, and international films, has helped it reach diverse audiences across the country (Adebayo, 2021). Filmhouse has also pioneered 3D and IMAX film screenings in Nigeria, offering moviegoers the latest in film technology.



Figure 3: Photo of Filmhouse Cinema

Source: Field Word

Another significant aspect of Filmhouse Cinema's development is its involvement in film promotion and festival screenings. By supporting the Nigerian film industry, Filmhouse has established itself as a key promoter of Nollywood films, contributing to the growth of the local film sector. Furthermore, Filmhouse has actively participated in





several Nollywood film festivals, showcasing Nigerian productions to both local and international audiences (Awodiya, 2018).

Viva Cinema

Viva Cinema, which started operations in 2015, is one of the newer cinema chains in Nigeria. Despite being relatively young, Viva Cinema has experienced significant growth in a short period. The cinema chain operates in several Nigerian cities, including Lagos, Ibadan, and Asaba, with plans to expand further.

Viva Cinema offers a range of film screenings, including Nollywood films, international blockbusters, and independent productions. One of the key strategies for Viva Cinema's development has been to offer affordable ticket prices while maintaining a high standard of cinema technology. The cinema chain has also become known for offering a comfortable and family-friendly movie-going experience, with facilities like children's play areas and special family packages (Ogunleye, 2020).

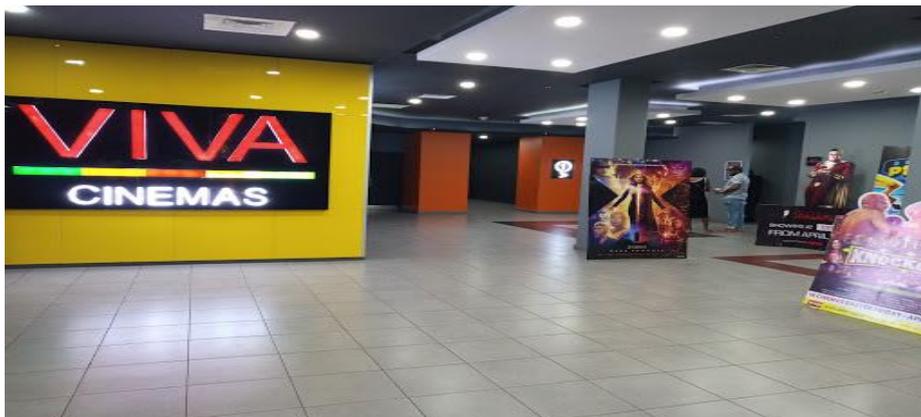


Figure 4: Photo of Viva Cinema

Source: Field Work

Viva Cinema's strategy of placing cinemas in large shopping malls ensures that it benefits from the increased traffic generated by retail customers. By targeting a broad demographic, including families, young professionals, and students, Viva Cinema has been able to attract diverse audiences. The brand's focus on providing an accessible and enjoyable movie-going experience has helped it establish a foothold in Nigeria's competitive cinema industry (Sanda, 2020).

The development of Silverbird Cinema, Genesis Cinema, Filmhouse Cinema, and Viva Cinema showcases the evolution of the Nigerian cinema industry and the increasing demand for modern, high-quality movie experiences. These cinema chains have played an essential role in shaping the industry by introducing multiplexes, offering advanced film technologies, and embracing digital and social media marketing





strategies. As they continue to expand, these cinema chains are contributing to the growth of Nigeria's film culture, supporting local filmmakers, and making cinema-going a more accessible and enjoyable experience for diverse audiences across the country.

Publicity Management in Contemporary Cinema Industries

Publicity management in cinema has evolved from basic promotional outreach to a strategic coordination process that links message design, channel integration, and audience value creation within competitive experience markets. Recent scholarship shows that cinema publicity now operates within complex media ecologies where digital platforms, urban lifestyles, and cultural expectations shape how audiences interpret and respond to film-related communication (Krüger and Trappel, 2020). The shift from traditional broadcast promotion toward hybrid digital–experiential messaging reflects broader transformations in the cultural industries, where consumer decision-making is influenced by both symbolic appeal and interactive engagement. This development is particularly visible in emerging film economies, where cinema markets are expanding within socially diverse and technologically dynamic environments, requiring managers to balance commercial imperatives with contextual audience dynamics (Jedlowski, 2020).

In African urban cinema contexts, publicity functions not only as a marketing practice but also as a social orientation mechanism that signals trust, relevance, and belonging within local entertainment cultures (Ekwuazi, 2019). Studies indicate that audiences in rapidly growing Nigerian cities navigate publicity messages through prior experiences with Nollywood, community peer networks, and digital word-of-mouth ecosystems, meaning that campaign effectiveness depends on how publicity aligns with shared meanings rather than merely reaching exposure thresholds. These insights demonstrate that publicity management is deeply relational, and that urban cinema markets demand communication strategies that acknowledge cultural interpretation alongside commercial persuasion.

Audience Behaviour, Expectation Formation, and Cinema Attendance Motivation

Audience studies literature emphasises that cinema attendance is shaped by expectation formation processes where individuals interpret promotional cues to anticipate value before the viewing experience occurs. Expectation-confirmation theory provides a robust explanatory lens for understanding how audiences evaluate cinema publicity, since pre-consumption expectations influence both satisfaction and repeat-attendance intention when compared with actual film experience (Bhattacharjee, 2020). Contemporary research in entertainment and service psychology shows that expectations are rarely formed from single messages; instead, they emerge through accumulated interactions between trailers, social media narratives, peer endorsements, and brand credibility





signals (Jiang and Kleis, 2021). This cumulative process links publicity meaning with experiential anticipation, creating a pathway from message interpretation to behavioural decision.

Within cinema environments, scholars report that audiences interpret publicity through affective resonance, genre familiarity, and perceived authenticity of communication tone (Seregina and Weijo, 2020). For urban African viewers, these factors intersect with socio-cultural identity, price sensitivity, and accessibility considerations, producing differentiated motivation patterns across demographic and city contexts (Okoye and Ezeh, 2022). Such findings highlight a causal chain where publicity frames expectations, expectations inform perceived risk, and perceived risk shapes attendance choices. Importantly, contradictory studies show that strong publicity exposure does not always result in attendance when experiential expectations conflict with prior cinema experiences or community narratives, underscoring the need for contextually grounded audience analysis.

Integrated Marketing Communications in Film and Entertainment Contexts

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) remains a foundational theoretical framework for analysing publicity management because it emphasises message consistency, cross-platform coordination, and brand coherence across communication channels. Schultz, Patti, and Kitchen (2019) demonstrate that IMC has evolved from a tactical campaign approach to a strategic organisational orientation in which communication planning is aligned with audience relationship management. Although their work predates the six-year threshold, it is retained as a theoretical anchor because contemporary cinema publicity research continues to build upon its conceptual emphasis on synergy and message integration.

Recent studies apply IMC principles to entertainment and cultural sectors, showing that integrated publicity strengthens audience trust when messaging across offline and digital platforms reinforces consistent meanings rather than fragmented impressions (Porcu, del Barrio-García, and Kitchen, 2020). Within cinema contexts, integration serves two key functions: first, it reduces cognitive ambiguity by aligning trailers, posters, influencer narratives, and in-hall promotions around coherent value propositions; and second, it facilitates experience continuity by linking pre-attendance messaging with in-cinema touchpoints. When integration is weak, audiences report uncertainty regarding film tone, quality, or relevance, leading to reduced confidence in attendance decisions. These studies reveal that IMC integration is not simply a technical coordination exercise; it is an interpretive process that shapes how audiences construct meaning across multiple publicity encounters.





Digital and Urban Publicity Ecosystems in Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa

Urban Nigerian cinema markets operate within distinctive digital publicity ecosystems characterised by high social media engagement, strong peer referral cultures, and dynamic youth-driven communication networks. Research on Nigerian media consumption shows that digital publicity diffuses through interactive communities in which audiences negotiate credibility through shared narratives rather than accepting promotional claims at face value (Obar and Oyèwùmí, 2021). In Lagos and Port Harcourt, city-specific digital cultures influence how campaigns circulate: Lagos publicity networks tend to amplify visibility through influencer amplification and entertainment-lifestyle convergence, while Port Harcourt audiences engage more strongly with community-based online clusters and socially embedded brand conversations (Nwafor and Odu, 2023).

Cinema publicity in these environments therefore operates within a hybrid ecosystem where formal campaigns intersect with user-generated discourse, creating both synergy and unpredictability. Studies in African digital marketing indicate that audience-led reinterpretation can enhance campaign reach when community narratives reinforce publicity meanings, yet it can also disrupt messaging when peer commentary challenges credibility or raises cost-value concerns (Opute, Hinson, and Owusu-Frimpong, 2020). These dynamics suggest that cinema publicity management in Nigeria requires sensitivity to socio-digital circulation patterns rather than reliance on one-directional promotional dissemination. Managers must interpret how messages travel through city-specific information networks and adapt strategies, accordingly, highlighting the strategic interdependence between publicity design and urban communication cultures.

Managerial Decision-Making and Audience Engagement in Cinema Spaces

Literature on entertainment management emphasises that publicity outcomes are shaped by managerial decision-making processes that balance resource constraints, organisational objectives, and perceived audience profiles. Recent qualitative research shows that cinema and cultural venue managers often rely on experiential judgement when selecting channels, combining data indicators with tacit knowledge of local audience behaviour (Björner and Berg, 2022). These decisions influence not only visibility but also audience meaning making, since managerial assumptions determine how campaigns represent film value, genre positioning, and experiential promises.

In Sub-Saharan cinema contexts, scholars note that managers frequently operate within infrastructural and budgetary constraints, leading to selective prioritisation of channels perceived as high impact within urban markets (Akande and Oyewole, 2021). This selective approach can foster strategic efficiency when aligned with audience





communication preferences, but it can also create publicity gaps when managerial perceptions diverge from actual audience information pathways. Studies examining African cultural organisations reveal tensions between formal brand-driven messaging and relational engagement strategies that emphasise community trust, suggesting that managerial perspectives play a crucial mediating role between institutional objectives and audience expectations (Nyarko, Boateng and Kosiba, 2022).

Methodological and Empirical Gaps in Existing Scholarship

Although scholarship on cinema audiences, digital publicity, and IMC integration has expanded in recent years, three notable empirical gaps remain. Many studies analyse publicity effectiveness through either consumer-behaviour surveys or managerial case narratives, but few combine both perspectives within a single analytical framework. This separation limits understanding of how managerial reasoning interacts with audience interpretation in real cinema environments. Research on Nigerian and Sub-Saharan cinema markets often focuses on Nollywood production networks or film distribution infrastructures rather than examining in-hall cinema publicity as a strategic management practice (Jedlowski, 2020). As a result, the everyday mechanisms through which publicity shapes attendance decisions in urban cinema houses remain under-documented.

Limited mixed-methods work investigates how audience expectations formed through publicity translate into experiential judgements across different Nigerian cities. Existing comparative media studies highlight regional variation in urban communication cultures, but they rarely link these differences to cinema publicity design and audience response patterns (Nwafor and Odu, 2023). Addressing these gaps requires research that integrates quantitative audience evidence with qualitative managerial insights to explain how publicity decisions are interpreted, negotiated, and acted upon within specific cinema contexts.

This study responds to these gaps by examining publicity management in cinema houses in Lagos and Port Harcourt through a convergent audience–manager lens. By linking managerial publicity strategies with audience expectation formation and attendance motivation, the research contributes an empirically grounded account of how integrated communication practices operate within Nigeria’s evolving urban cinema landscape.

Major Finding

This section presents key analysis of data collected through the administration of structured questionnaires to representatives of four selected cinema houses in Lagos and Port Harcourt, namely: Silverbird Cinema, Film House Cinema, Genesis Cinema, and Viva Cinema. The responses were analysed in line with the research objectives and



questions. The analysis provides insight into the publicity tools used, the effectiveness of these strategies, the challenges faced, and recommendations for enhancing publicity management in Nigerian cinemas.

Cinemagoers' Perspective

To complement the views of managers, cinemagoers were asked how they usually learn about upcoming movies. Their responses are summarised in the table below.

Table 1: Sources of Movie Awareness among Cinemagoers

Source of Awareness	No. of Respondent	Percentage (%)
Social media	59	29.5
Friends/Word of Mouth	42	21
Influencers/Celebrities	30	15
Radio/TV Adverts	28	14
Cinema Website/Mobile App	22	11
Billboards/Posters	14	7
SMS/Email Notifications	5	2.5

The cinemagoers provided a more nuanced perspective on the effectiveness of publicity strategies.

Table 2: Influence of Publicity on Movie Attendance

Level of Influence	No. of Respondent	Percentage (%)
Very strongly	66	33.0
Strongly	45	22.5
Neutral	50	25.0
Slightly	32	16.0
Not at all	7	3.5

Cinema Managers' Perspectives on Publicity Strategies

The cinema managers and publicity executives surveyed generally rated their publicity strategies positively. Among the four cinema houses, three Silverbird, Genesis, and Viva Cinema described their strategies as “very effective,” whereas Film House rated theirs as “effective.” This self-assessment highlights a broad confidence in the design and execution of contemporary publicity campaigns within Nigerian cinema houses.

Publicity Channels and Frequency of Use

The findings indicate a blend of traditional and digital publicity tools across all cinemas. Traditional channels including billboards, radio, and television remain prevalent, particularly at Silverbird and Genesis. Simultaneously, digital platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook are increasingly indispensable in cinema marketing. Silverbird



relies primarily on traditional media, employing social media only monthly, with TikTok identified as its most engaging digital platform. In contrast, Film House, Genesis, and Viva Cinema use social media daily, with Instagram reported as the most effective platform across these cinemas. Furthermore, Film House and Viva Cinema integrate influencer marketing and partnerships with filmmakers, suggesting a higher degree of application of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategies compared to their counterparts.

Despite the extensive use of both traditional and digital media, all cinemas reported limited adoption of personalized communication channels such as email marketing and SMS campaigns. This represents a notable gap in audience retention strategies that could be optimized to foster stronger loyalty and repeat attendance.

Cinema managers employ multiple metrics to assess publicity performance. All four cinema houses reported tracking social media engagement through likes, shares, and comments as a primary measure. Film House and Viva Cinema additionally monitor ticket sales to evaluate the impact of campaigns. While audience feedback and brand studies were mentioned in managerial discussions, none of the cinemas explicitly used structured survey instruments or brand metrics to quantify campaign effectiveness.

Notable Campaign Strategies

Specific campaigns illustrate how cinemas integrate traditional and digital tools to enhance engagement:

- 1. Silverbird:** Executed roadshows as the centrepiece of its publicity strategy, using these events to generate ticket sales and increase public visibility.
- 2. Film House:** Highlighted the Black Panther: Wakanda Forever campaign as their most successful initiative, though the precise publicity tools used were not specified.
- 3. Genesis:** Employed pre-launch promotional campaigns that combined teasers with influencer engagement to build anticipation for film releases.
- 4. Viva Cinema:** Leveraged celebrity and influencer meet-and-greet sessions to attract audiences and increase social media traction.

These examples demonstrate that cinema houses employing integrated traditional and digital campaigns tend to report higher engagement levels, reflecting the synergistic potential of combining multiple publicity channels.

Digital Publicity and Social Media as Drivers of Awareness

A central finding is that social media serves as the most influential awareness channel for cinemagoers, which aligns with managers' emphasis on daily social media activity,





particularly on Instagram and TikTok. This convergence reinforces empirical evidence that digital publicity enhances audience engagement through relevance, immediacy, and interactive features (Appel et al., 2020). The consistency between managerial practice and audience recall suggests that cinemas deploying social media-based campaigns are leveraging platforms that already function as primary information ecosystems for entertainment consumption.

Moreover, the relatively high influence of social media corroborates research showing that cross-platform digital campaigns create synergistic effects when coordinated strategically, improving message reinforcement and behavioural outcomes (Voorveld et al., 2019). The fact that Film House, Genesis, and Viva Cinema integrate influencer marketing into their publicity mix further reflects an IMC-consistent approach, as influencer-driven content supports brand meaning transfer and parasocial credibility among younger audience segments (Jin, Muqaddam, and Ryu, 2019). The audience finding that 15% of respondents identify influencers and celebrities as their awareness source illustrates this mechanism in practice, demonstrating partial causal linkage between influencer activation and audience attention.

However, the moderate rather than dominant percentage also indicates that influencer campaigns are effective but not universal in reach. This suggests that such campaigns may resonate more strongly with specific demographic or psychographic clusters rather than the broader cinema-going public. This interpretation aligns with contemporary IMC scholarship, which emphasizes that integrated strategies produce optimal outcomes when tailored to distinct audience segments rather than applied uniformly (Kliatchko and Schultz, 2021). Thus, the findings imply that cinema organizations may benefit from refining segmentation approaches rather than expanding influencer activity indiscriminately.

Publicity Influence on Attendance and Expectation-Confirmation Dynamics

The finding that 55.5% of respondents are strongly or very strongly influenced by publicity provides empirical support for the argument that pre-exposure communication shapes cinema attendance behaviour. Within the framework of Expectation-Confirmation Theory, publicity constructs anticipatory expectations regarding the experience, value, and symbolic meaning of cinema attendance (Bhattacharjee, 2001). When these expectations align with subsequent experience, satisfaction and loyalty tendencies increase, while mismatched expectations may reduce repeat attendance.

The managerial emphasis on campaign success stories such as roadshows at Silverbird or film-specific campaigns at Film House illustrates how certain publicity events function as expectation-shaping episodes rather than simple awareness tools. This





aligns with contemporary ECT applications showing that media-driven expectation formation significantly influences post-consumption evaluations in entertainment and service environments (Hossain, Kim, and Jahan, 2022). The presence of a sizeable neutral group (25%) in the influence table, however, suggests that not all campaigns generate compelling or personally relevant expectations.

This neutral segment is particularly meaningful because it indicates neither resistance nor strong persuasion, but rather a disconnect between publicity content and audience motivation. The explanation may lie in insufficient personalization, limited message differentiation, or weak alignment between campaign narratives and audience value drivers. This interpretation corresponds with empirical findings that generalized mass-targeted campaigns often fail to trigger affective engagement or cognitive elaboration among heterogeneous urban audiences (Shareef et al., 2020). Consequently, the neutral and slightly influenced respondents signal an opportunity for cinemas to develop more segment-specific message framing and post-campaign feedback mechanisms.

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of publicity strategies on cinema attendance, integrating the perspectives of cinema managers with empirical evidence from cinemagoers. The findings reveal that publicity in the Nigerian cinema industry is increasingly shaped by a hybrid communication ecosystem, where traditional media remains relevant but digital channels constitute the dominant driver of awareness and engagement. Audience data indicates that social media accounted for the highest proportion of movie awareness (29.5%), followed by word-of-mouth referrals (21%) and influencer-driven publicity (15%). These outcomes reinforce prior evidence that digital engagement platforms enhance visibility, peer-mediated persuasion, and content discoverability in entertainment consumption contexts (García-Milon et al., 2021; Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch, 2017).

This discussion interprets the findings by synthesizing the perspectives of cinema managers with the responses of cinema-going audiences. The patterns reveal how different publicity tools influence awareness and attendance, and how these outcomes relate to Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) and Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT). The audience data indicate that social media is the dominant source of movie awareness (29.5%), followed by word-of-mouth (21%) and influencer or celebrity publicity (15%), while traditional media collectively account for 21%. More than half of respondents (55.5%) reported that publicity influences their attendance strongly or very strongly. When examined alongside managerial reports of campaign effectiveness, these outcomes suggest alignment in some areas and gaps in others.





Taken together, the findings reveal a layered publicity ecosystem in which digital media, traditional channels, and interpersonal communication intersect rather than replace one another. Cinemas that deploy multi-channel IMC strategies appear to generate broader awareness and stronger engagement, and audience responses largely validate managerial perceptions of effectiveness. At the same time, the presence of neutral respondents and the lack of personalized retention tools indicate that campaign effectiveness is not uniform.

Theoretically, the results reinforce IMC's central proposition that communication synergy arises when channels work in concert rather than isolation, while ECT helps explain how publicity influences behavioural intention through expectation formation and confirmation. Practically, the findings suggest that cinema organizations should maintain integrated digital-traditional strategies, deepen audience segmentation, and incorporate retention-oriented communication mechanisms to close existing gaps between campaign visibility and sustained attendance motivation. These insights provide a foundation for the subsequent section of the paper, which will extend these interpretations into conclusion, practical recommendations, and implications for cinema publicity strategy, theory, and policy.

The perspectives from cinema managers further confirm this shift. While traditional channels such as billboards, radio, and television remain in active use, daily deployment of social media particularly Instagram and TikTok has become central to publicity execution and audience targeting. Campaign-based initiatives, including celebrity appearances, influencer partnerships, teaser promotions, and film-specific marketing activations, were identified as particularly impactful in stimulating audience participation and ticket sales. The audience survey aligns with this managerial assessment, as 55.5% of respondents reported that publicity influenced their attendance either "very strongly" or "strongly," underscoring the persuasive role of integrated communication in shaping cinema-going behaviour.

However, the study also highlights important strategic gaps. Despite widespread reliance on social media, customer-retention channels such as email and SMS remain significantly underutilised, even though relationship-oriented communication has been shown to strengthen loyalty and repeat patronage in cultural and leisure industries (Baker and Kim, 2020). Similarly, the limited use of analytics-driven feedback systems suggests that cinema publicity is still more campaign-focused than insight-led. The variation in campaign outcomes across cinema houses also indicates that effectiveness is enhanced when digital and traditional tools are deployed synergistically rather than in isolation, consistent with Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) theory and findings from contemporary media marketing research (Šerić and Vernuccio, 2020).





The results offer empirical confirmation that publicity does not merely inform audiences but actively mediates motivation, social validation, and experiential anticipation all of which shape the decision to visit the cinema. The prominence of peer-influenced awareness pathways, particularly friends' recommendations and influencer endorsements, further emphasises the social nature of entertainment decision-making in digitally networked environments. By demonstrating convergence between managerial practices and audience responses, the study contributes evidence-based insights into how cinema organisations can optimise communication investments, strengthen brand-audience relationships, and enhance participation in an increasingly competitive leisure marketplace.

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BRIDGING THEORY AND PRACTICE: THE APPLICATION OF COMMUNICATION THEORIES IN FILM PRODUCTION

Moses Ofome Asak

Department of Mass Communication
Faculty of Behavioral and Management Studies
Dennis Osadebay University
Email: asak.moses@dou.edu.ng
Phone: 08038625780

Abstract

This article interrogates the relationship between communication theory and film production practice, advancing the argument that communication theories are not merely analytical instruments for post hoc interpretation but active determinants of cinematic meaning-making. Drawing on established frameworks - semiotics, narrative theory, audience reception, interpersonal communication, and visual communication - the study demonstrates how these paradigms inform and structure each phase of filmmaking, from pre-production conceptualization and scripting to post-production circulation, exhibition, and reception. Through a comparative qualitative analysis of selected films from Hollywood and Nigeria's Nollywood, the article illustrates how communication theories shape narrative construction, character interaction, visual design, and audience engagement within distinct industrial, cultural, and economic contexts. While Hollywood mobilizes communication theory within a highly institutionalized and globalized production system oriented toward transnational audiences, Nollywood adapts similar frameworks through culturally specific semiotic codes, indigenous narrative traditions, and localized reception practices. The study further examines the structural, cultural, institutional, and pedagogical challenges involved in translating theory into practice, particularly within resource-constrained film industries. It concludes by arguing that future interdisciplinary convergence among communication studies, film theory, cognitive psychology, and digital media scholarship will further enhance the explanatory and practical relevance of communication theories in global film production.

Keywords: Communication theory; film production; semiotics; narrative theory; audience reception; visual communication; Nollywood; Hollywood; film studies

Introduction

Film constitutes one of the most influential communicative forms within contemporary media ecologies, operating at the intersection of art, culture, technology, and mass communication. Beyond its aesthetic dimensions, cinema functions as a complex system of meaning production through which social values, ideological positions, and cultural identities are articulated and circulated. Unlike purely linguistic modes of communication, film mobilizes a multimodal semiotic repertoire - combining moving images, sound, dialogue, performance, editing, and narrative structure - to generate meaning in ways that are both sensorially immersive and culturally situated. Consequently, communication theory provides a critical foundation for film studies,





offering systematic frameworks through which cinematic meaning-making processes can be analyzed in relation to production practices, textual organization, and audience interpretation (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020; Chandler, 2017).

Classical models of communication established the conceptual groundwork for understanding film as a mediated process involving senders, messages, channels, receivers, and effects. Lasswell's (1948) influential formulation – 'Who says what, in which channel, to whom, and with what effect' - remains analytically useful for examining cinema as a structured flow of communication encompassing filmmakers, cinematic texts, distribution platforms, audiences, and social impact. However, as film theory and media scholarship evolved, scholars increasingly challenged the adequacy of linear transmission models in capturing the interpretive complexity of cinematic texts. Film meaning, it became evident, is neither fixed nor unidirectional but emerges through dynamic interactions among textual form, cultural codes, and audience agency.

This theoretical shift gave rise to interpretive and culturally grounded approaches that continue to shape contemporary film scholarship. Semiotic theory, most notably articulated by Barthes (1977), conceptualizes cinema as a signifying system in which images and sounds function as culturally coded signs rather than transparent reflections of reality. Building on Saussurean linguistics, semiotic film analysis underscores how denotation and connotation operate within cinematic language, enabling films to naturalize ideological meanings. Narrative theory further refines this understanding by distinguishing between *story* (what is told) and *discourse* (how it is said). Chatman's (1978) structural model remains foundational, while more recent narratological scholarship has emphasized cognitive and transmedia dimensions of storytelling in contemporary cinema (Mittell, 2015; Ryan, 2016).

Audience-centered theories further complicate the communicative process by foregrounding interpretation as an active, socially embedded practice. Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model remains a cornerstone of reception studies, emphasizing that cinematic meanings are encoded within institutional and ideological frameworks but decoded by audiences according to their cultural competencies, social positions, and lived experiences. Subsequent research in audience studies and media reception has reinforced this view, demonstrating that spectatorship is shaped by intersecting factors such as class, gender, ethnicity, and global media flows (Staiger, 1992; Livingstone, 2019). These insights are particularly salient in an era of transnational circulation, where films increasingly address heterogeneous audiences across cultural boundaries.

Importantly, communication theories are not confined to post-hoc textual analysis; they are deeply implicated in filmmaking practice itself. Decisions concerning





narrative design, visual composition, soundscapes, performance styles, and marketing strategies are informed - explicitly or implicitly - by theoretical assumptions about perception, cognition, emotion, and cultural symbolism. Contemporary film production environments, characterized by data analytics, test screenings, and audience research, further institutionalize the application of communication theory in shaping cinematic form and reception (Tryon, 2013). Thus, theory and practice function not as separate domains but as mutually constitutive dimensions of cinematic production.

A comparative examination of Hollywood and Nigeria's Nollywood provides a particularly productive lens through which to explore the practical application of communication theories across divergent industrial and cultural contexts. Hollywood's highly capitalized, vertically integrated studio system facilitates the systematic deployment of narrative and communication models designed to maximize global audience engagement and market penetration (Curtin, Holt, & Sanson, 2014). Nollywood, operating within more constrained material and infrastructural conditions, nonetheless demonstrates extraordinary narrative productivity and cultural resonance through the strategic use of indigenous semiotics, oral storytelling traditions, and localized audience address (Nyamnjoh 2010; Haynes, 2016). Examining these industries in tandem reveals not only the adaptability of communication theories across cinematic ecosystems but also their capacity to illuminate how meaning is negotiated differently within global and local contexts.

An Overview of Communication Theories and Film

Communication theories provide indispensable conceptual frameworks for understanding cinema as a structured system of meaning production rather than a neutral vehicle of entertainment. Film operates through deliberate processes of selection, organization, and representation, whereby filmmakers encode messages that are shaped by industrial constraints, cultural norms, and assumptions about audience interpretation. This section outlines three interrelated theoretical traditions - semiotics, narrative theory, and audience reception - that are central to analyzing how communication operates within film production and how meaning is generated, stabilized, or contested across different cinematic contexts.

Together, these frameworks illuminate the mechanisms through which films signify, narrate, and engage viewers, while also accounting for the variability of interpretation across cultural and industrial settings such as Hollywood and Nollywood. Rather than treating theory as an abstract analytical exercise, this framework foregrounds its practical relevance to filmmaking decisions, from visual design and storytelling strategies to audience targeting and circulation.





Semiotics and Cinematic Meaning

Semiotics remains one of the most enduring and influential approaches to understanding cinematic meaning. Rooted in Ferdinand de Saussure's foundational distinction between the *signifier* (the material form of a sign) and the *signified* (the concept it evokes), semiotic theory conceptualizes film as a system of signs organized according to culturally specific codes. Barthes' (1977) extension of semiotics into the realm of myth and ideology remains particularly significant for film studies, as it demonstrates how seemingly naturalized images and sounds function to reproduce dominant cultural meanings and power relations.

In cinematic practice, semiotic processes operate across all formal dimensions of film. *Mise-en-scène* elements such as costume, lighting, color, and spatial organization function as signifiers that convey social status, moral alignment, emotional tone, and ideological positioning. Cinematography and editing further modulate meaning through camera angles, shot duration, and rhythmic patterning, while sound design and music guide affective and interpretive responses (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020). These signifying practices are rarely arbitrary; they are shaped by shared conventions that allow audiences to recognize and interpret cinematic cues efficiently.

In Hollywood cinema, semiotic systems tend to rely on widely circulated and globally legible visual codes, particularly within genre filmmaking. High-key lighting is conventionally associated with safety, transparency, and moral clarity, whereas low-key lighting connotes danger, secrecy, or ethical ambiguity. Similarly, color symbolism - such as the use of red to signal passion, violence, or threat - has become standardized through repetition across films and media platforms. These conventions support narrative economy and facilitate cross-cultural circulation by minimizing interpretive ambiguity (Elsaesser, Hagener, & Buckland, 2015).

By contrast, Nollywood cinema mobilizes semiotic resources that are deeply embedded in local cultural knowledge systems. Traditional attire, ritual objects, linguistic codes, and spatial settings function as culturally specific signs that communicate social hierarchy, spiritual belief systems, and moral frameworks to audiences familiar with these conventions. As Haynes (2016) observe, Nollywood's semiotic density derives much of its communicative power from its alignment with indigenous symbolic systems, including oral traditions and religious cosmologies. Semiotic analysis thus reveals how filmmakers in different industries encode meaning in anticipation of culturally competent audiences, underscoring the contextual specificity of cinematic communication.





Narrative Theory and Story Construction

Narrative theory addresses the organization of events into coherent structures that enable audiences to make sense of cinematic experience over time. One of the most influential contributions to narrative film theory remains Chatman's (1978) distinction between *story* - the characters, events, and settings that constitute narrative content - and *discourse*, or the way those elements are presented through cinematic techniques. This distinction allows scholars to analyze not only what is told in films but how storytelling strategies shape perception, emotion, and interpretation.

Classical Hollywood cinema has historically privileged narrative coherence, linear causality, psychological motivation, and closure. These conventions align with industrial imperatives for clarity, emotional engagement, and mass appeal, ensuring that narratives remain accessible to diverse audiences and conducive to global distribution. Bordwell (2006) characterizes this model as one that foregrounds goal-oriented protagonists and tightly structured plots, minimizing ambiguity in favor of narrative efficiency. Such strategies reflect implicit assumptions about audience cognition and attention, demonstrating how narrative theory informs production practices.

Nollywood storytelling traditions, while equally systematic, often diverge from classical Hollywood norms. Drawing on oral narrative forms, melodrama, and didactic storytelling, many Nollywood films emphasize moral instruction, spiritual conflict, and communal values over strict linear progression or narrative closure. Episodic structures, repetition, and direct address are frequently employed to reinforce ethical lessons and social norms (Tsika, 2015; Okome, 2007). Narrative theory thus provides a comparative framework for understanding how different cinematic traditions are structured in terms of time, causality, and meaning in ways that reflect distinct cultural epistemologies and audience expectations.

Recent scholarship has further expanded narrative theory by incorporating cognitive and transmedial perspectives, emphasizing how audiences actively construct narrative coherence across films, franchises, and platforms (Mittell, 2015; Ryan, 2016). These developments are particularly relevant in an era of globalized media circulation, where narrative strategies must accommodate diverse interpretive communities.

Audience Reception and Interpretive Agency

Reception theory challenges deterministic models of media influence by foregrounding the active role of audiences in meaning-making. Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model remains foundational in this regard, positing that media texts are encoded with preferred meanings shaped by institutional and ideological contexts but are decoded by audiences in ways that may align with, negotiate, or oppose those meanings. Interpretation, in this





view, is contingent upon viewers' social positions, cultural competencies, and lived experiences.

Hollywood's global reach necessitates an acute awareness of interpretive plurality. Films designed for international circulation often balance cultural specificity with narrative universality, allowing for multiple points of identification while avoiding overtly localized references that might limit accessibility. As Staiger (1992) argues, Hollywood cinema frequently relies on polysemy to accommodate diverse audiences, enabling films to sustain varied readings across cultural contexts.

Nollywood's communicative strategy, by contrast, often depends on a high degree of cultural intimacy between texts and audiences. Shared linguistic codes, moral frameworks, and social experiences provide strong emotional resonance and facilitate preferred readings that align closely with filmmakers' intentions (Haynes, 2016; Okome, 1997). Reception theory thus highlights how audience engagement is shaped not only by textual features but also by cultural proximity and modes of circulation.

Contemporary audience studies further emphasize the impact of digital platforms, diasporic viewerships, and participatory cultures on film reception. Viewers increasingly engage with films through social media, streaming services, and informal distribution networks, reshaping interpretive practices and feedback loops between producers and audiences (Livingstone, 2019; Tryon, 2013). These dynamics underscore the continuing relevance of reception theory for understanding film as an evolving communicative process.

Interpersonal Communication and Character Interaction

Interpersonal communication theory provides a critical framework for understanding how films construct psychologically credible characters, relational dynamics, and social worlds through interaction. At its core, interpersonal communication concerns the exchange of meaning between individuals within relational contexts shaped by cultural norms, social roles, power relations, and emotional states (Berger, Roloff, & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2019). When translated into cinematic practice, these principles inform not only verbal dialogue but also patterns of listening, silence, gesture, and embodied response, thereby shaping audience perceptions of authenticity, intimacy, conflict, and transformation.

In film, dialogue functions not merely as a vehicle for narrative exposition but as an interactional performance through which character psychology and relational history are revealed. Interpersonal communication scholarship highlights conversational features such as turn-taking, pacing, politeness strategies, and accommodation as central mechanisms through which meaning is negotiated between interlocutors (Giles, 2016).





In cinematic contexts, these features enable filmmakers to communicate complex relational dynamics implicitly, reducing reliance on overt narration or explanatory dialogue. Dialogue that reflects recognizable interactional norms enhances narrative plausibility and encourages audiences to perceive characters as socially situated and psychologically coherent agents.

Nonverbal communication constitutes an equally central dimension of interpersonal meaning-making in film. Facial expression, posture, gesture, eye contact, and spatial proximity operate as powerful communicative cues that frequently supersede spoken language. Film's visual affordances—particularly close-ups, framing, and shot duration—magnify the interpretive significance of subtle nonverbal behaviors, allowing spectators to infer emotional states and relational attitudes with heightened intensity (Smith, 2003). Interpersonal communication theory underscores that nonverbal cues often convey affect, dominance, vulnerability, and intimacy more efficiently than verbal expression, making them indispensable to cinematic storytelling.

Relational dynamics further structure interpersonal communication in film. Characters do not exist in isolation; their identities and motivations emerge through relationships that evolve across recognizable phases such as initiation, intensification, maintenance, conflict, and dissolution (Knapp, Vangelisti, & Caughlin, 2014). Narrative cinema frequently organizes character arcs around these relational trajectories, particularly in romantic, familia, and ensemble films. Filmmakers provide audience identification and emotional investment, enabling viewers to track relational change as a meaningful narrative progression when they align character interaction with established interpersonal patterns.

Cultural context plays a decisive role in shaping interpersonal communication on screen. Norms governing hierarchy, gender relations, emotional expressiveness, and conflict management vary across cultures and influence how character interactions are encoded and decoded. Hollywood cinema often reflects individualistic communication values, privileging verbal assertiveness, self-disclosure, and psychological transparency (Neuliep, 2018). Nollywood films, by contrast, frequently depict communication practices rooted in collectivist cultural frameworks, where respect for elders, communal obligation, indirect expression, and moral authority are emphasized (Haynes, 2016; Okome, 2007). These culturally specific interactional patterns enhance representational authenticity and shape audience reception within distinct socio-cultural contexts.

From a production standpoint, interpersonal communication theory informs key creative decisions in screenwriting, directing, and performance. Screenwriters draw on interactional principles to craft dialogue that conveys subtext, relational tension, and





power dynamics without explicit exposition. Directors guide actors in embodying relational meaning through timing, silence, gaze, and proxemics, while performance evaluation often hinges on the credibility of interpersonal exchange. In this sense, interpersonal communication theory functions not only as an analytical lens but also as a practical toolkit that bridges theoretical insight and creative execution.

Visual Communication and Cinematic Form

Visual communication theory occupies a foundational position in film studies by foregrounding the primacy of image-based meaning in cinematic expression. Unlike verbal communication, which unfolds sequentially, visual communication operates simultaneously across perceptual, affective, and cognitive levels, enabling films to convey complex meanings instantaneously and often below the threshold of conscious awareness (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). Cinema's distinctive communicative power lies in its capacity to organize visual elements - composition, framing, movement, color, lighting, and spatial relations - into expressive systems that shape audience perception, emotion, and interpretation.

Arnheim's (1957) influential assertion that film's expressive power derives from abstraction rather than mechanical reproduction remains central to contemporary visual communication theory. Cinema does not simply record reality; it transforms it through formal choices that foreground contrast, rhythm, and pattern. These transformations function as communicative strategies that direct attention, generate mood, and articulate meaning. Subsequent film theorists have reinforced this view, emphasizing that cinematic realism itself is a constructed effect produced through stylistic convention rather than an objective reflection of the world (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020).

Composition and framing constitute primary mechanisms of visual communication. The spatial arrangement of elements within the frame guides viewer attention and establishes relationships between characters, objects, and environments. Symmetrical compositions may connote order, control, or rigidity, while asymmetrical framing can evoke instability, tension, or psychological imbalance. Camera distance further mediates viewer engagement: close-ups encourage emotional intimacy, medium shots emphasize interaction, and long shots situate characters within broader social or environmental contexts. These visual choices operate as communicative cues that shape narrative comprehension and affective response (Elsaesser, Hagener, & Buckland, 2015).

Movement - both within the frame and through camera motion - introduces a temporal dimension to visual communication. Camera pans, tracking shots, and handheld movement influence how spectators experience space, continuity, and





subjectivity. Smooth, controlled camera movement often conveys stability or harmony, whereas erratic or fragmented movement can signal anxiety, chaos, or subjective disturbance. Editing rhythms further structure meaning by organizing visual flow and temporal progression. Visual communication theory emphasizes that such techniques are not ornamental but integral to cinematic language, shaping how narratives are perceived and felt.

Color and lighting deepen the communicative capacity of film images by evoking emotional associations and symbolic meanings that are culturally mediated. Color palettes may signal warmth, nostalgia, alienation, or menace, while lighting design shapes spatial perception and moral alignment. These visual codes frequently operate at an affective level, guiding interpretation without explicit verbal articulation (Bordwell & Thompson, 2020).

Visual communication theory also foregrounds the ideological dimensions of cinematic form. Visual choices inevitably reflect and reproduce cultural values, social hierarchies, and power relations. Decisions regarding whose bodies are centered, whose spaces are privileged, and whose perspectives are marginalized carry implicit meanings that shape audience understanding of identity, authority, and belonging. As visual culture scholars have argued, cinematic form is inseparable from questions of representation and cultural politics (Mirzoeff, 2016).

From a comparative perspective, Hollywood and Nollywood exemplify distinct yet equally systematic applications of visual communication shaped by industrial conditions and cultural traditions. Hollywood's access to advanced technologies and extensive resources enables highly controlled visual environments and large-scale spectacle designed for transnational legibility. Nollywood, operating within more constrained material conditions, often prioritizes culturally resonant visual motifs, location-based realism, and symbolic imagery that speaks directly to local audiences (Haynes, 2016). These contrasting practices underscore the adaptability of visual communication theory across diverse production ecologies..

Communication Theory Across the Stages of Film Production

Communication theories exert a formative influence across the entire filmmaking process, shaping not only the aesthetic and narrative dimensions of cinema but also its organizational, managerial, and industrial practices. Film production is best understood as a multi-stage communicative enterprise in which meaning is progressively encoded, refined, and circulated through successive phases of creative and technical labor. Each stage - pre-production, production, post-production, and distribution - constitutes a site





where theoretical assumptions about communication, meaning, and audience interpretation are operationalized in concrete decision-making processes.

Rather than functioning as isolated or sequential activities, these stages are interdependent, with communicative choices made at one phase conditioning the possibilities available at subsequent stages. Narrative coherence, visual symbolism, character interaction, and audience engagement are therefore not emergent properties of the finished film alone but the cumulative outcome of theoretically informed practices distributed across the production pipeline. Communication theory provides a conceptual framework for understanding how these practices are coordinated and how meaning is managed throughout the lifecycle of a film.

Pre-Production: Conceptualization and Encoding

Pre-production constitutes the primary phase of meaning construction in film production, during which abstract ideas are translated into narrative structures, visual concepts, and production strategies. From a communication-theoretical perspective, this stage is best understood as the moment of *encoding*, wherein filmmakers anticipate audience interpretation and embed preferred meanings within narrative and visual design (Hall, 1980). Decisions made at this stage establish the semiotic and narrative parameters within which all subsequent production activities operate.

Narrative theory plays a central role in pre-production, particularly in scriptwriting and story development. Screenwriters and directors draw upon narrative conventions - such as causality, temporal sequencing, and character motivation - to construct plots that are intelligible and emotionally engaging. Classical Hollywood cinema often adheres to linear narrative progression and goal-oriented protagonists, reflecting industrial imperatives for clarity and mass appeal. These conventions are not merely stylistic preferences, but communicative strategies designed to facilitate audience comprehension and emotional alignment. Narrative theory thus provides filmmakers with structural templates that guide the organization of story events and character arcs.

Semiotics further informs pre-production by shaping visual and symbolic design. Costume, set decoration, props, and color schemes function as sign systems that communicate social identity, historical context, and thematic meaning. Semiotic awareness enables filmmakers to encode cultural meanings that audiences can readily decode based on shared symbolic repertoires. In Nollywood, for example, the use of traditional attire, domestic spaces, and ritual objects encodes social hierarchy, spiritual belief systems, and moral values that resonate strongly with local audiences. In Hollywood, semiotic encoding often prioritizes transnational legibility, favoring symbols and genres that can circulate across cultural boundaries.





Audience reception theory also exerts significant influence during pre-production, particularly in market-driven industries. Filmmakers anticipate audience expectations, genre preferences, and interpretive frameworks when selecting themes, tones, and narrative complexity. Hollywood studios routinely rely on audience research, genre analysis, and prior reception data to inform pre-production decisions, effectively integrating reception theory into managerial practice (Staiger, 2005). Even in less industrialized contexts, filmmakers rely on cultural intuition and communal feedback to anticipate how narratives will be received, underscoring the universal relevance of audience-oriented communication strategies.

Production: Performance and Visual Expression

The production phase represents the translation of encoded concepts into embodied cinematic form. Here, communication theory intersects most visibly with performance, cinematography, and directorial practice. Visual communication theory and interpersonal communication theory become particularly salient as abstract narrative and semiotic intentions are realized through image, movement, and human interaction.

Visual communication theory guides decisions regarding camera placement, framing, lighting, and movement. Cinematography functions as a communicative system that directs audience attention, establishes mood, and conveys relational dynamics. Close-ups intensify emotional engagement by foregrounding facial expression, while wide shots contextualize characters within social or spatial environments. Lighting choices shape moral and psychological interpretation, with contrasts between illumination and shadow functioning as visual metaphors for knowledge, power, or ambiguity. These choices are not neutral; they encode meaning through formal composition, operating often below conscious awareness.

Interpersonal communication theory informs actor performance and dialogue delivery. Directors guide performers in embodying relational dynamics through speech patterns, pauses, gesture, and proxemics. The credibility of character relationships depends on alignment with recognizable communication practices, including conversational turn-taking, emotional regulation, and nonverbal signaling. Effective performances thus emerge not solely from script fidelity but from nuanced attention to communicative realism. In ensemble scenes, communication theory helps coordinate interactional rhythm and relational hierarchy, ensuring narrative coherence at the level of human exchange.

Directors play a mediating role between theory and practice, translating conceptual frameworks into actionable guidance for cast and crew. This mediation underscores the applied nature of communication theory in film production: theoretical





knowledge is operationalized through rehearsal, blocking, camera rehearsal, and on-set improvisation. The production phase therefore represents a critical juncture where communicative intent is tested against material constraints and human performance.

Post-Production: Narrative Coherence and Meaning Consolidation

Post-production constitutes the phase in which cinematic meaning is consolidated, refined, and stabilized through editing, sound design, visual effects, and musical scoring. From a communication-theoretical perspective, post-production functions as a process of narrative and semiotic regulation, ensuring that encoded meanings are coherent, legible, and affectively impactful.

Editing plays a central role in shaping narrative rhythm and temporal structure. Editors manipulate pacing, continuity, and juxtaposition to guide audience perception and emotional response. Through selective omission and sequencing, editing constructs causal logic and reinforces thematic emphasis. Narrative theory informs editorial decisions regarding plot clarity and character development, while visual communication theory guides attention through rhythm and spatial continuity (Monaco, 2009).

Sound design and music operate as powerful auditory semiotic systems. Dialogue clarity, ambient sound, and musical scoring contribute to mood, tension, and emotional alignment. Music, in particular, functions as a communicative bridge between narrative events and audience affect, often signaling emotional interpretation more directly than image alone. Sound therefore extends the communicative reach of cinema beyond the visual, reinforcing meaning through multisensory integration.

Audience reception theory continues to influence post-production through test screenings and feedback mechanisms, particularly in Hollywood contexts. Adjustments to pacing, tone, or narrative emphasis are often made in response to audience response, demonstrating the iterative nature of communicative encoding. Even in contexts without formal test screenings, informal audience feedback and cultural intuition shape post-production choices, underscoring the persistent role of reception considerations.

Marketing and Distribution as Communicative Practice

Marketing and distribution represent the final extension of cinematic communication, shaping how films are framed, interpreted, and consumed within public discourse. From a communication-theoretical standpoint, promotional materials function as paratexts that mediate between the film text and its audiences, influencing interpretation before viewing occurs.

Agenda-setting theory provides a useful framework for understanding film marketing practices. Trailers, posters, and press coverage prioritize certain themes,





characters, and aesthetic qualities, guiding audience attention and expectation (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). These promotional strategies frame films within recognizable genres and emotional registers, shaping the horizon of audience interpretation.

Marketing discourse also draws upon reception theory by segmenting audiences according to demographic and cultural profiles. Hollywood's global marketing campaigns tailor messages to different regions and platforms, emphasizing universal themes or localized appeal as needed. Nollywood's distribution practices, often reliant on community networks and diasporic circulation, similarly employ culturally specific communicative strategies to mobilize audience engagement.

Distribution platforms further mediate communication by shaping access and context of reception. The rise of digital streaming has altered communicative dynamics, enabling new forms of audience interaction and feedback that influence future production decisions. Marketing and distribution thus complete the communicative cycle of film production, transforming cinematic texts into socially circulating meanings.

***CODA* (2021) and Interpersonal Communication**

CODA (Child of Deaf Adults), directed by Sian Heder, offers a compelling illustration of interpersonal communication theory in cinematic representation. The film centers on a hearing daughter of Deaf parents, foregrounding communication as both a narrative theme and a formal practice. Interpersonal communication theory, which emphasizes relational interaction, nonverbal cues, and contextual meaning, is central to the film's emotional and narrative effectiveness.

One of *CODA*'s most significant contributions lies in its authentic representation of Deaf culture and American Sign Language (ASL). Rather than treating sign language as a narrative novelty, the film integrates it as a primary communicative mode, thereby challenging auditory-centric norms of cinematic communication. Gesture, facial expression, and bodily orientation function as core semiotic resources, demonstrating that meaning is not confined to spoken language. This aligns with interpersonal communication scholarship that emphasizes multimodality and contextual sensitivity in human interaction.

The film's attention to communicative authenticity enhances narrative plausibility and emotional resonance. *CODA* ensures audience identification and cross-cultural empathy because it accurately portrays Deaf communication practices, casting Deaf actors in Deaf roles. Such representational choices not only increase realism but also function as ethical communicative acts that expand audience understanding of marginalized communities (see Singleton & Tittle, 2000; Heffernan & Nixon, 2023;





Allard & Roos, 2025). The film thus exemplifies how interpersonal communication theory informs both representational ethics and narrative design in film production.

Wes Anderson and Visual Semiotics

The cinema of Wes Anderson provides a paradigmatic example of how visual communication and semiotics operate at the level of auteur style. Anderson's films are characterized by meticulous symmetry, controlled color palettes, and precise spatial organization, all which function as consistent semiotic systems guiding audience interpretation. Visual communication theory is particularly useful in analyzing how these stylistic elements operate as communicative codes rather than mere aesthetic flourishes.

Symmetry in Anderson's framing conveys order, artificiality, and emotional restraint, often reflecting the psychological states of characters and the constructed nature of the narrative world. Color palettes function symbolically, with recurring hues signaling emotional tone, historical period, or thematic emphasis. These visual choices create a coherent sign system that audiences learn to decode across films, reinforcing auteurist identity and interpretive consistency (Monaco, 2009).

Anderson's work re-echoes and demonstrates Arnheim's (1957) assertion that film's expressive power lies in abstraction rather than photographic realism. This implies that Anderson transforms cinematic form into a communicative language that operates at both conscious and subconscious levels by foregrounding stylization. Visual communication theory thus reveals how formal design choices shape perception, affect, and meaning, underscoring the centrality of visual semiotics in cinematic storytelling.

Kunle Afolayan and Indigenous Semiotics

Kunle Afolayan's films exemplify how communication theory can be adapted to indigenous cultural contexts through localized semiotic systems. Drawing on Nigerian folklore, ritual symbolism, and historical memory, Afolayan integrates traditional signifiers into contemporary cinematic form. His work demonstrates that semiotics is not culturally universal but contextually embedded, relying on shared cultural knowledge for effective meaning-making.

In films such as *October 1* and *The Figurine*, objects, rituals, and landscapes function as culturally specific signs that communicate moral values, historical trauma, and social identity. These semiotic elements are legible to audiences familiar with Yoruba cosmology and Nigerian history, creating a layered communicative experience that combines entertainment with cultural reflection. As Tsika (2015) notes, Afolayan's cinema exemplifies a maturation of Nollywood's narrative and visual language through strategic semiotic encoding.





From a communication-theoretical perspective, Afolayan's work illustrates how global theoretical frameworks - such as semiotics and narrative theory - are reconfigured within local storytelling traditions. This localization challenges assumptions of Western theoretical dominance and underscores the adaptability of communication theory across cultural contexts.

Living In Bondage and Audience Reception

Living in Bondage (1992), widely regarded as a foundational text of modern Nollywood, provides a seminal example of audience reception theory in practice. The film's extraordinary popularity cannot be attributed solely to production quality or narrative novelty but to its deep resonance with prevailing social anxieties, moral frameworks, and economic realities in Nigeria at the time of its release.

Reception theory emphasizes that audiences actively interpret media texts based on social positioning and cultural experience (Hall, 1980). *Living in Bondage* engaged audiences through themes of wealth, sacrifice, and moral consequence that reflected widespread concerns about materialism and spiritual corruption. Viewers decoded the film's narrative within shared moral and religious frameworks, resulting in strong affective and interpretive alignment (Okome, 1997).

The film's success demonstrates that effective communication in cinema depends not only on encoding strategies but also on cultural proximity and interpretive familiarity. *Living in Bondage* thus exemplifies how audience reception functions as a decisive factor in cinematic meaning-making, particularly within culturally specific production contexts such as Nollywood.

Taken together, these case studies demonstrate the practical applicability of communication theories across diverse cinematic contexts. Whether through interpersonal authenticity, visual semiotics, indigenous symbolism, or culturally grounded reception, each example illustrates how theory informs practice and how practice, in turn, refines theoretical understanding. These cases collectively reinforce the article's central argument: communication theory is not ancillary to film production but foundational to its creative, cultural, and industrial processes.

Challenges in Applying Communication Theory

Despite the demonstrable relevance of communication theories to film production, the translation of theory into practice is neither seamless nor universally attainable. Filmmakers operate within complex constraints - economic, cultural, institutional, and interpretive - that shape how theoretical frameworks are understood and applied. These challenges are particularly pronounced in emerging film industries, where infrastructural





limitations intersect with rapidly evolving audience dynamics and global media pressures.

One significant challenge lies in resource constraints, which directly affect the extent to which theoretical ideals can be operationalized. Communication theories often assume conditions of creative flexibility and technical proficiency that are difficult to achieve under limited budgets, compressed production schedules, and inadequate access to technology. In contexts such as Nollywood, filmmakers may possess strong intuitive understanding of audience communication but lack the material resources required to fully realize complex visual or narrative strategies. This gap between theoretical aspiration and practical feasibility underscores the importance of contextualizing theory within material conditions of production.

A related issue is the abstract nature of communication theory itself. Many theoretical models - particularly those rooted in semiotics, reception theory, and media psychology - are articulated in highly conceptual language that can be difficult to translate into actionable production decisions. Without pedagogical frameworks that bridge academic theory and creative practice, filmmakers may perceive theory as detached from real-world production challenges. This divide is exacerbated in educational contexts where communication theory is taught analytically rather than applied experimentally, limiting its perceived relevance to practitioners.

Cultural specificity further complicates theoretical application. Communication theories are often developed within Western academic traditions and may implicitly privilege certain narrative forms, visual codes, or audience assumptions. When applied uncritically across cultural contexts, these theories risk misalignment with local storytelling traditions and audience expectations. Nollywood filmmakers, for example, routinely adapt or reinterpret theoretical frameworks to align with indigenous semiotic systems and communal reception practices. This process of localization highlights both the limitations and the adaptive potential of communication theory in non-Western contexts.

Institutional pressures within the global film industry also shape theoretical application. Hollywood's studio system, driven by profit imperatives and risk aversion, often prioritizes formulaic narratives and market-tested communicative strategies. While these practices are informed by audience reception theory and market research, they tend to constrain creative experimentation and theoretical innovation. Conversely, independent and emerging industries may enjoy greater narrative flexibility but face distribution and visibility challenges that limit their communicative reach.





Finally, audience heterogeneity presents an enduring challenge to communicative control. Contemporary film audiences are fragmented across cultural, ideological, and technological lines, engaging with films through diverse platforms and interpretive communities. Reception theory emphasizes the inevitability of multiple readings, yet filmmakers often seek coherence and preferred meaning. Balancing interpretive openness with narrative clarity requires adaptive communicative strategies that acknowledge audience diversity without relinquishing authorial intent.

Collectively, these challenges reveal that applying communication theory to film production is an ongoing negotiation rather than a fixed procedure. Effective integration requires sensitivity to context, flexibility in interpretation, and institutional support for interdisciplinary collaboration.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that communication theories are not merely analytical tools for interpreting cinematic texts but foundational frameworks that actively shape film production practice. Communication theories bridge the conceptual divide between theory and practice across all stages of filmmaking when it informs narrative structure, visual expression, character interaction, and audience engagement. Film emerges, in this framework, as a dynamic communicative process rather than a static artistic product.

Through a comparative analysis of Hollywood and Nollywood, the study highlights the adaptability and global relevance of communication theories. While Hollywood applies these frameworks within a highly institutionalized, market-driven production system oriented toward transnational audiences, Nollywood mobilizes them through culturally specific semiotics and indigenous storytelling traditions. This comparison underscores that communication theory does not impose uniform practices but enables context-sensitive meaning-making across diverse cinematic environments.

The case studies further illustrate how interpersonal communication, visual semiotics, audience reception, and narrative theory operate in concrete cinematic contexts. From *CODA*'s embodied communicative authenticity to Wes Anderson's stylized visual language, and from Kunle Afolayan's indigenous symbolism to *Living in Bondage*'s culturally grounded reception, the analysis demonstrates that theory gains explanatory and practical power when grounded in production practice.

In conclusion, the continued integration of communication theory into film production holds significant implications for scholarship, pedagogy, and industry practice. Future research should pursue deeper interdisciplinary convergence among communication studies, film theory, media psychology, and digital media studies, particularly in light of emerging technologies and evolving audience practices. Scholars





and filmmakers alike can enhance cinema's capacity for meaningful, culturally resonant communication in an increasingly globalized media landscape as they strengthen the dialogue between theory and practice.

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ECONOMIC IMPACT OF FILM PIRACY ON THE NIGERIAN FILM INDUSTRY: THE EFFECTS OF COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT

Osakpolor Kross Esokpunwu

Faculty of Management and Social Sciences,

Nigerian British University,

esokpunwu.osakpolor@nbu.edu.ng

+2348063309744,

&

Faustina Akudo Warri

Faculty of Management and Social Sciences,

Nigerian British University,

Asa, Abia State, Nigeria.

warri.faustina@nbu.edu.ng

+2348066963117

Abstract

This study examines the economic impact of film piracy on the Nigerian film industry: a study of the effects of copyright infringement. This study is anchored on the Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Theory. It adopted a qualitative research approach using in-depth interviews to explore the economic impact of film piracy on the Nigerian film industry. The findings revealed that film piracy significantly affects Nollywood's revenue generation, as illegal copies of films are widely circulated, often at cheaper prices or for free, reducing the potential earnings of filmmakers, distributors, and other stakeholders. This loss of revenue limits the ability of filmmakers to recoup production costs, discourages investment in high-quality productions, and negatively impacts job creation within the industry. The study concluded that film piracy remains a major threat to Nollywood's revenue generation, as unauthorized distribution of films diverts earnings away from filmmakers and investors, limiting the industry's financial growth. Without effective anti-piracy measures, the economic viability of Nollywood will continue to decline, making it difficult for producers to fund high-quality projects and compete internationally. Therefore, tackling piracy is crucial for sustaining the profitability and expansion of Nigeria's film industry. The study recommended that Nollywood stakeholders should collaborate with government agencies and private investors to develop more secure and profitable distribution channels that discourage piracy.

Keywords: Economic impact, film piracy, Nigerian film industry, copyright, infringement

Introduction

The Nigerian film industry, popularly known as Nollywood, is one of the largest film industries in the world, ranking alongside Hollywood and Bollywood in terms of production output (Okome, 2020). With an annual contribution of approximately \$600 million to Nigeria's economy, Nollywood provides employment for thousands of actors, producers, directors, and technical crew members (UNESCO, 2021). However, industry faces a persistent challenge in the form of film piracy, which has significantly





hindered its economic growth and sustainability (Ogunleye, 2019). Film piracy, which involves the unauthorized duplication, distribution, and sale of copyrighted content, has led to massive revenue losses, reducing the profitability of filmmakers and discouraging investment in the industry (Uchenna, 2022). Copyright infringement in Nollywood manifests in various ways, including digital piracy, unauthorized DVD reproductions, and illegal online streaming platforms (Ebewo & Okafor, 2013). The proliferation of pirated content has been facilitated by advancements in digital technology, making it easier for illegal distributors to copy and sell films without proper authorization (Obiaya, 2020).

Resultantly, legitimate filmmakers struggle to recoup production costs, leading to a decline in film quality and innovation (Mwachukwu, 2019). This economic sabotage affects not only filmmakers but also the entire value chain of the industry, including marketers, distributors, and cinema operators (Olatunji, 2021). The economic impact of film piracy in Nigeria is evident in the declining revenue streams for Nollywood producers. Studies estimate that the industry loses billions of naira annually due to unauthorized distribution (Okoh, 2020). While the Nigerian Copyright Commission (NCC) and other regulatory bodies have attempted to curb piracy through legislative measures, enforcement remains a significant challenge (Adewopo, 2017). The weak implementation of copyright laws and the lack of stringent penalties for offenders contribute to the persistence of this menace (Ekeanyanwu, 2015). Consequently, filmmakers continue to suffer financial losses, which limits the industry's growth potential and discourages new entrants from investing in film production (Ogundele, 2022).

Furthermore, piracy undermines the economic viability of Nollywood by diverting revenue that would otherwise be reinvested into film production and infrastructure development (Chukwu, 2021). Legal film distribution channels, such as cinemas and digital streaming services, struggle to compete with the low prices of pirated content, forcing many legitimate businesses to shut down (Obafemi, 2020). This situation creates a ripple effect on employment, as job opportunities in the industry decline due to financial constraints faced by filmmakers and production companies (Oni, 2022). It also affects the international reputation of Nollywood. Investors and international distributors are often hesitant to collaborate with Nigerian filmmakers due to the high risk of intellectual property theft (Okafor, 2018). The lack of effective copyright protection discourages foreign direct investment (FDI), which is crucial for industry growth and global competitiveness (Ekpo, 2019). Countries with strong copyright enforcement frameworks, such as the United States and India, have been able





to attract significant investment in their film industries, a model that Nigeria has struggled to replicate due to rampant piracy (Akande, 2020).

Digital piracy has become a dominant threat to Nollywood's revenue streams. With the rise of high-speed internet and peer-to-peer file-sharing networks, unauthorized downloads and illegal streaming of Nigerian films have become widespread (Oluwafemi, 2022). This shift has significantly affected traditional distribution models, with DVD sales and cinema revenues witnessing a sharp decline (Oloyede, 2021). Despite the emergence of legal streaming platforms like Netflix, IROKOtv, and Showmax, the challenge of piracy persists, as many consumers opt for free illegal alternatives rather than paying for copyrighted content (Nwosu, 2023).

The cultural implications of piracy also extend beyond economic losses. Nollywood films serve as a medium for promoting Nigerian culture, values, and traditions to both local and global audiences (Ogunbiyi, 2019). However, the widespread circulation of pirated films diminishes the value of creative intellectual property, making it difficult for filmmakers to sustain culturally relevant storytelling (Uka, 2021). As a result, many filmmakers are forced to adopt cost-cutting measures, which often compromise artistic quality and limit the industry's potential for cultural exportation (Adesanya, 2020). Hence, addressing film piracy requires a multi-faceted approach that includes stronger copyright laws, enhanced enforcement mechanisms, and increased public awareness about the economic impact of intellectual property theft (NCC, 2022). Countries that have successfully reduced piracy, such as South Korea and China, have implemented strict legal frameworks alongside technological measures such as digital rights management (DRM) and blockchain-based copyright protection (Chen, 2018). Nigeria can learn from these best practices to develop a more robust strategy for combating film piracy and protecting the economic interests of Nollywood stakeholders (Balogun, 2023).

This study explores the economic impact of film piracy on Nollywood by examining revenue losses, employment challenges, and the role of copyright enforcement in mitigating piracy. It analyses the effectiveness of existing anti-piracy measures and proposes policy recommendations that can enhance the sustainability of the Nigerian film industry. The study also assesses consumer attitudes toward pirated content and explores alternative distribution models that can reduce the attractiveness of illegal film consumption (Ogunleye, 2023).

By providing empirical evidence on the effects of copyright infringement, this study aims to contribute to policy discussions on intellectual property rights in Nigeria's creative industries. Strengthening the legal and regulatory framework for copyright





protection is essential for ensuring that Nollywood filmmakers receive fair compensation for their work, thereby fostering industry growth and economic stability (Ayodele, 2022). Ultimately, combating film piracy will not only protect the financial interests of filmmakers but also enhance Nigeria's global standing as a hub for creative content production.

An Overview of the Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Theory

The Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Theory, propounded by John Locke in 1690 and further developed by legal scholars in the 19th and 20th centuries, serves as the theoretical foundation for this study. The theory is rooted in Locke's Labour Theory of Property, which argues that individuals have a natural right to own and control the products of their labour (Locke, 1690). In modern applications, the IPR Theory emphasizes that creative works, including films, are a form of intellectual property that must be legally protected to ensure fair compensation for creators and encourage innovation (Hettinger, 1989). The key tenets of the theory include the recognition of intellectual property as a form of ownership, the necessity of legal protection to prevent unauthorized use, and the economic incentives that come from securing intellectual property rights (Machlup & Penrose, 1950). The theory assumes that without strong legal enforcement, creative industries such as Nollywood will suffer financial losses, discouraging future investments in content creation (Cornish & Llewelyn, 2010).

Despite its strengths, the IPR Theory has faced criticism for prioritizing economic gain over public access to creative works. Scholars argue that excessive intellectual property protection can stifle creativity, limit knowledge sharing, and restrict the availability of cultural products (Lessig, 2004). Additionally, in developing countries like Nigeria, weak enforcement mechanisms often render copyright laws ineffective, leading to widespread piracy despite legal frameworks (Okorie, 2019). However, the relevance of this theory to the study lies in its emphasis on the economic consequences of copyright infringement. It provides a framework for understanding how weak intellectual property protection in Nollywood results in revenue losses, discourages investment, and hampers the industry's global competitiveness. By applying the IPR Theory, this study highlights the need for stronger copyright enforcement, public awareness campaigns, and the adoption of digital rights management (DRM) systems to mitigate piracy in Nigeria's film industry.

Copyright Enforcement and the Challenges of Curbing Film Piracy in Nigeria

Despite the existence of copyright laws designed to protect intellectual property in Nigeria, enforcement has remained largely ineffective due to systemic challenges (Adewopo, 2017). The Nigerian Copyright Act (Cap C28 LFN 2004) criminalizes the unauthorized reproduction, distribution, and sale of copyrighted materials, yet piracy





continues to thrive due to weak implementation and inadequate legal penalties (Ekeanyanwu, 2015). Many piracy syndicates operate with little fear of prosecution, as enforcement agencies often lack the resources and technical expertise needed to track and dismantle illegal distribution networks (Ogundele, 2022). Additionally, corruption within regulatory bodies has contributed to the persistence of piracy, with some enforcement officers allegedly accepting bribes to overlook infringement cases (Oni, 2022). This lack of accountability has created an environment where film piracy flourishes unchecked, significantly undermining the effectiveness of Nigeria's copyright laws (Olatunji, 2021).

One of the major challenges hindering effective copyright enforcement in Nigeria is the rapid evolution of digital technology, which has made it easier for pirates to distribute stolen content online (NCC, 2022). Unlike traditional DVD piracy, where physical copies could be seized and destroyed, digital piracy is more difficult to control because pirated films can be easily uploaded and shared across multiple platforms within minutes (Nwosu, 2023). Furthermore, many illegal streaming websites operate from foreign countries, making it challenging for Nigerian authorities to take legal action against them (Ekpo, 2019). The absence of strong digital rights management (DRM) systems and inadequate cybersecurity measures have left Nollywood vulnerable to intellectual property theft, exacerbating revenue losses for legitimate filmmakers (Ogunleye, 2023).

To address these enforcement challenges, there is a need for stronger collaboration between the government, law enforcement agencies, and industry stakeholders (Balogun, 2023). Countries like South Korea and China have successfully reduced piracy through a combination of stringent copyright laws, digital monitoring systems, and public awareness campaigns (Chen, 2018). Nigeria can adopt similar strategies by implementing blockchain technology for copyright protection, strengthening penalties for offenders, and investing in digital surveillance tools to track and shut down piracy networks (Obafemi, 2020). Additionally, increased public awareness about the consequences of piracy can help shift consumer behavior towards supporting legal film distribution channels (Ogunbiyi, 2019). Without urgent intervention, film piracy will continue to stifle Nollywood's economic potential and hinder its ability to compete on the global stage (Ayodele, 2022).

The Economic Impact of Film Piracy on Nollywood

Film piracy has significantly undermined the economic viability of Nollywood, leading to substantial revenue losses for filmmakers, producers and distributors (Ogunleye, 2020). According to a report by the Nigerian Copyright Commission (NCC, 2022), the industry loses approximately ₦150 billion annually due to





unauthorized reproduction and distribution of films. This financial setback affects not only content creators but also the entire value chain, including marketers, cinema operators, and legal streaming platforms (Obiaya, 2021). Many filmmakers struggle to recover production costs due to reduced sales from legitimate sources, leading to a decline in film quality and overall industry investment (Ekpo, 2019). As piracy continues to erode the profitability of Nollywood, fewer investors are willing to fund high-budget productions, which ultimately affects the industry's growth and global competitiveness (Chukwu, 2021).

The rise of digital piracy has further exacerbated the economic challenges faced by Nollywood. With the advancement of internet technology, pirated copies of newly released films are often available for illegal download or streaming within hours of their official release (Okoh, 2020). Platforms such as Telegram, peer-to-peer (P2P) sharing networks, and illegal streaming websites have become major distribution channels for pirated Nigerian films (Nwosu, 2023). This unrestricted access to unauthorized content discourages cinema attendance and legal streaming subscriptions, leading to declining revenues for legitimate distributors (Olatunji, 2021). The financial impact extends beyond film producers to actors, directors, and technical crew members, many of whom rely on royalties and profit-sharing agreements that piracy disrupts (Ogunbiyi, 2019).

Furthermore, piracy affects the ability of Nollywood to compete globally, as international investors and distributors are hesitant to engage with an industry where intellectual property rights are not adequately protected (Okafor, 2018). In contrast, countries like the United States and India have implemented robust anti-piracy measures, ensuring that their film industries remain lucrative and attractive to foreign investment (Akande, 2020). The lack of stringent copyright enforcement in Nigeria has allowed piracy to thrive, weakening Nollywood's financial standing and limiting opportunities for expansion into global markets (Ebewo & Okafor, 2013). Addressing this challenge requires a concerted effort from industry stakeholders, policymakers, and law enforcement agencies to develop sustainable strategies for combating piracy and ensuring fair compensation for creative works (Balogun, 2023).

How piracy impacts the financial earnings of Nollywood filmmakers

Responses from Interview Extract: Film Producer (Respondent 1) stated that piracy significantly undermines our ability to generate revenue from our films. When a movie is produced, we rely on cinema screenings, DVD sales, and digital streaming platforms to recoup our investments and make a profit. However, the moment a film is released, illegal copies flood the market, selling at a fraction of the original cost. In some cases, pirated copies surface even before the official release, drastically reducing the number of





people willing to pay for legal access. This means that one often struggles to recover production costs, let alone make a reasonable profit.

Film Distributor (Respondent 2) elicited that the biggest issue is that piracy diverts revenue from the rightful owners to unauthorized sellers. While a Nollywood film may be priced at ₦1,500 in a legal distribution channel, pirated copies sell for as low as ₦300. Consumers, especially in low-income communities, find the cheaper option more appealing. This translates to billions of naira lost annually. Streaming services, which have become a major revenue source, are also affected, as unauthorized downloads and illegal streaming platforms offer free access to movies that should be paid for.

Copyright Official (Respondent 3) illustrated that from an enforcement perspective, the economic losses caused by piracy are staggering. Nollywood contributes significantly to Nigeria's GDP, but with piracy taking away much of its earnings, the industry's financial growth is stunted. Many filmmakers are forced to reduce their production budgets, which in turn affects the quality of movies. Some investors are also reluctant to fund projects, knowing that piracy will eat into potential profits. Addressing this issue requires stricter enforcement of copyright laws and greater awareness among consumers about the negative impact of piracy.

Marketer (Respondent 4) said that in markets like Alaba and Onitsha, where film sales are concentrated, piracy dominates. Even when a film is officially released, pirated versions flood the streets, making it difficult for authorized sellers to compete. Online piracy has worsened the situation, with platforms offering movies illegally for downloading. If this continues unchecked, many filmmakers may abandon the industry due to financial losses, and the reputation of Nollywood as a profitable sector may decline.

Effectiveness of copyright enforcement mechanisms in curbing film piracy in Nigeria

Responses from the interview extract: Film Producer (Respondent 1) said that honestly, copyright enforcement in Nigeria is weak. While we have copyright laws in place, their implementation is poor. The Nigerian Copyright Commission (NCC) and law enforcement agencies often lack the resources and technical capacity to track and shut down piracy networks. Many offenders go unpunished, which emboldens others to continue illegal distribution. Even when cases are taken to court, the legal process is slow, and penalties for piracy are not severe enough to deter offenders.

Copyright Official (Respondent 2) posited that the challenge the copyright officials face was not just about laws but also about enforcement. The officials conduct





raids on piracy hubs, seize illegal copies, and shut down unauthorized streaming sites, but the problem persists. The digital landscape makes it difficult to fully control the distribution of pirated content. Many websites hosting illegal Nollywood movies operate from foreign servers, making legal action complicated. There is also corruption within enforcement agencies, where some officials accept bribes to turn a blind eye to piracy operations.

Lawyer (Respondent 3) stated that from a legal standpoint, Nigeria's copyright laws are outdated in addressing modern digital piracy. The Nigerian Copyright Act provides a framework for protecting intellectual property, but enforcement remains a challenge. There is a need to introduce stricter penalties, improve surveillance, and collaborate with international agencies to curb cross-border digital piracy. Countries with strong enforcement mechanisms, such as the United States and the UK, have successfully reduced piracy through legal streaming alternatives and stringent copyright regulations. Nigeria needs to adopt a similar approach.

Film Distributor (Respondent 4) elucidated that one of the biggest obstacles to effective copyright enforcement is public perception. Many Nigerians do not see piracy as a serious crime. People openly buy pirated movies in the market without fear of consequences. Until there is a cultural shift and greater awareness about the damages of piracy, enforcement alone will not be enough. Government agencies need to work closely with filmmakers to implement a multi-faceted approach that includes education, legal reforms, and technological solutions to combat piracy.

Strategies Nollywood adopted to mitigate film piracy and enhance profitability

Extraction from the interview: Film Producer (Respondent 1) agreed that one key strategy is embracing digital platforms with strong anti-piracy measures. Many international streaming services use digital rights management (DRM) technology to prevent unauthorized copying and sharing of content. If Nollywood producers' partner with such platforms, it will help limit piracy. Additionally, creating exclusive content for legal streaming services like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Showmax can make it harder for pirates to distribute unauthorized copies.

Tech Expert (Respondent 2) narrated that technology can play a vital role in combating piracy. Blockchain technology, for instance, offers a way to track and authenticate film ownership, making it easier to detect unauthorized distributions. Nollywood filmmakers can also explore watermarking techniques that embed unique digital signatures into movies, making pirated copies traceable. Furthermore, collaborations with cybersecurity firms can help identify and shut down illegal streaming sites.





Marketing Expert (Respondent 3) accepted that affordable and accessible legal alternatives are crucial. Many Nigerians turn to pirated content because legal movie platforms are either too expensive or inaccessible due to poor internet connectivity. Nollywood can explore lower-cost streaming services tailored to the Nigerian market, like how music platforms like Boomplay succeeded by offering affordable subscriptions. Localized streaming services with affordable pricing can help redirect consumers away from piracy.

Government Official (Respondent 4) explained that a comprehensive anti-piracy policy is needed, combining law enforcement, public education, and industry collaboration. The government must strengthen copyright laws, impose harsher penalties on offenders, and conduct regular raids on piracy hubs. Additionally, awareness campaigns should be launched to educate consumers on how piracy negatively impacts the Nigerian film industry. If piracy is tackled holistically, Nollywood can thrive financially and remain a global competitor in the film industry.

The responses from industry stakeholders reveal that film piracy poses a major economic threat to Nollywood, primarily due to weak copyright enforcement and inadequate legal frameworks. While existing measures to combat piracy are insufficient, stakeholders believe that leveraging technology, improving legal frameworks, and increasing public awareness are crucial steps toward mitigating the issue. Strengthening copyright enforcement, promoting affordable legal distribution platforms, and fostering industry-government collaboration will be essential in ensuring Nollywood's profitability and long-term sustainability.

Conclusion

The study concluded that that film piracy remains a major threat to Nollywood's revenue generation, as unauthorized distribution of films diverts earnings away from filmmakers and investors, limiting the industry's financial growth. Without effective anti-piracy measures, the economic viability of Nollywood will continue to decline, making it difficult for producers to fund high-quality projects and compete internationally. Therefore, tackling piracy is crucial for sustaining the profitability and expansion of Nigeria's film industry.

The study justified that Nigeria's copyright enforcement mechanisms are weak, making it difficult to curb film piracy effectively. Outdated legal frameworks, poor implementation, and digital piracy challenges contribute to widespread copyright infringement, undermining the efforts of filmmakers to protect their creative works. Strengthening legal enforcement and adopting modern anti-piracy strategies are essential steps in addressing this growing issue and ensuring Nollywood's economic resilience.





The study established that Nollywood must embrace a combination of technological and legal strategies to combat piracy and safeguard its revenue streams. Digital rights management (DRM), blockchain-based content protection, affordable streaming platforms, and stricter copyright enforcement can significantly reduce illegal film distribution. Additionally, raising public awareness about the negative impact of piracy can promote ethical film consumption and encourage the adoption of legal alternatives, ensuring a more sustainable future for Nollywood.

This study contributed to knowledge by providing a comprehensive analysis of the economic impact of film piracy on Nollywood, highlighting the significant revenue losses, weak copyright enforcement mechanisms, and the urgent need for technological and legal interventions. Unlike previous studies that focused primarily on the prevalence of piracy, this research offers practical solutions, such as digital rights management (DRM), blockchain integration, and affordable legal streaming platforms, to mitigate piracy and enhance revenue generation. Additionally, by aligning findings with the Economic Theory of Intellectual Property Rights, the study strengthens the theoretical understanding of how weak intellectual property enforcement affects creative industries. The research also bridges the gap between policy and practice by emphasizing the role of public awareness in shifting consumer behaviour towards legal film consumption. These insights provide valuable recommendations for Nollywood stakeholders, policymakers, and scholars seeking sustainable strategies to protect Nigeria's film industry from piracy. In view of the findings from the work, the following recommendations have been made.

- 1) Nollywood stakeholders should collaborate with government agencies and private investors to develop more secure and profitable distribution channels that discourage piracy.
- 2) The Nigerian government should strengthen copyright laws, enhance enforcement mechanisms, and invest in digital tracking systems to combat both physical and digital film piracy effectively.
- 3) Nollywood should adopt advanced anti-piracy technologies, create affordable and user-friendly legal streaming platforms, and launch public awareness campaigns to promote ethical film consumption.

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MEDIA MANAGEMENT AND ECONOMICS IN THE GLOBAL FILM INDUSTRY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF NOLLYWOOD, HOLLYWOOD, AND BOLLYWOOD IN 2025

Moses Ofome Asak

Department of Broadcasting
Communication and Media Studies
University of Port Harcourt
Email: asak.moses@dou.edu.ng
Phone: 08038625780

Abstract

This study examines the evolving landscape of media management and economics within the global film industry, with a particular focus on Nigeria's Nollywood in 2025. Recognizing the industry's complex economic structures, technological innovations, and cultural dynamics, the research compares Nollywood's development with Hollywood and Bollywood to identify unique strategies and challenges. The study was anchored on an interdisciplinary theoretical framework drawing from media economics, industrial organization theory, and political economy of communication. A qualitative approach was employed synthesizing recent literature, industry reports, and case analyses, alongside secondary data from global and Nigerian sources. The findings suggest that Nollywood's rapid, cost-effective production model, digital distribution strategies, and entrepreneurial management practices have positioned it as a significant emerging player on the world stage, despite infrastructural and regulatory hurdles. The analysis highlights the importance of institutional strengthening, technological adoption, and strategic international partnerships for sustainable growth. The paper concludes with policy recommendations aimed at nurturing industry resilience, enhancing revenue models, and safeguarding intellectual property, thereby contributing to the broader understanding of media economics and management in diverse cultural and economic contexts.

Keywords: Media Management, Film Industry Economics, Nollywood, Global Film Markets, Digital Distribution, Cultural Industries, Industry Development, Media Policy

Introduction

Media management and media economics constitute a mature interdisciplinary field concerned with the structural, organizational, and financial conditions under which media industries produce and circulate symbolic goods. Media economics applies economic theory to the study of media systems, examining how ownership structures, market concentration, regulation, labor relations, and technological change shape media production and consumption across national and transnational contexts (Albarran, 2005, 2023; Doyle, 2013). At both macro and micro levels, scholarship in this field has emphasized the distinctive characteristics of media products - high sunk costs, demand uncertainty, public-good properties, and reliance on intellectual property regimes -





which complicate conventional economic models of production and exchange (De Vany, 2004; Vogel, 2020).

The global film industry offers a particularly salient site for analyzing these dynamics. Film production and distribution operate within highly uneven global markets dominated by a small number of vertically and horizontally integrated conglomerates, while simultaneously accommodating diverse local and regional industries with distinct institutional logics (Hesmondhalgh, 2019; Lobato, 2019). Hollywood's enduring dominance has been sustained through control over global distribution networks, marketing infrastructures, and financialization strategies that mitigate risk through franchising, intellectual property exploitation, and platform convergence (Curtin et al., 2014; Tryon, 2019). In contrast, emerging film industries often rely on alternative production models, informal financing, and localized distribution systems, revealing different configurations of media management and economic rationality.

Recent transformations driven by digital platforms and streaming services have further reshaped the political economy of film. Subscription-based video-on-demand (SVOD) services have altered revenue models, distribution windows, and audience measurement practices, intensifying competition while also creating new opportunities for industries outside the traditional centers of global cinema (Lobato, 2019; Cunningham & Craig, 2019). These shifts underscore the need for comparative, globally oriented analyses that move beyond Euro-American frameworks and systematically examine how film industries operating under different economic and institutional conditions manage uncertainty, platformization, and integration into global markets.

Within this global configuration, Nollywood - the Nigerian film industry - has emerged as a critical case for rethinking media economics and management outside the dominant studio system. Nollywood is widely recognized as one of the world's most prolific film industries by output, distinguished by rapid production cycles, relatively low budgets, and a strong orientation toward domestic and diasporic markets (Haynes, 2016; Jedlowski, 2016). Rather than conforming to Hollywood's capital-intensive model, Nollywood developed through informal distribution networks, direct-to-video markets, and entrepreneurial production practices that prioritized speed, cultural proximity, and audience familiarity over high production values (Lobato & Thomas, 2015).

In recent years, however, Nollywood has undergone significant industrial reconfiguration. Increased state and private investment, the expansion of multiplex exhibition, and strategic partnerships with global streaming platforms have contributed to rising production budgets, enhanced professionalization, and greater international





visibility (Adejumobi, 2014; Krings & Okome, 2013; Lobato, 2019). At the same time, persistent challenges - including piracy, infrastructural limitations, labor precarity, and uneven access to financing - continue to shape the industry's economic sustainability and creative autonomy (Jedlowski, 2022; UNESCO, 2022). These tensions position Nollywood as a vital site for examining how media industries in the Global South negotiate global capital flows while retaining localized modes of production and cultural expression.

Against this backdrop, this article advances a comparative analysis of Hollywood, Bollywood, and Nollywood to address the following overarching research question: How do media management practices and economic logics differ across Hollywood, Bollywood, and Nollywood in 2025, and how do these differences shape each industry's capacity to manage uncertainty, platformization, and global market integration? The study foregrounds structural differences in financing, distribution, labor organization, and governance, demonstrating how film industries operating under divergent economic conditions develop distinct yet interconnected strategies for survival and growth by situating Nollywood alongside Hollywood and Bollywood.

Such a comparative perspective contributes to ongoing debates in media economics, global cinema studies, and cultural policy by highlighting the plurality of industrial models that coexist within the contemporary audiovisual landscape. An understanding of these dynamics is essential for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners concerned with the future sustainability, equity, and cultural diversity of global film industries.

Industrial Organization and Film Markets

At the core of this framework is the Industrial Organization (IO) model, which conceptualizes the film industry through the interrelated dimensions of market structure, firm conduct, and economic performance. Originating in classical industrial economics and adapted to media industries, the IO model emphasizes how ownership concentration, barriers to entry, vertical integration, and economies of scale shape competitive behavior and market outcomes (Guback, 1969; Albarran, 2005, 2023). In the context of film, this approach has been particularly useful for analyzing Hollywood's dominance, where major studios exert control over production, global distribution networks, marketing infrastructures, and intellectual property portfolios.

Contemporary scholarship has extended IO analysis to account for globalization and platformization, noting that market power increasingly derives from control over distribution technologies, data analytics, and transnational licensing arrangements rather than theatrical exhibition alone (Lobato, 2019; Vogel, 2020). These developments have





intensified asymmetries between dominant film industries such as Hollywood and emerging industries like Nollywood, while simultaneously opening new avenues for international circulation and market access.

Uncertainty, Risk, and Film Economics

A second foundational pillar of the theoretical framework is the economics of uncertainty and risk, most notably articulated by Arthur De Vany (2004). De Vany conceptualizes film markets as characterized by extreme uncertainty, where box office performance follows a non-normal distribution and success is contingent on relative competition rather than absolute quality. Films operate within what he terms a “market for surprises,” in which small differences in timing, marketing, or audience reception can produce disproportionate financial outcomes.

This model explains the persistence of blockbuster strategies, sequelization, star casting, and genre repetition as rational risk-management responses by studios seeking to stabilize revenue streams in an otherwise volatile market (Vogel, 2020). While developed primarily in relation to Hollywood, the uncertainty framework has broader applicability, particularly in explaining why capital-intensive industries favor franchising and why low-budget industries often pursue rapid production and portfolio diversification strategies to offset risk.

Media Economics and Multi-Sided Markets

Media economics provides a critical framework for understanding film industries as operating within multi-sided markets that connect producers, distributors, exhibitors, advertisers, platforms, and audiences. In this configuration, value creation and capture depend on the coordinated management of interdependent market relationships rather than on direct producer–consumer exchange alone. Picard’s foundational work conceptualizes media firms as resource-constrained organizations whose economic sustainability hinges on balancing content investment, pricing strategies, audience demand, and regulatory conditions across these interlocking markets (Picard, 1989, 2011).

Historically, the film industry generated revenues through a sequential system of exploitation windows - beginning with theatrical exhibition and extending to home entertainment, broadcast licensing, and ancillary merchandising. This windowing model functioned as a risk-management mechanism, allowing producers and distributors to segment audiences temporally and geographically while maximizing revenue extraction from intellectual property (Vogel, 2020). Within this system, Hollywood studios leveraged vertical integration and global distribution control to optimize returns, while





industries such as Bollywood and Nollywood adapted windowing practices to local exhibition infrastructures and audience behaviors.

Over the past decade, however, the rise of global digital platforms has fundamentally disrupted this economic architecture. Subscription-based and platform-exclusive distribution models have compressed or eliminated traditional release windows, altered revenue timing, and shifted bargaining power toward transnational technology firms that control access to audiences, data analytics, and recommendation systems (Lobato, 2019; Cunningham & Craig, 2019). As a result, contemporary media economics must account not only for pricing and cost structures, but also for platform governance, algorithmic visibility, and data-driven decision-making as central determinants of market success.

Comparative Global Perspectives: Hollywood, Bollywood, and Nollywood

Viewed comparatively, the operation of multi-sided markets reveals both convergence and divergence across global film industries. Hollywood exemplifies a highly capitalized, vertically integrated model in which studios manage risk through franchising, intellectual property aggregation, and cross-platform synergies that extend film content across television, streaming, gaming, and merchandising ecosystems (Hesmondhalgh, 2019; Vogel, 2020). In this context, platformization complements rather than displaces existing corporate power, as major studios negotiate from positions of relative strength.

Bollywood occupies an intermediate position within the global media economy. Its business model is anchored in a vast and internally differentiated domestic market, sustained by star-centered production cultures and long-standing exhibition networks. While increasingly engaged with global platforms, Bollywood remains less dependent on international box office dominance than Hollywood, relying instead on high production volume, domestic circulation, and diasporic consumption to sustain profitability (Athique, 2016; Punathambekar & Mohan, 2019). Platform integration has expanded global reach but has not fundamentally displaced the industry's domestic economic logic.

Nollywood presents a more radical challenge to Hollywood-centric assumptions embedded in traditional media economics. Emerging outside the vertically integrated studio system, Nollywood historically relied on informal financing, rapid production cycles, and direct-to-consumer distribution networks that minimized capital exposure while maximizing cultural proximity to audiences (Haynes, 2016; Jedlowski, 2016). Rather than representing an anomaly or market failure, Nollywood demonstrates how alternative institutional arrangements emerge in response to resource scarcity,





infrastructural constraints, and uneven access to capital - conditions common across much of the Global South.

Recent scholarship situates Nollywood within broader processes of global media restructuring, emphasizing how digital platforms, diasporic markets, and transnational co-production have reshaped its economic and managerial practices (Adejunmobi, 2014; Krings & Okome, 2013; Jedlowski, 2022). Integration into global streaming ecosystems has expanded Nollywood's visibility and revenue opportunities, but it has also exposed the industry to new forms of dependency, as platform commissioning practices and licensing agreements increasingly shape production decisions.

Platformization, Power Asymmetries, and Managerial Implications

From a political economy perspective, the platformization of film distribution accentuates power asymmetries between Global North technology firms and Global South content producers. While platforms offer access to global audiences, they also centralize control over data, pricing, and discoverability, raising concerns about value extraction, cultural sovereignty, and long-term sustainability (Hesmondhalgh, 2019; Lobato, 2019). These dynamics underscore the need to theorize film industries not as isolated national entities, but as interconnected nodes within a stratified global media system.

Managerially, operating within multi-sided, platform-dominated markets requires advanced competencies in rights negotiation, metadata optimization, and cross-border marketing. Hollywood studios typically possess the institutional capacity to navigate these demands through in-house expertise and scale advantages. By contrast, producers in Nollywood - and to a lesser extent segments of Bollywood - often adapt under conditions of informational asymmetry and limited bargaining power, intensifying reliance on strategic partnerships, co-productions, and hybrid financing arrangements.

The foregoing suggest that media economics, multi-sided market theory, and comparative political economy provide a comprehensive conceptual framework for analyzing contemporary film industries. Applied comparatively to Hollywood, Bollywood, and Nollywood, these perspectives show that no single industrial model defines success in the global film economy. Instead, each industry reflects a historically contingent response to specific market conditions, institutional capacities, and audience relationships.

Hollywood's capital-intensive, franchise-driven system, Bollywood's volume-oriented domestic model, and Nollywood's flexible, culturally embedded production ecology illustrate multiple pathways through which film industries manage uncertainty, technological disruption, and global competition. Recognizing this plurality is essential





for developing media management strategies and cultural policies that support diversity, sustainability, and equity in an increasingly platform-dominated global cinematic landscape.

Nollywood: Economic, Managerial Perspectives, and Strategic Importance

Nollywood occupies a strategically significant position within Nigeria's creative economy and the broader global film industry. Over the past three decades, the industry has evolved from an informal, video-based production system into a complex audiovisual sector characterized by expanding theatrical exhibition, international circulation, and increasing engagement with global streaming platforms (Haynes, 2016; Jedlowski, 2022). Scholarly and institutional analyses consistently identify Nollywood as one of the most prolific film industries worldwide by output, rivaled primarily by India's Bollywood, and as a critical contributor to employment generation, cultural production, and national soft power (UNESCO, 2022).

From a conceptual standpoint, Nollywood's growth illustrates how film industries in the Global South can achieve scale and sustainability through alternative economic logics rather than through capital-intensive studio models typical of Hollywood. Its development has been shaped by localized demand, culturally proximate storytelling, and flexible production practices that reduce financial risk while maximizing audience reach (Lobato & Thomas, 2015). These characteristics position Nollywood as a paradigmatic case for rethinking media economics beyond Euro-American industrial norms.

Economic Impact and Revenue Structures

Nollywood's economic significance is most clearly evident in its contribution to Nigeria's creative and cultural industries. While precise output and revenue figures remain difficult to verify due to persistent informality and data limitations, consensus among scholars and policy institutions holds that film and allied creative sectors constitute a growing share of Nigeria's non-oil economy (UNESCO, 2022; PwC, 2023). Nollywood's value lies not only in direct revenues but also in its multiplier effects across employment, tourism, advertising, music, fashion, and digital services.

The industry's revenue model has diversified substantially in the past decade. In addition to domestic theatrical exhibition - supported by the expansion of multiplex cinemas in major urban centers - income streams include television licensing, international sales, festival circulation, and increasingly, digital streaming platforms (Lobato, 2019; Jedlowski, 2022). Subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) services have enabled Nollywood films to reach global audiences, particularly within African and





diasporic markets, while providing alternative financing and licensing opportunities that reduce dependence on volatile box office returns.

This hybrid revenue structure reflects a broader shift in global film economics, where value extraction increasingly occurs through licensing, catalog exploitation, and platform-based circulation rather than through theatrical exhibition alone (Vogel, 2020). For Nollywood, such diversification has improved visibility and production standards, though it has also intensified dependency on transnational platforms whose commissioning practices and contractual terms shape creative and economic outcomes.

Managerial Practices and Industry Development

Managerial practices within Nollywood are best understood as a hybrid of entrepreneurial informality and gradual institutionalization. Historically, the industry relied on rapid production cycles, informal labor relations, and personal or community-based financing mechanisms, allowing producers to operate under conditions of extreme uncertainty (Haynes, 2016). In recent years, however, there has been a discernible shift toward more structured management models, including professional guild organization, standardized production workflows, and vertically integrated exhibition and distribution strategies (Jedlowski, 2022).

The expansion of cinema infrastructure, production facilities, and training institutions has contributed to improved technical quality and professionalization. At the same time, managerial challenges persist, particularly in relation to copyright enforcement, reliable audience data, and access to formal financing instruments. Weak intellectual property protection and persistent piracy continue to undermine revenue capture, discouraging long-term investment and complicating the transition to sustainable industrial scaling (UNESCO, 2022).

From a comparative perspective, Nollywood's managerial logic differs markedly from Hollywood's capital-intensive, franchise-driven model and Bollywood's star-centered, domestically anchored production system. Nollywood's competitive advantage lies in its cultural responsiveness, speed, and audience proximity, which enable producers to operate at lower risk thresholds. However, these same features pose constraints in a platform-dominated global market that increasingly rewards scalability, data transparency, and standardized formats.

Strategic Importance

Nollywood's future trajectory is closely aligned with Nigeria's broader ambitions to diversify its economy through cultural and creative industries. Policy discourse increasingly frames audiovisual production as a strategic growth sector capable of generating employment, export revenues, and global cultural influence (UNESCO, 2022;





PwC, 2023). Continued growth, however, depends on addressing persistent structural constraints, including infrastructure deficits, access to formal financing, and effective copyright enforcement.

Strategically, Nollywood's significance extends beyond national boundaries. As global platforms expand investment in non-Western content, Nollywood occupies a pivotal position within the evolving geopolitics of global screen culture. Its ability to sustain growth while retaining creative autonomy will depend on the development of robust regulatory frameworks, transparent data systems, and financing mechanisms that balance local control with global integration.

In conceptual terms, Nollywood demonstrates that media management and film economics in the twenty-first century cannot be understood through a singular industrial model. Instead, its evolution highlights the coexistence of multiple, context-specific pathways through which film industries negotiate uncertainty, technological change, and global competition - an insight central to comparative media economics and global film studies.

Media Management Practices in Nollywood

The evolution of media management practices in Nollywood reflects a gradual but significant shift from informal, project-based modes of production toward more structured and institutionalized organizational frameworks. Early Nollywood production was characterized by entrepreneurial improvisation, compressed production schedules, and minimal fixed infrastructure - strategies that enabled rapid growth under conditions of capital scarcity but limited opportunities for scalability and long-term planning (Haynes, 2016). By the mid-2020s, however, the industry exhibits increasing managerial rationalization, driven by expanded exhibition infrastructure, professional training initiatives, and integration into global distribution platforms (Jedlowski, 2022).

This transition aligns Nollywood with broader global trends in media management, where sustainability, professionalization, and strategic coordination have become central to competitiveness in platform-dominated audiovisual markets (Hesmondhalgh, 2019). Rather than signaling a departure from Nollywood's distinctive production culture, these developments indicate an adaptive response to shifting economic and technological conditions.

Institutionalization and Infrastructure Development

One of the most consequential developments in Nollywood's media management landscape is the expansion of physical and organizational infrastructure. The growth of multiplex cinemas, studio facilities, and production hubs - particularly in Lagos and other urban centers - has strengthened exhibition capacity and enabled higher production





values (UNESCO, 2022). Infrastructure development facilitates more predictable revenue streams, enhances audience data collection, and supports compliance with international production standards.

From a media economics perspective, these investments represent a move toward vertical coordination, reducing transaction costs between production, distribution, and exhibition (Picard, 2011). While Nollywood does not replicate Hollywood's vertically integrated studio system, emerging conglomerate structures increasingly enable coordination across the value chain, improving efficiency and risk management. Such institutionalization is essential for capturing greater value from intellectual property and for negotiating effectively with global distributors and platforms.

Workforce Development and Professionalization

Human capital development has become a central pillar of Nollywood's evolving management practices. Historically dependent on informal labor networks and on-the-job learning, the industry now places greater emphasis on structured training, skills transfer, and professional accreditation (Haynes, 2016). Capacity-building initiatives supported by broadcasters, cultural institutions, and international partnerships have contributed to improved technical proficiency in cinematography, editing, sound design, and production management.

From a comparative perspective, this focus mirrors long-standing practices in Hollywood and Bollywood, where guild systems and professional training pipelines stabilize labor markets and support consistent production quality. In Nollywood, workforce professionalization enhances managerial predictability and enables longer-term project planning, addressing one of the industry's historical bottlenecks: uncertainty surrounding labor availability and skill consistency (Jedlowski, 2022).

Technological Integration and Sustainable Production Practices

Technological adoption has become increasingly central to Nollywood's media management strategies. Digital production tools, post-production software, and data-driven distribution analytics have streamlined workflows and reduced costs, allowing producers to achieve higher production values within constrained budgets (Lobato, 2019). While advanced virtual production technologies remain unevenly accessible, incremental technological integration reflects a pragmatic approach to innovation shaped by local resource conditions.

Sustainability has also gained prominence in managerial discourse, particularly in relation to cost efficiency, local sourcing, and environmentally responsible production practices. Institutional actors and training initiatives increasingly link sustainable production to professional standards, reflecting global policy discourse that frames





cultural production as both an economic and social good (UNESCO, 2022). In this respect, Nollywood's management practices align with global shifts toward environmentally and socially responsible media production.

Marketing, Audience Engagement, and Distribution Strategies

Marketing and audience engagement constitute critical components of contemporary Nollywood media management. Social media platforms function as low-cost, high-impact promotional tools that enable direct engagement with audiences, extend the lifecycle of film releases, and generate data-driven insights into viewer preferences. Such practices are consistent with global trends in media marketing, where audience analytics and participatory engagement increasingly shape content development and promotional strategies (Cunningham & Craig, 2019).

Distribution strategies in Nollywood now operate across a hybrid ecology that combines theatrical exhibition, broadcast licensing, and global streaming platforms. Platform partnerships have expanded international reach and diversified revenue streams, while also introducing new managerial challenges related to rights negotiation, exclusivity agreements, and algorithmic visibility (Lobato, 2019). As in other Global South industries, the benefits of platform access coexist with asymmetrical power relations that require careful strategic navigation.

In all of these, the evolution of media management practices in Nollywood reflects a broader process of institutional maturation shaped by infrastructural investment, workforce development, technological adoption, and platform integration. Rather than converging fully with Hollywood or Bollywood models, Nollywood continues to articulate a distinctive managerial logic rooted in flexibility, cultural proximity, and adaptive entrepreneurship. Its trajectory underscores the plurality of viable media management strategies within the global film industry and highlights the importance of contextualized approaches to professionalization and sustainability in comparative media economics.

Conclusion

This study contributes to media economics and global film studies by advancing a comparative, qualitative understanding of media management practices across Hollywood, Bollywood, and Nollywood in 2025. The analysis challenges universalist models of media economics that implicitly privilege Hollywood's industrial configuration as normative as it foregrounds managerial logics rather than output metrics alone. The findings underscore that global film industries are sustained through diversity rather than convergence. Hollywood's capital-intensive, franchise-driven model, Bollywood's volume-oriented domestic system, and Nollywood's flexible, culturally





proximate production ecology each represent viable responses to uncertainty and market pressure. Recognizing this plurality is essential for developing equitable theories of global media economics and for designing policies that support sustainable cultural production beyond the Global North.

The findings of this study carry significant implications for policy and industry development across Global South film industries, particularly in the case of Nollywood. They underscore the urgent need to strengthen institutional and regulatory infrastructures as a foundation for sustainable growth. Effective copyright enforcement, transparent licensing regimes, and the systematic production of reliable industry data are essential for improving value capture, reducing uncertainty, and attracting long-term investment. Governments should therefore approach audiovisual regulation not as a peripheral cultural concern but as an integral component of national economic policy and creative industry development.

Access to formal financing remains a persistent structural constraint for many producers in the Global South. Policy interventions should encourage the development of blended financing models that combine public funding, private capital, and carefully structured partnerships with global platforms, while avoiding excessive dependence on transnational intermediaries. Development banks, cultural funds, and public-private partnerships will play a major role in de-risking film production, supporting innovation, and enabling industrial scaling without compromising creative autonomy or local control.

The study also highlights platform governance as a critical site of power asymmetry within the global film economy. Policymakers and industry organizations in the Global South should advocate for greater transparency in platform commissioning processes, improved access to audience and performance data, and more equitable revenue-sharing arrangements. Regional cooperation, collective bargaining mechanisms, and cross-border alliances may enhance negotiating capacity and reduce informational asymmetries in engagements with dominant global platforms.

Sustained investment in human capital and professionalization is equally essential for long-term competitiveness. Strengthening training institutions, supporting guild systems, and establishing professional standards will improve production quality, enhance managerial predictability, and increase international credibility. Such investments enable Global South film industries to participate more equitably in global value chains while retaining culturally specific modes of production and storytelling.

Finally, the study emphasizes the importance of comparative research in informing effective cultural policy. Policymakers should avoid one-size-fits-all





development models and instead adopt context-sensitive strategies that reflect local production cultures, audience relationships, and economic conditions. Comparative insights into diverse industrial models should support policies that promote diversity, resilience, and cultural sovereignty within an increasingly platform-dominated global media environment.

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CHILDREN'S TELEVISION AND NOLLYWOOD: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SELECTED FILMS

Perfecta C. Eze-puls

Department of Theatre and Arts
University Of Port Harcourt

Abstract

This qualitative study examines selected Nollywood films- *Trouble Plus Trouble* (2025) and *The Powerful Slave Princess* (2025) in the context of children's television in Nigeria. Using the analytical frameworks of Thought, Characterisation, Costume, and Makeup, the study explores the suitability, cultural relevance, of the film on children aged 9 to 13. Guided by Cognitive Film Theory and Magic Bullet Theory, the analysis highlights how films influence the cognitive, moral, and social development of children. Findings indicate that while both films address social issues such as poverty, moral decay, and abuse of power, their effectiveness in promoting positive values varies. Certain character portrayals and narrative choices may inadvertently encourage undesirable behaviours, while costume and makeup influence relatability and cultural authenticity. The study concludes that Nollywood can serve as a meaningful educational and moral resource for children, provided filmmakers balance entertainment with social responsibility.

Keywords: Nollywood, Children's Television, Thought, Costume, Makeup, Character.

Introduction

Children's television, often referred to more broadly as Children's Mass Media, encompasses a wide array of content specifically developed for young audiences. This content, whether in print, audiovisual, or digital format is usually conceptualised, produced, and distributed by adults who aim to cater to the interests, developmental needs, and learning styles of children. Traditionally delivered through television, children's media has expanded significantly in the digital age to include streaming platforms such as Netflix, YouTube, and Facebook, Tiktok where content is readily accessible and easily shared. The Primary objective behind creating content for children goes beyond mere entertainment. It serves as an alternative or complementary approach to formal education, providing a more relaxed, engaging, and memorable learning experience. Through children's media, educational messages, cultural values, and life skills can be effectively communicated using engaging formats such as cartoons, animations, storytelling, drama, songs, dances, visual arts, handcraft tutorials, and short films. These media pieces are crafted in ways that appeal to children's imaginations and emotions, helping to instill values and reinforce learning in informal settings. Notable organisations such as Disney, Hanson Robotics, and several Hollywood production studios have long been at the forefront of children's content. In Africa, companies like





Ubongo (creators of *Akili and Me*), and Malenga Mulendema, creator of *Supa Team 4* on Netflix, are making significant strides in African-centred children's media. Others, such as PACE Expressions Arts Foundation, Masaka Kids Africana, and The Big Five, are dedicated YouTube-based content creators providing enriching, culturally relevant media for children, though not all focus on animations. Within Nigeria, Nollywood one of the largest film industries globally has also ventured into the production of films for children and young audiences. These films often attempt to reflect the expected behaviour, values, and societal expectations of the Nigerian child, with cultural and social class elements subtly woven into the narratives. This paper therefore, aims to critically examine whether the content produced by Nollywood for children between the ages of 9 and 13 is suitable, impactful, and appropriate. The selected films for this study include *The Powerful Slave Princess* director by Onowu Daniel (AMND), and *Trouble Plus Trouble*, directed by Nellyann Chisom James. They will be analysed in light of the relevance of their Thought, Characterization, Costume and Makeup to the children's television in Nigeria.

An Overview of Cognitive Film Theory

The word cognitive is a mostly used in educational psychology discipline. When it is used in that discipline, it mostly used to refer to children and how they develop intellectually and mentally. To this end, Piaget (1935) (qtd.in Igboabuchi 1989) develops stages of cognitive development theory to show how children develop mentally from birth up until adulthood (p.80). Similarly, Neisser (1967) (qtd.in Posner & Bourke, 1992) developed a theory on cognitive psychology that explains cognition to mean "...all processes by which sensory input is transformed, reduced, elaborated, stored, recovered, and used" (p. 621). Also, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theory, (1978) (qtd. In Shabani, Khatib & Ebadi (2010) holds the environment in which a child grows up as being responsible for the cognitive development of a child.

Against this backdrop, even as the word cognitive is used in film, it is closely related to what it means in educational psychology discipline. To this end, Allen (2002), states thus: "Cognitive film theory emerged as a distinctive research paradigm in film studies in the mid-1980s. The relationship between film and human psychology has always been a source of fascination for film theorists, and many writings in film theory are informed by the belief that film has a special relationship to human psychology" (p. 175). According to Pervez (2015), "Cognition is a collective term for the psychological processes involved in the acquisition organization, and use of knowledge. In contemporary terminology, cognition includes such processes and phenomena as perception, memory, attention, problem solving, language, thinking, and imagery" (p. 81). According to Plantinga (2002),





Joseph and Barbara Anderson are two of the earliest and most consistent proponents of cognitive film theory in its current manifestation. Joseph Anderson heads the Center for the Cognitive Study of the Moving Image, and oversees the regular symposia of the centre, while Barbara Anderson contributes in many ways, not least by offering excellent symposia papers on various topics in cognitive theory (p.18).

Therefore, Cognitive Film Theory explains and examines what films do to the mental and psychological processes of their viewers. It is concerned with how audiences perceive, interpret, and emotionally respond to what they see on screen. To this end (2002), “for the cognitivist, films are not like mental processes, they actually engage mental processes. The cognitive theorist seeks to understand how films engage our minds 'with the best available theory’” (p. 174). This assertion suggests that films do not merely resemble thought processes but actively stimulate and interact with them, shaping how viewers think, feel, and make meaning.

In other words, films possess the ability to influence the human mind in powerful ways. When individuals watch films, they often begin to imagine, interpret, and sometimes even believe that the events portrayed could occur in real life. As exposure to films increases, viewers may find themselves mentally immersed in cinematic worlds, allowing their imagination to blur the boundaries between fiction and reality. Through this immersion, audiences are able to fantasize, daydream, and emotionally invest in narratives as though they were real experiences.

This phenomenon explains why viewers frequently display strong emotional reactions while watching films. For example, some people cry when they witness tragic or painful events happening to characters, especially when those characters appear undeserving of such suffering. These emotional responses highlight the extent to which films engage viewers’ cognitive and emotional systems. Cognitive Film Theory, therefore, seeks to examine not only how films are understood but also the effects they produce, particularly the reactions and aftermath experienced by audiences after viewing a film.

To this end, Plantinga (2002) states that “Cognitive theory today is primarily interested in how spectators make sense of and respond to films, together with the textual structures and techniques that give rise to spectatorial activity and response” (p. 23). This perspective emphasizes the interaction between the formal elements of a film such as narrative structure, visuals, and sound-and the viewer’s mental activity. Similarly, “Cognitive film theory approaches the understanding of film from a receptor-





centered perspective” (p. 89), placing the audience at the center of analysis and focusing on how meaning is constructed during the viewing process.

In a nutshell, Plantinga (2002) notes that “Cognitive theory today is primarily interested in how spectators make sense of and respond to films, together with the textual structures and techniques that give rise to spectatorial activity and response” (p. 23). This reinforces the idea that Cognitive Film Theory is deeply concerned with audience engagement, interpretation, and emotional response, making it a crucial framework for understanding how films operate on the human mind.

An Overview of Magic Bullet Theory

Magic Bullet Theory is part of a broader collection of media theories commonly referred to as media effects theories. These theories are primarily concerned with examining the relationship between media messages and their audiences, particularly how media content influences, shapes, or alters the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours of those who consume it. The central assumption of media effects theory is that media does not merely entertain or inform but can exert measurable influence on individuals and society at large.

According to Nwabueze & Okonkwo (2018), Magic Bullet Theory, which originated in the 1930s, “...was propounded by Harold Lasswell after World War I” (p. 2). The historical context of the theory is significant, as it emerged during a period marked by intense propaganda, especially during and after the war, when mass media was widely believed to have powerful persuasive capabilities over large, undifferentiated audiences. This context contributed to the assumption that media messages could be transmitted directly and effectively to the public without resistance.

Owens (2008) further explains the core idea of the theory by stating that “The Magic Bullet Theory proposes that as an audience, we are all susceptible to the media who have the ability to direct the passive masses toward a chosen point of view” (p. 363). This perspective suggests that audiences are largely passive and that media messages are powerful enough to influence people uniformly, regardless of individual differences such as education, background, or personal experiences.

The Magic Bullet Theory is also referred to as the Hypodermic Needle Theory because it metaphorically compares media messages to a needle that injects ideas directly into the audience, producing an immediate and predictable response. This metaphor implies that once the message penetrates the audience, it automatically generates the intended effect. To this end, Owen (2008) notes that “This has also been known as the Hypodermic Needle Theory, another invasive metaphor, suggestive as it is of entering the body by force. In this metaphor the media are assumed to be injecting the





public with a specific message leading to the desired uniformed thinking” (p. 363) and possible action. This reinforces the idea that media has overwhelming power to shape public opinion and behaviour in a direct and forceful manner.

Similarly, Nwabueze & Okonkwo (2018) argue that “The bullet theory, magic bullet theory or hypodermic needle theory sees the mass media as having a direct, immediate and powerful effect on its audiences... It basically says that an intended message is directly received and wholly accepted by the receiver” (p. 1). This description emphasizes the assumption of immediate acceptance of media messages without critical evaluation by the audience.

In support of this view, Kharabadze, Bokvadze, Corbi and Lewes (2024) also observe that “The direct effects model, sometimes referred to as the hypodermic needle hypothesis or the magic bullet theory, asserts that communication technologies have strong, instantaneous, and direct impacts on audiences” (p. 250). Taken together, these explanations suggest that media content can serve as an eye-opener, triggering awareness, shaping opinions, sparking debates, and even motivating subsequent actions among audiences.

A practical illustration often cited in discussions of media influence is the American television series *Xfiles*. The show is believed to have encouraged many women to pursue careers in science due to the portrayal of Scully, a competent and intelligent female scientist. This phenomenon later became known as The Scully Effect, demonstrating how media representations can inspire real-world attitudes and career choices, aligning with the assumptions of the Magic Bullet Theory about the power of media messages.

The two theories adopted for this study-Film Cognitive Theory and Magic Bullet Theory are highly relevant to because they both emphasize the influence of film on the human mind, particularly on children. These theories help explain how film content can shape children’s thinking, perception, and understanding of the world around them. Film Cognitive Theory is useful in understanding how children process, interpret, and learn from what they watch on television and in films. It explains that film does not merely entertain children but also stimulates their cognitive development by engaging their attention, memory, imagination, and reasoning abilities. Through narratives, visuals, characters, and moral lessons presented in films, children are exposed to ideas that can enhance their intellectual growth and contribute to the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Similarly, Magic Bullet Theory is relevant because it highlights the powerful effects media content can have on audiences, especially vulnerable groups such as





children. The theory assumes that media messages are received directly and can have immediate effects on viewers. In the context of children's television and Nollywood films, this suggests that children are likely to absorb and internalize the messages, behaviours, values, and attitudes portrayed on screen. As a result, film content can significantly influence children's mental development, social behaviour, and worldview.

Together, these two theories demonstrate that film has the capacity to influence and develop the mental abilities of children due to the strong effects it has on their cognitive and psychological processes. By applying Film Cognitive Theory and Magic Bullet Theory, this study is able to examine how selected Nollywood films and children's television content contribute to children's learning, mental development, and overall growth.

An Overview of Children's Television in Nigeria

Children's television, or children's media, refers to mass media programmes that are produced by adults specifically for children and are broadcast through various platforms such as radio, television, and more recently, social media. These programmes are primarily created for children's consumption, education, and entertainment, and they are designed to suit the cognitive, emotional, and social development stages of young audiences. In this sense, children's media serves as a vital communication tool through which values, norms, and knowledge are transmitted to children in engaging and age-appropriate ways.

To this end, Bignell (2017) notes that "Children's television is made by adults, not by children, and the term is used to designate programmes aimed by adults at an audience of children" (p. 87). This definition emphasizes the fact that children's television is a carefully constructed form of media, shaped by adult producers, writers, and educators who determine the content, themes, and messages presented to children. As a result, such programmes often reflect adult perspectives on what children need to learn, experience, and enjoy.

Children's television is akin to what is obtainable in theatre, which is known as children's theatre. Both forms share similar objectives in terms of audience targeting, narrative simplicity, and the use of imaginative elements such as music, storytelling, colourful characters, and moral lessons to sustain children's interest. Just as children's theatre uses live performance to educate and entertain young audiences, children's television employs audiovisual techniques to achieve similar outcomes within the media space.

Documented facts show that children's television was born out of the need to cater for the edutainment needs of children. This implies that beyond mere





entertainment, children's television integrates educational content with engaging formats, thereby promoting learning through fun and interactive storytelling. In the Nigerian context, this has become increasingly important, as children's television serves as a platform for cultural transmission, language development, and socialization, while also responding to global trends in media consumption among children.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2009) (qtd. in Omotosho, Oyero & Salawu, 2015), children's television as it exists today has its roots in early global efforts to highlight and address issues affecting children. These efforts began with "The first attempt to bring issues affecting children to the fore..." which dates "...back to the 1924 Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child" (p. 135). This historic declaration marked a significant turning point in the recognition of children as a distinct group with specific rights that require protection, care, and development. This summit set the ball rolling for the rights of children to be clearly identified, discussed, and protected at the international level. It also laid the foundation for subsequent global frameworks and policies aimed at safeguarding children's welfare across different sectors, including education, health, and media. Over time, these efforts extended into the domain of mass communication, as stakeholders began to recognize the powerful influence of media on children's socialization, learning processes, and worldview.

This development eventually dovetailed into

...International Children's Television Charter which affirms the rights of children that are identified in the Convention concerning television programming for and about children. The Charter was presented by advocates for children's television to the First World Summit on Children and Television, held in Melbourne, Australia, in March 1995" (Omotosho, Oyero & Salawu, 2015, p. 135).

The Charter therefore represents a formal global commitment to ensuring that television content created for children aligns with their rights, needs, and developmental stages. The Charter pointed out the need to protect children from harmful media content, such as violence, inappropriate language, and misleading representations, and thus emphasized the importance of producing appropriate media content that would cater for their edutainment needs. In this regard, children's television is not only expected to entertain but also to educate, inform, and promote positive social values. As an influence of the International Children's Television Charter, it became obvious that children's television should be guided by principles that prioritize children's best interests, encourage creativity and cultural relevance, and ensure that media content contributes meaningfully to children's cognitive, emotional, and moral development. To this end, Omotosho, Oyero & Salawu (2015) note thus:





Conscious of the fact that the Charter needs to be complemented by a specific Charter that takes Africa's interests and peculiarities into account, the Commonwealth Broadcasters, under the auspices of the Commonwealth Broadcasters Association (CBA) converged in Cape Town, South Africa on October 13, 2000 to ratify the African Charter on Children's Broadcasting (ACCB), earlier affirmed and accepted at the African Summit on children's Broadcasting which was held in Accra, Ghana in 1997 (p.136).

The ACCB came up with certain agreement concerning media content for children which was to be adopted by all African Nations. Summary of the discussion according to Omotosho, Oyero & Salawu (2015) is that:

The Africa Charter on Children's Broadcasting demands that children's programmes should be of high quality, made specifically for them, for development of their physical, mental and social potentials to the fullest and that they should be involved in the production process. They should also be protected from commercial exploitation, guaranteed right to freedom of expression, thought, conscience and religion and must be ensured equitable access to programmes (p.136).

Children's television in Nigeria can be traced back to the 1980s and early 1990s, a period when the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), a government-owned television network, was the dominant broadcast station in the country. During this period, NTA played a pioneering role in the development of local content for children audience through the production and broadcast of *Tales by Moonlight* (TBM). The programme quickly became one of the most popular and widely recognized children's television shows in Nigeria. In those early years, *Tales by Moonlight* (TBM) stood out as the major locally produced television programme specifically designed for children and was broadcast nationally across the NTA network. As a result, it served as a primary source of entertainment and informal education for Nigerian children, while also promoting indigenous storytelling traditions, cultural values, and moral lessons.

According to Omotosho, Oyero & Salawu (2015) "One could be proud of television programmes on Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) in the 1980s and early 1990s... and it was normal for every child that had access to television to stay glued to NTA on week days from 4pm till the next three hours. On weekends, there were exciting programmes, especially the Sunday evening when *Tales by Moonlight* is aired (p. 137-138). According to Oselola-Orakwue, (2016) (qtd. In Olisakwe, 2016) "The programme, named 'Tales by Moonlight' first aired on NTA's nationwide channel in October 1983 with the aim of using social value messages to educate and unite Nigeria's children





irrespective of their tribe and creed” (p. 19). This period can therefore be regarded as the beginning of children’s television in Nigeria. This, however, does not imply that there were no television programmes for children before the introduction of *Tales by Moonlight* (TBM). Rather, although some children’s programmes existed prior to TBM, they were largely foreign productions and not locally generated content. Consequently, TBM marked a significant shift towards indigenous children’s television programming in Nigeria, as it provided culturally relevant content that reflected Nigerian values, languages, and storytelling traditions.

For instance, Olisakwe (2016) notes that “The love shown by Nigerian children for Sesame Street served as a catalyst for the birth of TBM” (p. 20). Giving a detailed historical account on the birth of TBM, Maduka (2016), (qtd. In Olisakwe, 2016) note that “Dr Victoria Ezeokoli, the then Director of programs at the NTA had interactions with producers of Sesame Street while attending a function abroad in 1982, and they offered to design and produce a Nigerian version of Sesame Street to cater for Nigerias’ uniquely large market” (p. 20). The proposal for this project was submitted but was beyond what NTA could afford. Maduka (2016), (qtd. In Olisakwe, 2016) note that “While NTA’s Management were tentatively considering alternate funding sources for the proposed childrens’ program, the then Director General of NTA reasoned with his team and asked “why can’t we have a Nigerian television program that could hold the attention of Nigerian children as well as impart the norm and values of our cultural heritage” (p. 20). This made “Dr Victoria Ezeokolie...” to commission “...a nation-wide research to record folktales from ethnics groups in Nigeria and had these tales recorded on tape in their indigenous language. These tales were later transcribed in English to serve as a pool of material for the later launch of Tales by Moonlight” (p. 20). *Tales by Moonlight* was a dramatized presentation of Nigerian cultural stories narrated to children by the anchor of the programme. The stories were largely fictional but were embedded with strong moral lessons aimed at promoting the entertainment, education, and moral development of children. Through storytelling, the programme sought to shape the values, attitudes, and behaviour of the Nigerian child in line with acceptable societal norms.

TBM featured a variety of traditional elements such as folktales, proverbs, riddles, songs, and games, which were characteristic of cultural activities commonly enjoyed by children in rural communities during full moon nights. By recreating these indigenous practices on television, the programme not only preserved Nigerian oral traditions but also provided children with a sense of cultural identity and belonging in a modern media environment.





Olisakwe, (2016) the broadcast of TBM offered children the opportunity to learn “...acceptable codes of conduct in the society, about their roots, cultural values, folklores, proverbs, issues relating to discipline, respect for elders, love for one another etc (p. 20). During this period, television broadcasting in Nigeria was dominated solely by government-owned television stations. However, in 1993, African Independent Television (AIT) was commissioned, marking a major turning point in the Nigerian broadcast industry. The emergence of AIT introduced a new era of private television broadcasting and led to the production and transmission of a wider range of television programmes, including soap operas and family-oriented content that could be enjoyed by both adults and children. Following the establishment of AIT, several other private television networks also emerged, thereby increasing competition and diversity in television programming across the country. This expansion significantly transformed the media landscape and created more opportunities for locally produced content.

Today, with the advent of social media and the growth of digital streaming platforms such as YouTube, children’s television has expanded in leaps and bounds. Different individuals, media organizations, and content creators now produce a wide variety of programmes for children, including content of Nigerian, African, and international origin. As a result, children’s media consumption has shifted beyond traditional television to include multiple digital platforms, offering children greater access to diverse and interactive forms of entertainment and education.

An Overview of NollywoodS

Nollywood is the name given to the film-making industry in Nigeria and it comprises films produced in different genres and languages. These include epic or traditional films, in which the dialogue may be in indigenous Nigerian languages such as Igbo, Hausa, or Yoruba. In some cases, epic films may also be delivered in the English language; however, their storylines, costumes, make-up, settings, and cultural elements clearly reflect traditional or historical Nigerian contexts.

In addition to epic films, Nollywood also produces contemporary films that are shot in indigenous languages such as Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba. There are also modern films produced in Nigerian Pidgin English and standard English, which often reflect present-day social realities and urban lifestyles. Together, these various categories of films collectively constitute the Nigerian film industry known today as Nollywood.

The term *Nollywood* was coined in 2002 by a British journalist, Nick Moran, to describe Nigeria’s rapidly growing film industry. To this end, Adjeketa, Oliogu & Orisaremi (2022) note that “In 2002, Film production in Nigeria entered a new era when it received its new name Nollywood” (p. 223). They further quote Uchenna (2009) that





“Nick Moran, a British Journalist and actor” (p.223) was the person who assigned that name to the Film making Body of Nigeria. This nomenclature aligns with the naming patterns of Hollywood and Bollywood, which are the film industries of the United States of America and India respectively, and which were given these names in 1887 and the 1970s. However, this does not suggest that film-making in Nigeria began in 2002 when the term *Nollywood* was coined. On the contrary, film production in Nigeria predates this period. In fact, Shaka (2021) traces the historical origins of Nollywood back to the year 1903, during the colonial era, when “film exhibition was first hosted in Nigeria by Glover Memorial Hall...” (p. 1). The effect of this film exhibition in Nigeria was encouraging that it was “...applied in containing the outbreak of a plague in Lagos in 1929” (Shaka 2021, p.1) Thus, film production in Nigeria continued even into the post-colonial era. However, a major turning point in the Nigerian film industry occurred with the production of *Living in Bondage* written by Kenneth Nnebue and directed by Chris Obi Rapu in the year 1992. This film, which was produced in the Igbo language, marked a significant breakthrough and is widely regarded as a foundational text of the modern Nollywood video film era. To this end, Ayakoroma (2024) notes that “...the production of *Living in Bondage*... marked a new beginning for the eventual production of movies. *Living in Bondage*...was the first commercially successful video film, which had very wide viewership, despite the fact that it was an Igbo language film. Unarguably, it marked the advent of the *contemporary* Nigerian film industry, popularly called, Nollywood” (p. 9). Since then, Nollywood has grown to become one of the most recognized film industries in the world. It is known for its distinctive storytelling styles, which often reflect Nigerian and African cultural realities. These narratives frequently engage with cultural practices such as traditional beliefs, spirituality, and religion, as well as social institutions like family relationships and marriage. Nollywood films also address contemporary social issues including feminism and gender equality, as seen in *Lionheart*; politics; cybercrime (popularly referred to as “yahoo-yahoo” or “yahoo plus”), as portrayed in *To Kill a Monkey*; and gangsterism or urban violence, as depicted in films such as *Shanty Town*.

There may be no clearly documented record of the first Nigerian film in which a child actor featured. However, contemporary film records and popular discourse often cite actors such as Somadina Adinma and Regina Daniels as some of the most prominent performers who began their acting careers as children and successfully sustained them into adulthood. Chinedu Ikedieze and Osita Itheme are also widely known for playing childlike roles, even though they began their acting careers as young adults. Due to their physical attributes, they were frequently cast in the roles of mischievous children and became popularly known as Aki and Pawpaw.





Thought, Characterisation, Costume and Makeup

The films under review, *Trouble Plus Trouble* Directed by Nellyann Chisom James and *The Powerful Slave Princess* Directed by Onowu Daniel will be examined using the yardsticks of Character, Thought, and Costume and Makeup. These are key elements that constitute the performing arts and are essential for both the writing and performance of any script. It is therefore necessary to provide a brief explanation of these terms.

Character: In every literary work, there are persons within the world of the text who carry out the actions of the narrative. Character is the second element of tragedy as outlined by Aristotle in *Poetics*, and it is a fundamental feature of all forms of performance. Wilson (2004) opines that “Although they seem like real people, dramatic characters are created by playwrights” (p. 275). Aligning with Wilson (2004), Eze-Puls (2025) opines that character “...is the playwright’s creation to represent people in society. This creation by a playwright takes up the dramatic actions in the play in order to make it believable.” (p. 298). In the case of a film script, the scriptwriter is responsible for creating the characters who perform the actions within the narrative. What a playwright is to the stage, a scriptwriter is to the screen. Although both roles are similar, the major difference lies in the medium of expression. While a play is written to be performed on stage, a screenplay is written to be performed on screen. Distinguishing between characters and actors, Eze-Puls (2025) opines that “While characters are created by the playwright, actors are the real-life drama and theatre personnel who assume the roles of the characters and bring to life the idea of the playwright...” (p. 298). In the films under review, the characters of interest are Oroma and Angelina in *Trouble Plus Trouble*, and Amara and King Eze Dike in *The Powerful Slave Princess*. These characters are portrayed by Ebube Obio and Lizzy Gold, and by Chimamanda Augustine and Ilo Somtochukwu, respectively.

Thought: This is the third element of tragedy as outlined by Aristotle. The thought of a literary work offers the audience a glimpse into the mind of the creator, revealing the underlying ideas and intentions behind the work. It reflects the central direction or guiding principle of the narrative that is, the thematic path along which a screenplay or any work of art develops.

Brockett and Ball (2004) say that “thought includes the themes, arguments, and overall meaning of an action” (p. 41). Eze-Puls (2025) says that thought “is simply what the playwright wishes to bring to the fore. It can also be the subject matter the playwright wishes to write about” (p. 298). The thoughts of the films *Trouble Plus Trouble* and *The Slave Princess* are somewhat similar. In the first film, the thought is to criticize desperation for improved economic status and to expose the consequences of broken family values and moral decadence within Nigerian families. Similarly, the





thought of the second film is to highlight the dangers and consequences of the desperate quest for power and control. Both films address these societal ills with the aim of discouraging excessive desperation in the pursuit of economic and social advancement. Thus, the thought of a literary work is often embedded in the presentation of solutions to social problems.

Costume and Makeup: Costume and makeup are two closely related aspects of performance that work hand in hand. While costume refers to the clothing worn by performing artists such as actors, dancers, and musicians, makeup involves the bodily and facial adornment of actors. Costumes and makeup do not necessarily have to be “extraordinary” to be effective; rather, their primary function is to be appropriate and suitable enough to make the character of the performer believable, realistic, and relatable to the audience.

Ken-Aminikpo (2007) define costume as “...a form of non-verbal communication to indicate occupation, rank gender... dresses are languages of signs, symbols and iconography that non-verbally communicate meaning...” (p. 37). Similarly, Bature-Uzor (2022) opines that “costumes are clothes and other materials that an actor/actress wears that serve a particular purpose in the context of the narrative...The purpose of costume in narrative are for narrative characterization and narrativity” (p. 205). Wilson (2004) says that:

...because they are actually worn by the performers, costumes are the most personal aspect of the visual elements in a theatre...costumes have a value of their own, adding color, shape, texture and symbolism to the overall effect. Other elements or accessories, such as makeup, hairstyles, masks, and personal items like bracelets and the necklaces, are an important component of costumes (p. 361).

Synopsis of film *Trouble Plus Trouble* Directed by Nellyann Chisom James

Trouble Plus Trouble (2025) is a contemporary Nollywood film that portrays the challenges faced by families as they struggle to navigate life and economic hardship. The film tells the story of Angelina, played by Lizzy Gold, who abandons her husband and daughter, Oroma (played by Ebube Obio), in order to marry a wealthy man, Chief Otunba. In an ironic twist, Angelina later employs her biological husband and daughter as a gateman and a cook respectively in the household of her new husband, thereby concealing their true identities.

Eventually, Chief Otunba discovers the truth and expels Angelina, along with her real husband and daughter, from his residence. The family is forced to return to the





village where they originally came from and continue living in poverty. Prior to Angelina's marriage to Chief Otunba, she had lived in the village with her husband and daughter, where they frequently experienced hunger and deprivation to the extent that they could not afford to keep Oroma in school.

Oroma is portrayed as a poorly socialized child, as she exhibits rude and disrespectful behaviour towards her school teacher and even towards her parents. She speaks to them without fear of discipline or correction, a behaviour that contrasts sharply with the values upheld in a typical Nigerian family, where children are expected to show respect and obedience to elders. It is this characterization of Oroma that forms one of the major focuses of this paper. The costume for this film was by Chinedu Ike Obetta and the makeup was by Blessing John.

Synopsis of *The Powerful Slave Princess* Directed by Onowu Daniel

The Powerful Slave Princess is an epic Nollywood film that was uploaded to YouTube in December 2025. The film tells the story of a young girl named Amara, played by Chimamanda Augustine, who is born with special mystical powers and is, by birth, a rightful princess. However, before her birth, her father is murdered by his brother, the reigning king, Igwe Dike, played by Ilo Somtochukwu, who kills him in order to seize the throne. Following this act of betrayal, Amara's mother is banished from the village, forcing her into exile even before Amara is born. Amara and her mother later return to the village when Amara is about nine years old. Her mother disguises herself as a woman suffering from a terrible communicable disease in order to avoid recognition. Their return is motivated by Amara's destiny to confront and dethrone King Igwe Dike, who is portrayed as a cruel ruler that oppresses his subjects and turns them into virtual slaves.

Amara boldly challenges the king and his accomplice, Ezemuo, who together had plotted the murder of her father and bound his spirit. Through her extraordinary powers, Amara heals the villagers of their various illnesses, which earns her their trust and loyalty. This endears her to the people and strengthens her influence within the community. Despite several attempts by King Igwe Dike to eliminate her, he fails because of Amara's supernatural abilities. In the end, Amara confronts, disgraces, dethrones, and eventually kills him, thereby restoring justice and freeing the villagers from tyranny. The costume and make-up for the film were designed by Onyekachi Ibezim.

A Critical Analysis of Both Films Viz-a-Viz Children's Television

The characters played by both children, Oroma and Amara, are also relatable, although their portrayals involve some degree of hyperbole, which is clearly employed for artistic





and dramatic purposes. For instance, the idea of a child being born with special mystical powers, as seen in the character of Amara, is not a common reality among Nigerian families. However, it is possible for a child to be bold, confident, and fearless, and to challenge adults who may be overly assertive, particularly within immediate family settings. While a child may not realistically confront a community leader such as a king during childhood, such a personality trait may develop over time and later manifest in adulthood, possibly leading the individual to assume leadership roles. This type of courage and assertiveness, however, is a personality trait rather than a result of possessing mystical powers.

On the other hand, the character of Oroma is not a desirable one that most Nigerian adults would wish their children to emulate. Ideally, Oroma's parents should have disciplined her and corrected her behaviour. Instead, her mother, Angelina, encourages her to be rude to her school teacher. When the teacher attempts to discipline Oroma for her misconduct, she runs home to report to her mother, who in turn confronts the teacher at the school. Both Angelina and Oroma face no immediate consequences for their actions, and this absence of punishment fails to serve as a deterrent for viewers of the film.

Although Angelina is eventually disgraced and sent out of Chief Otunba's house, Oroma never suffers any direct consequences for her persistent rudeness towards adults. This represents a weakness in the narrative of the film, as children who watch the film may develop the impression that they can get away with disrespectful behaviour. They may begin to view rudeness towards adults as normal or acceptable. Similarly, parents who watch the film may not see the need to discipline their children for such behaviour, interpreting it as typical or harmless.

Film, beyond its entertainment function, is also expected to promote positive and socially acceptable behaviour. From this perspective, it can be argued that this film does not fully achieve the purpose of inculcating moral values in children and in Nigerian society at large.

The Thought of both films is relatable to realities that are prevalent in Nigerian society. Issues such as poverty and economic hardship are common among many Nigerian families, and mothers are often portrayed as willing to go to extreme lengths, using whatever means available to them, in order to break free from deprivation and improve the living conditions of their families. This is usually driven by a strong survival instinct and the desire to secure a better future for their children. Similarly, Nigerian leaders, particularly political leaders, are often perceived as using their positions and political power arbitrarily, resulting in widespread suffering among



citizens who continuously lament their situation and seek a saviour for redemption and social change.

The Costume and Make-up used in the film *Trouble Plus Trouble* are relatable and typical of Nigerian society, as they reflect the social status and living conditions of the characters portrayed in the film. The costumes align with contemporary Nigerian dressing patterns and therefore enhance the realism and credibility of the narrative. The costumes in the film include school uniforms, security and chef uniforms, as well as regular Nigerian outfits made from Ankara (African) fabric. These costumes and the accompanying makeup can therefore be described as contemporary Nigerian styles, combining both Western and indigenous Nigerian elements.

However, in *The Slave Princess*, the costumes used are not entirely typical of what is found in most Igbo rural communities in present-day Nigeria, largely due to the effects of westernization and modern influences on traditional dressing. Unless the intention of the film was to portray an idealized version of what rural costume should be in the twenty-first century, or to represent clothing styles from a historical period in the past, the film does not successfully reflect the actual dressing patterns of contemporary Igbo rural dwellers. As such, the costumes appear more symbolic or exaggerated than realistic. The costumes and makeup used in this film are largely epic in nature, consisting of wrappers, beads, anklets, and other traditional accessories.

In a nutshell, it is important for Nollywood to produce films that are appropriate for Nigerian children and that promote useful cultural practices, moral values, and socially acceptable behaviour. Film-makers should not be driven solely by commercial interests but should also recognize the social responsibility of cinema as a tool for education and positive social change. Rather than creating or reinforcing social problems, Nollywood films should contribute meaningfully to addressing them and to shaping the moral development of Nigerian children and society at large.



A screenshot of Amara and King Igwe Dike in *The Slave Princess*



A screenshot of Amara in *The Slave Princess*



A screenshot of Angelina, Oroma and her father in *Trouble Plus Trouble*



A screenshot of Oroma in school in *Trouble Plus Trouble*

Conclusion

This study has examined selected Nollywood films-*Trouble Plus Trouble* and *The Powerful Slave Princess* within the context of children's television in Nigeria, using the analytical frameworks of Thought, Characterisation, Costume, and Makeup. Drawing from Cognitive Film Theory and Magic Bullet Theory, the paper establishes that films possess significant power to influence children's cognitive, emotional, and social



development. The analysis reveals that while both films address relevant social issues such as poverty, desperation, abuse of power, and moral decadence, their effectiveness in promoting positive values for children varies. Although the films present relatable themes and culturally grounded narratives, certain character portrayals, particularly that of Oroma, risk normalizing negative behaviours due to the absence of corrective consequences. Furthermore, while the costumes in *Trouble Plus Trouble* enhance realism and cultural relatability, those in *The Powerful Slave Princess* appear more symbolic than reflective of contemporary rural realities. Ultimately, the study reveals the need for Nollywood filmmakers to consciously prioritize children's moral and cognitive development by producing content that not only entertains but also upholds ethical standards, cultural authenticity, and socially responsible messages capable of positively shaping young audiences.

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SHIFTING THE GAZE: A STUDY OF SELECTED NOLLYWOOD FEMALE DIRECTORS.

Jacinta Jane Ujong,
Femi Okiremuette Shaka

&

Nkechi Bature- Uzor

Department Of Film And Multimedia,
Faculty Of Communication And Media Studies,
University Of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Abstract

Over the years and especially in the entertainment and film industry, feminists believe there is a gross misinterpretation of the female gender in various cultural commodities and multiple disciplines viz: film, music, books, fashion, dances and paintings. Nollywood feminist ideologists strongly criticize the perpetuating of gender stereotypical portrayals of men and women identities which they view as subjugation. This work examines the evolving landscape of identity constructions, sexism and power dynamics in the workplace, home front and the struggle for paternity in other spheres of human influence. This study employs feminist film complexities and post- colonial analysis to examine how contemporary Nigerian film directors -particularly female directors are challenging traditional gender representations while navigating cultural authenticity, commercial viability, global audience expectations and reinforcing societal norms from the female lens. The study recommends a reawakening of more women behind the camera and in leadership positions, as well as a more objective examination of female characterization in Nollywood film narratives by rewriting history, changing demeaning cultural patterns and churning out captivating storylines with positive themes and rich contents that depict positive image of women in the new horizon. This study also has implications for film directors, producers, screenwriters, industry stakeholders and policymakers to ensure they promote more inclusive and equitable representations which can contribute to a deeper understanding of gender roles and help change and shape societal attitudes and perceptions of their unique roles and mutual respect for all.

Keywords: Nollywood, gender stereotyping, film analysis, representation, patriarchy.

Introduction

Nollywood has experienced rapid growth since its inception in the 1990s, becoming a significant cultural and economic force in Nigeria and beyond (Haynes, 2016). With an estimated annual production of over 1,000 films, Nollywood has become a major platform for storytelling, cultural representation, and social commentary (Larkin, 2008). Despite this growth, the issue of discrimination in gender roles remains in the front burner. The scholarly history of stereotyping women is a vast, complex and evolving field that spans multiple disciplines as it continue to impact women's experiences in various domains, including the workplace, politics, and education (Risman, 2018; Oswald, 2023). Nigeria's prolific film industry, has faced criticism for its portrayal of





gender roles, often reinforcing traditional stereotypes (Okome, 2007). God's presence observed that "Johnston has succinctly traced the source of women stereotyped image in films as having originated from Hollywood cinema when filmmakers made man's role dynamic and woman's roles as static" (2013.p.53). God's presence then opined that since the Nigerian film industry is still developing and learns narrative modes from Hollywood, Nollywood filmmakers will certainly tow the same path in the decimal of women stereotyping. There are several ways in which the image and identity of woman is subjugated in films. As Penley observes "film after film, the recurring image of woman as nothing but the projected fears and desires of men and cosmic victim" (1979, p.208). Women are frequently depicted in stereotype roles as submissive, emotional, and nurturing, while men are shown as strong, dominant, and authoritative (Adesanmi,2015). However, recent studies indicate a shift towards more progressive representations, with female characters increasingly portrayed as resilient, independent, and empowered.

In the 1970s, researchers like Broverman et al. (1970) and Broverman et al. (1972) explored sex-role stereotypes and their impact on clinical judgments of mental health. - The Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al., 2002, p.78-79) posits that stereotypes are based on perceived warmth and competence, with women often being stereotyped as warm but less competent than men. These studies found that women were often stereotyped as more emotional and less competent than men. Women are often objectified and portrayed as sex objects, weak, and dependent on men, reinforcing negative stereotypes and contributing to a culture of objectification (Adesokan,2014, p.139-140). In the film industry female characters are frequently depicted in traditional roles, such as caregivers, secretaries, and homemakers, limiting their representation and opportunities (Okome, 2007). While men are often shown as dominant and authoritative figures, reinforcing patriarchal norms and contributing to gender inequality (Nzegwu, 2017).

Impact and Implications of Gender Roles in Nollywood

Feminism in Nollywood narratives has become a significant area of study in recent years, reflecting the growing awareness of gender issues in Nigeria and beyond. Nollywood has been known for its portrayal of women in subservient roles, reinforcing patriarchal norms and societal expectations. However, with the rise of feminist movements and increased advocacy for women's rights, there has been a shift towards more positive and empowering representations of female characters in Nigerian films that can influence and promote positive societal attitudes and perceptions of women and girls (Adejunmobi, 2020, p.37). Nollywood films are beginning to showcase women in leadership positions, promoting a more equitable representation of gender roles and challenging traditional patriarchal norms (Ogunleye, 2018, 299-302)). Female characters





are shown to be ambitious, intelligent, and capable of overcoming societal challenges, as seen in Izu Ojukwu's historic action film *Amina* (2021), which showcases the bravery of a Hausa warrior princess and her journey to queenship and military campaigns to protect and expand her kingdom (Nzegwu, 2017, p.149-161). Films like *The Wedding Party* (2016) and *Lionheart* (2018) also feature strong, complex female characters who challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes (Adejunmobi, 2020, p.40). Positive representations can inspire and empower women, promoting gender equality and challenging traditional stereotypes (Ogunleye, 2018, p.304-305). Filmmakers have a responsibility to promote more nuanced and complex representations of men and women, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable society (Adesokan, 2014, p.135-138).

An Overview of Feminism

Feminism or feminist theory is simply an intellectual revolution that began to address the issue of inequality between men and women. Feminism is a range of ideologies that share a common goal which is to define and advance political, economic, personal and social rights for women in education, employment and other spheres of human existence. Most feminists agree on five basic principles namely- working to increase equality, expanding human choice, eliminating gender stratification, ending sexual violence and promoting sexual freedom (Reese et al., 2023). Feminists speak out about the power of patriarchal ideology and how it operates to concede, mask and distort gender relations in our society. Understanding the different types of feminism and their key concepts and visionaries can help us better appreciate the complexity and richness of feminist thought and practice. Feminism has also evolved after going through different stages in different periods into three basic types namely – Liberal feminism, Socialist feminism and Radical feminism each having different modes of operation and each focusing on diverse aspects of the society. Liberal Feminism: focuses on achieving gender equality through legal and political reforms within the existing societal structure. Liberal feminists work to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes that limit women's choices and opportunities. It centers on women's ability to sustain their equality through their own actions and choices despite the belief that they are less intelligent and capable than men. Key figures include Mary Wollstonecraft, who argued for women's education and equality in "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" (1792), and Betty Friedan, whose book "The Feminine Mystique" (1963) sparked the second wave of feminism. The Socialist/ Marxist feminism on the other hand, focuses on both the public and private aspects of women's life by advocating that true liberation will come when there is an end to oppression from both the economy and culture. It combines feminist and socialist principles to address the ways in which capitalism perpetuates gender inequality. Marxist feminists argue that capitalism is the primary source of women's





oppression, while socialist feminists recognize the interplay between patriarchy and capitalism. Key figures include Clara Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai, who emphasized the importance of collective action and the need for a socialist society to achieve true gender equality

The Radical feminism promotes a total restructuring of the society from traditional gender roles because they believe that patriarchy is deeply embedded in all aspects of society and must be dismantled as the root cause of women's oppression, and they often focus on issues like sexual violence, reproductive rights, and objectification of women. Key figures include Simone de Beauvoir, who wrote "The Second Sex" (1949), and Shulamith Firestone, a prominent radical feminist writer, Cultural Feminism: emphasizes the positive aspects of women's culture and experiences, arguing that women possess unique qualities and values that should be celebrated and preserved. Cultural feminists advocate for the creation of women-centered spaces and institutions that reflect these values.

Other Types of Feminism include *Black Feminism*: which centres on the experiences and perspectives of Black women within feminist theory, highlighting the unique forms of oppression they face due to the intersections of race and gender. Key figures include Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term "intersectionality," and Sojourner Truth, a prominent abolitionist and women's rights activist.

Eco-Feminism: this connects the oppression of women to the destruction of the environment, arguing that both stem from patriarchal control. Eco-feminists emphasize the importance of sustainability, eco-conscious policies, and indigenous rights. Key figures include Vandana Shiva, a renowned environmental activist.

Intersectional Feminism: recognizes that multiple identities (e.g., race, class, sexuality, disability) intersect to shape individual experiences of oppression. Intersectional feminists argue that feminist theory and practice must consider these intersections to be truly inclusive ¹.

Post-colonial Feminism: Critiques Western feminism for marginalizing the experiences of women in colonized countries. Postcolonial feminists argue that women's liberation cannot be achieved without addressing the legacy of colonialism and imperialism.

Trans-feminism: focuses on the experiences and rights of trans- women and trans individuals, arguing that feminist theory and practice must consider the intersections of gender identity and expression.

The history of the modern feminism is divided into four waves with each tackling different feminist issues namely: The first wave which began in the 19th and early 20th





centuries precisely 1848-1920 which focused on women's suffrage and property rights, with key proponents like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. Second Wave (1960s-1980s): this addressed issues like women's reproductive rights, workplace equality, and domestic violence, with influential advocates like Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem.

The Third Wave then arose in the 1990s-2000s as a continuation and reaction to the failure of the second wave feminism. It emphasized individuality, diversity, and intersectionality, with notable figures like Rebecca Walker and Kimberlé Crenshaw. Fourth Wave (2010s-present) then arose and this focuses on issues like street harassment, campus sexual assault, and rape culture, with movements like #MeToo and Everyday Sexism Project.

Feminist ideologists' who constantly seek out new ways through film analysis to understand and redefine subjugation, have been instrumental in critically examining the representation of gender and women in various cultural commodities, particularly in the context of cinema. These feminists have extensively explored how film medium reflects and shapes societal attitudes towards gender roles, power dynamics, and women's agency. This work synthesizes key findings from existing research, highlighting the various feminist perspectives and frameworks employed to analyze the intersection of gender representation in film and the perception of the female by different segments of the society at large due to inequality.

Key Concepts and Principles of Feminism Movement are as follows:

Patriarchy: A system of male dominance that pervades all aspects of society, perpetuating gender inequality and women's oppression.

Intersectionality: The idea that multiple identities intersect to shape individual experiences of oppression, requiring a nuanced and inclusive approach to feminist theory and practice.

Empowerment: The process of gaining control over one's life, choices, and opportunities, which is central to feminist goals and principles.

Feminist Film Theory and Representation in Cinema

Feminist film theory has provided a robust foundation for analyzing gender representation in cinema. Early feminist scholars, such as Laura Mulvey authored a powerful article titled: *Visual pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975) where she introduced the concept of the "male gaze" to elucidate how the camera reinforces patriarchal norms by objectifying women on screen from three angles-the man behind the camera as he films events, the male actor sharing a scene with a female while on set





and the male spectator who focuses on the female during a performance. Later theorists like Bell Hooks (1992), emphasized the importance of connectivity and appraised the lack of diverse representation of women in mainstream films unlike the males. This foundation will set the stage for a deeper exploration of the complexities of female representation in films. Researchers across the world have scrutinized the portrayal of female characters in the cinema, examining their agency, complexity, and relationship to traditional gender roles. Bechdel Test (1985), proposed by Alison Bechdel, became a widely used benchmark to assess female presence and conversation in films, highlighting the portrayal of female characters in the cinema, examining their agency, complexity, and relationship to traditional gender roles. Bechdel Test (1985), proposed by Alison Bechdel, became a widely used benchmark to assess female presence and conversation in films, highlighting the need for authentic female character development. Additionally, Judith Butler's *Performativity theory* (1990) has been applied to understand how gender identities are constructed and enacted through film narratives. Nichols expresses his view on this matter thus:

Feminist film practice must challenge the dominant film practice, whose means of significance are keyed to a patriarchal ideology that reconstitutes sexuality in hierarchical or oppositional terms: “it is this imaginary unit, the sutured coherence (that centers on the phallus as paradigm of male sexuality, marking the female as ‘object rather than the subject of desire’), the imaginary sense of identity set up by the film which must be challenged by a feminist film practice.” (Nichols, 1985, p.315).

Subversive Narratives and Feminist Empowerment

There is a deep call among the feminist film critics like Shaka, Ogunleye and Ukadike for a new and more balanced viewpoint in the manner the woman is portrayed in films, far from all negativities like weak, evil and laidback roles to the opposite image of strength, resilience, a heroine, transformational leader and a game changer. This is necessary because negative or improper representation is misleading and does not portray the true virtues and qualities of women, whether African or Western (God's presence, 2013, p.59). The blame rests basically on poorly researched stories, hastily written screenplays and poorly produced films (Omar, 2019). The filmmakers have a pivotal role towards actualizing this feat of redeeming this image because the way women are represented in film determines the way the society and culture take them. The film medium can be used to spread this ideology to the viewing audience until this rebranded image of women resonates and spreads far and wide (Metz, 1985, p.544).





The Impact of Female Directors in Nollywood: A Deeper Look

It is an unparalleled time for Nollywood as Nigerian films are racking up huge numbers at the box office and finding easier access to slots at festivals around the world. There are also more pathways, especially boosted by the exceptionality of streaming, for Nigerian films to reach global audiences and bring in more money and attention to the filmmakers. One thing, though, that is clear in this latest phenomenon is that there are more women—whether as directors, producers or boardroom executives—than there ever contributing to the rapid expansion of the film industry. There has been a rise of female directors in Nollywood who have made significant contributions to the Nigerian film industry, pushing the boundaries of storytelling, redefining Nollywood's cultural landscape and inspiring a new generation of filmmakers. Let us dive deeper into the common themes and motifs in their films, their contributions to the growth and globalization of Nollywood, and the challenges they face.

Common Themes and Motifs in Nollywood Women Cinema

The films directed by these female directors often explore themes of family, relationships, and social issues. For example, Kemi Adetiba's *The Wedding Party* (2016) and *King of Boys* (2018) feature strong female characters and explore themes of love, family, and power. Similarly, Funke Akindele's *Jenifa* (2008) and *Omo Ghetto: The Saga* (2020) films often explore themes of family, relationships, and social issues, with a comedic tone (Akindele, 2020).

Genevieve Nnaji's *Lionheart* (2018) explores themes of family wealth, corporate leadership challenging traditional male-dominated industry and institutional feminism, with a strong female lead character-Adaeze at the centre of the story. According to Nnaji, the film was inspired by her own experiences as a woman in a patriarchal society (Nnaji, 2018). Omoni Oboli's *Moms at War* (2018) explores themes of motherhood and relationships, highlighting the challenges faced by women in Nigerian society.

Funke Akindele's films often explore themes that resonate deeply with Nigerian audiences. Some of the common themes in her movies include:

Family and Relationships: Akindele's films frequently highlight the importance of family bonds, as seen in *A Tribe Called Judah* (2023), where the story revolves around the Judah family's dynamics and their unwavering support for each other.

Resilience and Perseverance: Her movies often feature characters who face significant challenges, yet find ways to overcome them, showcasing the resilience and determination of Nigerian women, particularly single mothers like Jedidah in *A Tribe Called Judah* (2023).





Motherhood is a recurring theme in Akindele's films, as evident in *A Tribe Called Judah* (2023), where Jedidah's love and sacrifices for her sons drive the plot.

Social Realities: Akindele's films frequently touch on societal issues, such as corruption, financial struggles, and the challenges faced by women in leadership roles, as depicted in *Behind the Scenes* (2025).

Cultural Identity: Her movies often incorporate local dialects, cultural nuances, and traditional values, making them uniquely Nigerian and relatable to her audience.

Redemption and Forgiveness: Some of her films, like *A Tribe Called Judah* (2023), explore the themes of forgiveness, second chances, and personal growth.

Contributions of Women to the Growth and Globalization of Nollywood

Women play vital roles in Nollywood and contribute to its success through various capacities such as acting, directing and film production. These talented women have been breaking new ground and making significant contributions to the industry with their captivating storytelling and creative prowess. Some notable female filmmakers in Nollywood who have contributed significantly to the growth and globalization of the industry include the following-

Funke Akindele's an ace actress and director is known to have contributed greatly in the following underlisted ways-

Box Office Records: four of her films have consistently broken box office records including *Battle on Buka Street* (2023), *A Tribe Called Judah* (2023), *Omo Ghetto: The Saga*, *Everyone Loves Jenifa* with *Behind the Scenes* (2025) becoming the highest-grossing Nollywood film of all time, crossing ₦2.1 billion. She currently holds the title of highest grossing director in Nigerian Cinema, with filmmaker a total gross exceeding ₦4.7 billion making her one of the most bankable filmmakers (Moyinoluwa, 2025, businessday.ng). Akindele's ability to blend comedy, drama, and social themes has made her a filmmaker with both commercial and cultural impact. Her films have dominated cinemas nationwide, breaking weekend opening records and drawing audiences in historic numbers.

Global Recognition: Akindele's success has expanded Nollywood's reach beyond Nigeria, with her films being screened in international cinemas, including in the UK and Ireland.

Inspiring a New Generation: Her achievements serve as a testament to the potential of Nigerian filmmakers and actors, inspiring others to pursue careers in the film industry.





Elevating Nollywood's Status: Akindele's films have contributed to the growth and recognition of Nollywood, both locally and internationally, showcasing the industry's capabilities.

Kemi Adetiba is another critically acclaimed Nigerian filmmaker known for her high-production value films and distinct directorial style. Her work has not only earned critical acclaim but also achieved significant commercial success, making her one of the most influential figures in contemporary Nigerian cinema. Adetiba's breakthrough in film came with her feature film debut, *The Wedding Party* (2016), a romantic comedy that premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) and became one of Nigeria's highest-grossing films. She followed this success with *King of Boys* (2018), a gritty political thriller that showcased her versatility as a filmmaker and became one of the top 10 Nollywood films (pulse.ng). Adetiba's films often feature strong, complex female characters, and she is particularly known for creating women who dominate the screen. Adetiba's work has had a significant impact on the Nigerian film industry, inspiring a new generation of filmmakers and challenging traditional narratives. Her success has also paved the way for other female filmmakers in Nollywood, cementing her legacy as a trailblazer in the industry. Adetiba is a visionary filmmaker who has made a significant contribution to Nigerian cinema. Her distinct directorial style, commitment to quality production, and ability to craft compelling narratives have made her one of the most respected filmmakers in the industry.

Mo Abudu is yet another outstanding filmmaker that has made significant contributions to the Nollywood industry, revolutionizing the way African stories are told and perceived globally. Here are some of her notable achievements:

Pioneering African Storytelling: As the founder of EbonyLife Media, Abudu has produced high-quality films and TV series that showcase African narratives with global appeal. Her productions, such as *The Wedding Party 1 & 2* (2016) and *Chief Daddy* (2018), have become some of the highest-grossing films in Nigeria. Other notable productions are *Fifty* (2015), *Oloture* (2019), *Elesin Oba: The King's Horseman* (2022) and *Her Perfect Life* (2023). Abudu's films often explore themes of love, power, ambition, and societal dynamics, resonating with audiences across Africa and beyond. Her storytelling style blends African culture with global appeal, making her productions a staple of modern Nollywood. Through EbonyLife, Abudu has created opportunities for African creatives to showcase their talent, both locally and internationally. Her production company has partnered with global streaming platforms like Netflix, making her productions accessible to a broader audience. Abudu's success has helped promote cinema culture in Nigeria, inspiring a new generation of filmmakers and actors. Her luxury entertainment resort, EbonyLife Place, has become a hub for film enthusiasts and





industry professionals. More so, Abudu's contributions to the film industry have earned her international recognition, including being named one of *Time Magazine's* 100 Most Influential People in 2025 and Forbes' Africa's Most Successful Woman. In fact, Abudu's legacy extends beyond her productions, as she continues to inspire and empower African creatives to tell their stories and share them with the world.

Jade Osiberu: is a talented writer, creative director and producer who has made a name for herself in the Nigerian film industry. Her exceptional writing and production skills have earned her numerous awards and nominations. Her ability to create thrilling, high-stakes narratives with dynamic cinematography has made her a standout in the industry. She's the first Nigerian film director to sign an exclusive overall deal with an Amazon Prime Video. More so Osiberu's films such as *Sugar Rush* (2019), *Gangs of Lagos* (2023) and *Brotherhood* (2020) have redefined the action-crime genre in Nollywood.

Biodun Stephen: is a prolific filmmaker known for her emotionally driven stories that explore themes of family, female empowerment, love, domestic abuse, rape and societal expectations... A creative storyteller has produced several films that explore themes, of family, female empowerment, love, domestic abuse, rape culture and societal expectation like *Breaded Life* (2021), *The Wildflower* (2022) *Sista*, (2022), *I Am Anis* (2025), *Tiwa's Baggage* (2017), *All Shades Of Wrong*(2018). Stephen's ability to craft relatable stories has made her a consistent filmmaker in Nollywood. Her 2025 release, *Labake Olododo*, further solidified her reputation for delivering intimate, character-based stories rooted in real Nigerian experiences.

Omoni Oboli: is a talented actress, turned director and producer has made a name for herself in Nollywood. Her films like *Okafor's Law* (2016), *Wives on Strike* (2016), *The First Lady* (2015), *Moms At War* (2018), *Love is War* (2018) have become box office hits. Oboli's understanding of online consumption patterns has allowed her to position her films perfectly for viewers who prefer digital-first entertainment. Her film *Love in Every Word* (2025) achieved remarkable success on streaming platforms, amassing millions of views.

Genevieve Nnaji: A trailblazing actress and filmmaker, has broken barriers in the industry and paved the way for other women. Genevieve Nnaji's *Lionheart* (2018) her directorial debut was the first acquired Netflix original film, marking a significant milestone in the globalization of Nollywood.

Emem Isong is a trailblazer in the Nigerian film industry, celebrated for her pioneering contributions as a producer, director, and writer. Her films, such as *Private Sin* (2003) *Games Women Play* (2003) and *Reloaded* (2009) have become classics in Nollywood. Isong's dedication to storytelling and her commitment to diversity and inclusion have set





a standard of excellence for filmmakers across Nigeria and beyond. Her legacy continues to inspire a new generation of filmmakers.

Bolanle Austen-Peters is a visionary founder and artistic director of Terra Kulture, a cultural hub in Lagos that fosters arts and entertainment. She transitioned into filmmaking with her debut feature *The Bling Lagosians* (2019) and has since directed historic and socially conscious films like *House of Ga'a* (2024) and the biopic *Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti* (2024). Austen-Peters' films often explore historical and socially conscious themes, shedding light on history, culture, and social justice. Her work bridges the gap between cinema and theatre, making her one of Nollywood's most distinguished female directors.

Tope Oshin is a multi-talented director who has made a name for herself in the Nigerian film industry. Oshin's films often tackle bold themes, including youth identity, sexuality, and health with nuance and sincerity. She has established herself as one of the leading directors in the movie industry, with a diverse portfolio spanning film, television, and documentaries. Her directorial works include *Up North* (2018) and *New Money* (2018).

Toyin Abraham is a prolific actress and filmmaker who has made a name for herself in Nollywood. Abraham's storytelling style blends comedy, emotional complexity, and social commentary in creating films that connect strongly with everyday Nigerians. Her ability to engage her loyal fanbase has positioned her as one of the most versatile and commercially successful women in Nollywood. Her directorial works include *Iyalode* (2025) and *Oversabi Aunty* (2025), which have become box office hits.

Mildred Okwo is a renowned Nigerian film director and producer known for her exceptional contributions to the industry. Her films, such as *The Meeting* (2021) and *Suru L'ere*, (2016) have received critical acclaim and won numerous awards. Okwo's dedication to creating movies that resonate with local and international audiences has earned her accolades, including the Best Director Award at the Africa Magic Viewers' Choice Awards.

These top female Nollywood directors have demonstrated exceptional talent, creativity, and perseverance in the face of challenges. Their contributions to the industry have not only paved the way for future generations of women in film but have also helped shape the landscape of Nigerian cinema. As Nollywood continues to grow and evolve, it is clear that these women will remain at the forefront of the industry, pushing boundaries and breaking new ground.



**Challenges faced by Nollywood female directors**

Despite their successes, female directors in Nollywood face significant challenges, including limited opportunities, sexism, gender stereotypes and bias. According to a study by the Women in Film and Television (WIFT) Nigeria, women are underrepresented in key creative roles in the Nigerian film industry, including directing and producing (WIFT Nigeria, 2020) Women are often portrayed in traditional roles, reinforcing patriarchal norms and limiting their potential. Films often depict women as submissive, dependent, and inferior to men, perpetuating gender inequality.

Limited Access to Funding and Resources: Female filmmakers struggle to secure funding for their projects, and when they do, they often face challenges in accessing resources and equipment.

Male Dominance in Technical Roles: Women are underrepresented in technical roles such as cinematography, sound engineering, and editing. This limits their opportunities and creates a male-dominated work environment.

Sexism and Harassment: Female filmmakers often face sexism and harassment on set, which can create a hostile work environment and limit their opportunities.

Lack of Representation and Opportunities: Women are often excluded from leadership positions and opportunities, limiting their ability to shape the industry and tell their stories.

Despite these challenges, Nigerian female filmmakers are making significant contributions to the industry, challenging traditional narratives and promoting gender equality. However, these women have overcome these challenges through their hard work, determination, resilience and innovative approaches to storytelling. As Kemi Adetiba notes, "As a woman in a male-dominated industry, you have to be twice as good to be recognized" (Adetiba, 2016). Genevieve Nnaji also emphasizes the importance of perseverance and hard work, saying "I don't let my fears stop me from doing what I want to do" (Nnaji, 2018).

To address these challenges, initiatives such as the Female Representation and Advancement in Media (F.R.A.M.E.) project have been launched to support and empower female filmmakers. The program provides funding, mentorship, and training to help women succeed in the industry. Despite their successes, female directors in Nollywood face significant challenges, including limited opportunities, sexism, and stereotypes. According to a study by the Women in Film and Television (WIFT) Nigeria, women are underrepresented in key creative roles in the Nigerian film industry, including directing and producing (WIFT Nigeria, 2020).





Gender balancing in Nollywood

Creating a gender balance in the Nollywood industry requires a multi-faceted approach that involves filmmakers, industry stakeholders, and regulatory bodies. Here are some strategies to promote gender equality:

Promote diverse and empowering representations by depicting women in non-traditional roles, showcasing their capabilities and contributions to society.

Highlighting women's experiences, challenges, and triumphs, fostering empathy and understanding.

Encourage nuanced portrayals of women, moving beyond stereotypes and tropes.

Empower women behind the camera- provide opportunities for women to take on key roles in the film production process, such as directing, screenwriting, and editing.

Support and mentor emerging female filmmakers by helping them develop their skills, talents and build their networks.

Encourage collaboration between male and female filmmakers to promote the rich and diverse perspectives of our culture and heritage in film productions.

Addressing gender-based violence and stereotypes

Film can be used as a platform to address issues like domestic violence, harassment, and sexism in the following ways by stakeholders and industry practitioners:

Challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes, promoting more inclusive and respectful representations.

Foster a culture of sensitivity and respect on movie sets / locations, ensuring a safe working environment for all.

Industry Initiatives and Policy Changes- develop and enforce policies promoting gender equality, such as diversity benchmarks and incentives for productions that showcase empowering representations of women.

Provide training and resources for industry professionals to address unconscious bias and promote inclusive storytelling.

Encourage regulatory bodies to monitor and address gender-based issues in the industry.

Collaboration and Community Building

Fostering partnerships between industry stakeholders, policymakers, and civil society organizations to promote gender equality.





Create platforms for women to share their experiences, challenges, and successes, amplifying their voices and perspectives.

Encourage audience engagement and feedback, promoting a culture of accountability and inclusiveness.

The role of female filmmakers in shaping the narrative of Nollywood films and promoting gender equality

Female filmmakers play a crucial role in shaping the narrative of Nollywood films and promoting gender equality. By bringing their unique perspectives and experiences to the table, they can create more nuanced and complex portrayals of women and girls. Female filmmakers can also help to challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes, promoting more inclusive and respectful representations.

Some ways female filmmakers can shape the narrative of Nollywood films include:

Creating complex and multi-dimensional female characters: female filmmakers can create characters that are more relatable and realistic, showcasing the diversity and complexity of women's experiences.

Telling women's stories: Female filmmakers can tell stories that highlight the challenges and triumphs of women, promoting empathy and understanding.

Challenging traditional gender norms: female filmmakers can challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes, promoting more inclusive and respectful representations of women and girls.

Recommendations for the development of more Inclusive and empowering representations of women in Nollywood films

Industry stakeholders and policymakers can support the development of more inclusive and empowering representations of women in Nollywood films in several ways like:

Providing funding and resources: Providing funding and resources for female filmmakers can help to support the development of more inclusive and empowering representations of women.

Mentorship and training: Providing mentorship and training opportunities for female filmmakers can help to develop their skills and promote more diverse perspectives.

Promoting diversity and inclusion: in the industry can help to create a more supportive and inclusive environment for female filmmakers.





Encouraging collaboration: between male and female filmmakers can help to promote more diverse perspectives and create more inclusive and empowering representations of women.

Policy Initiatives and Industry Support

Developing and enforcing policies: that promote gender equality and inclusion can help to create a more supportive and inclusive environment for female filmmakers.

Providing incentives: for productions that showcase empowering representations of women can help to promote more inclusive and respectful representations.

Monitoring and addressing gender-based issues: in the industry can help to create a safer and more supportive environment for female filmmakers.

By supporting female filmmakers and promoting more inclusive and empowering representations of women, the Nollywood industry can help to promote gender equality and challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes.

In conclusion, feminist approaches to Nollywood and film analysis have played a pivotal role in uncovering the complexities of gender representation in cinema. The female directors in Nollywood have made significant contributions to the industry, pushing the boundaries of storytelling and inspiring a new generation of filmmakers. Despite the challenges they face, these women have overcome obstacles and achieved success through their hard work and determination. Film scholars have employed diverse theoretical frameworks to examine the portrayal of women, critique regressive narratives, and celebrate empowering representations. This work sets the stage for the critique of the top female filmmakers in Nollywood through a feminist lens, aiming to contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding gender representation in Nollywood and per adventure commence a move towards an inclusive nation building.

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CLASS STRUGGLE AND THE NIGERIAN SOCIO-POLITICAL LANDSCAPE: A CINEMATIC PURVIEW OF JADESOLA OSIBERU'S *GANGS OF LAGOS*

Augustine Ime Ette

&

Friday Nwafor

The Department of Film and Multimedia
Faculty of Communication & Media Studies
University of Port Harcourt

Abstract

Class struggle, political domination and crime are recurring thematic concerns in Nollywood films but despite these concerns, limited scholarly attention has been given to the extent to which recent commercial films operate as tools of resistance or as reinforcements of class formation, capitalist hegemony and political corruption. This study probes Jade Osiberu's *Gangs of Lagos* (2023) through the lens of Marxist film theory leveraging on the functions of film as a site for discuss on class oppression, capitalist hegemony, political corruption and systemic violence in Nigeria. Anchored on Marxist Film Theory as advanced by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, this study employs a qualitative close-reading methodology to critically examine the extent to which the film through its cinematic elements and narrative structure reflects the Nigeria's socio-political landscape. Findings show that the gang system in Nigeria is a political tool used by the ruling class and the elite represented by Alaye Bam Bam and Olorugun to control and dictate the survival of others like Obalola, Ify, Gift and even Kazeem. It further shows a hierarchical power structure in which the ruling class delegate authority to selected members of the working class to further subjugate members of the working class. More so, through the concept of false consciousness, the film portrays how members of the selected working class like Nino, Obalola and Ify are deceived into embracing the illusion of self-determination within an exploitative system controlled by the top-tier ruling class. The analysis positions the film within the Marxist concepts of economic determinism, hegemony, false consciousness, relative deprivation and gendered class struggle while interrogating the extent to which Nollywood functions as an effective agent of resistance against class struggle and oppression. The study highlights *Gangs of Lagos* (2023) as a significant social commentary on Nigeria's political landscape but calls for greater narrative clarity and structural transformation in Nollywood to strengthen its potential as a tool for ideological resistance.

Keywords: Class struggle, Relative deprivation, Economic determinism, Hegemony and False consciousness, Gendered class struggle.

Introduction

The representation of social reality is a significant role of film or the cinema in our society and for the cinema to properly reflect and shape social reality, a triangulation of arts, science and technology abound. By arts, components such as plot structure and



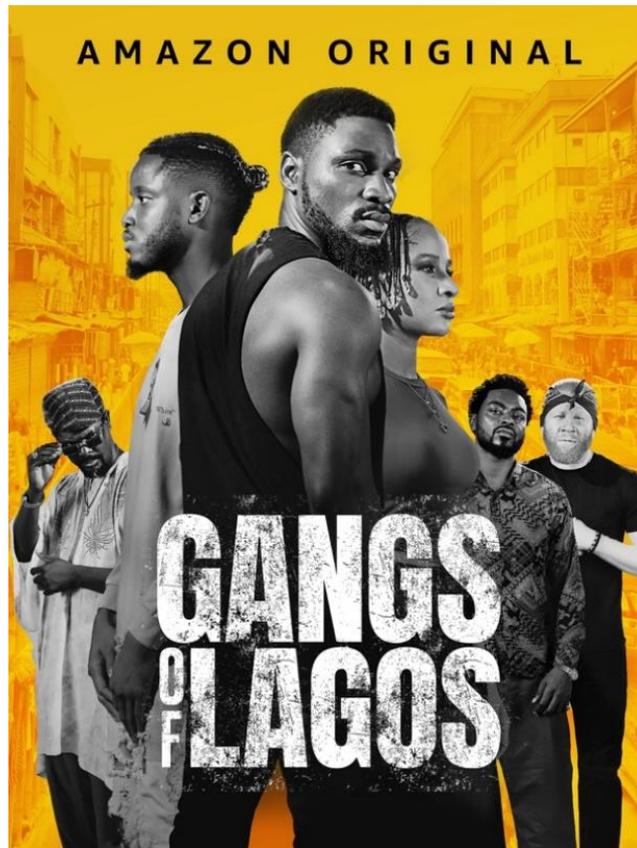


development, character development and mise-en-scene are considered to reflect life brilliantly while science and technology employs cameras, lights, sound, graphics and postproduction order as well as the study of man and his world. However, the functionality of each of these components are critical to the interpretation of every film text and this births the different film theories, from Auteur Film Theory to Structuralism, Formalism, Semiotics, Psychoanalytic Film Theory, Queer Film Theory, Apparatus Film Theory, Feminists Film Theory, Marxist Film Theory and so on. These theories become the framework for analyzing and understanding cinema, exploring their meaning, impact and relationship to society, culture and arts, offering tools for deeper appreciation and discourse. Noteworthy, a film becomes a site for discourse because the filmmaker shares an idea, a somewhat visual essay to portray his mindset, validating the claims that filmmaking is a meaning making venture.

Using Osiberu's *Gangs of Lagos* (2023) as an example, the filmmaker explores the socio-political struggles of young people in Lagos stirred by the dysfunctional system of leadership, politics and governance. The film features the story of three friends in Isale Eko, Lagos, entangled in a cycle of violence, power struggles, and betrayal and when a political power shift occurs, the trio faces deadly consequences as they struggle to escape the life they were forced into. Undergirded by the ethos of Marxist Film Theory, this study intends to interrogate and understand the film's relationship to reality. Marxist Film Theory (MFT) focuses on the power dynamics between the dominant classes and the subordinate classes, as well as the ideological messages that films may contain. Marxist film theory is adopted to probe the merits and demerits of the filmic content by bringing to the fore, the thematic thrusts of class struggle, economic determinism as well as social reflection and change. According to Carter "Marxist film theorists use Marxist ideas to analyze films in terms of their class-based content, their representation of social and economic power, and their potential to influence social and political change" (Carter, pg.1).

According to Carter, the theory culminates from the Marxist school of thought championed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels where they query capitalism and envisioned a classless, collective and communist society. It was at first an economic and political program propounded to evoke a revolutionary overthrow of capitalism by proletariat as well as create a utopic society where communism and collectivism abound. They emphasize that, "(s)ociety as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat" (Marx and Engels, 2002, p.220). This thought process finds expression in forms of art, from literature, paintings, musical composition to film.





Synopsis of *Gangs of Lagos* (2023)

The Plate 1: The art cover of Gangs of Lagos (2023)

Title of Film: *Gangs of Lagos*

Directors: Jade Osiberu

Producer: Kemi Lala Akindoju

Jade Osiberu

Original Release Network: Amazon

Stars: Tobi Bakre, Chioma Akpotha, Adesua Etomi, Chike-Ezekpeazu, Iyabo Ojo,
Bimbo Ademoye, Olarotimi Fakunle, Yvonne Jegede, Yinka Quadri

Music: Tolu Obanro

Year of Release: 2023

Original Language: English

Running Time: 2 hours 40 Minutes

The film titled *Gangs of Lagos* (2023) is a Nigerian action film by Jadesola Osiberu featuring Tobi Bakre as Obalola, Adesua Etomi (Gift), Chike (Ify), Iyabo Ojo (Mama Oba), Chioma Akpotha (Mama Ify), Toyin Abraham (Bamidele), Bimbo Ademoye (Teni), Tayo Faniran (Nino), Olarotimi Fakunle (Kazeem), Damilola Akajo (Ekun), Ayo



Lijadu (Alaye Bam Bam), Yinka Quadri (Olorogun), Wasiu “Pasuma” Alabi (London), Yvonne Jegede (Princess) amongst others. It is one of the popular Nollywood crime thrillers that creatively explores the theme of gangsterism, exploitation, fate and will. In reflecting these thrusts, the film focuses on Obalola, Ify and Gift, the three friends raised in Isale Eko, a settlement in Lagos State ragged by crime, gangster activities and political corruption.

The film begins with an action. Eyo masquerade, the gods of the highway of the dead, killing a man in the presence of the wife and infant child, Obalola. Obalola is made to grow in a crime ridden Isale Eko without a father but with the dream to become the Eleniyan, aka owner of men. His desire being in order with the prophesy that he will grow, live and die as a gangster just like the father prompts the mother to call for his spiritual cleansing but the physical torture during the cleansing drives him to abandon the mother and seek shelter with a man, Nino, who would later change the course of his destiny. Nino, one of the leading gang leaders for Alaye Bam Bam, the Eleniyan of Isale Eko aka owner of men, comes in contact first with Obalola and friends after Obalola at the age of 7 led his friends, Ify and Gift to rob a woman and her infant daughter while in her car on a busy Isale Eko road by threatening to kill the infant daughter with a pen knife. The case is reported to Alaye Bam Bam and Obalola is brought before the Eleniyan, the owner of men but his wit and courage to accurately inform Alaye Bam Bam with the gang leaders, Kazeem and Nino, that the woman had already reported to the police made him gain Nino’s attention and from here, Nino adopts him as a son.

Obalola and friends find solace with Nino and his girlfriend, Princess, with Nino catering for their feeding and education. Nino becomes the father he never had and begins to redirect Obalola’s dream towards becoming an economist cum CBN Governor but in moment, Nino is gruesomely killed by gang members.

The murder of Nino kicks an unwilling return to the gangster life for the three friends as they find themselves working for Kazeem, a gang leader with their beloved father-figure, Nino. They become entangled in a cycle of violence, crime, exploitation and oppression of the masses to raise funds for the upcoming election as would be contested by Olorugun, a businessman, boss of all bosses and a Kingmaker who now wants to be a king, but in all of these, the trio are secretly planning to escape the life they were forced into. Unfortunately, Kazeem and Olorugun have another plan for them and in this plan, Ify is gruesomely murdered after Kazeem had given him hope that he will introduce Ify to a renowned music producer who will promote and manage Ify’s music career – a dream Ify had nursed from childhood.





Meanwhile, growing up, Kazeem's daughter, Teni, was friendly with the trio and particularly, Obalola's crush. While Teni furthers her education outside the shores of Nigeria, the trio are on the street of Isale Eko rigorously raising money for Kazeem and Ologun. While planning to eliminate Ify, Kazeem instructs Obalola to assume duty as Teni's bodyguard which eventually climaxed with Teni and Obalola having sex and at the same moment, Ify is being murdered.

The death of Ify, Obalola's best friend and a talented musician who just reconnected with his baby mama and his baby, becomes a defining moment for Obalola, pushing him towards the desire to revenge. In this moment, Obalola and Gift leads the gang to war with Nino's old associate, Ekun, who was believed to be the murderer of Nino and Ify but in the course of this event, expositions are made. Obalola is made to understand the place of power struggle and betrayal within the ranks of the political class which led to the murder of his biological father, Ify's father and his adopted father, Nino and the death of Nino brought about the election of Kazeem as the new Eleniyan of Isale Eko. With these expositions, Obalola and gang shakes the very foundation of Isale Eko, challenges the political structures of Kazeem, Alaye Bam Bam and Olorogun, reinforces and gives power to the opposition party with Bamidele. This leads to a creepy gun battle featuring once again, the Eyo Masquerade where, Kazeem, Alaye Bam Bam and many other notorious gang members and sponsors are murdered.

Obalola's decision to break free from the system is herein rested by his alliance with the opposition party and elevation to Eleniyan of Isale Eko aka as the owner of men, a place Kazeem occupied till death and a position Obalola had intuitively desired to occupy while growing up.

Plot Structure/Development in *Gangs of Lagos* (2023)

Gangs of Lagos (2023) is one crime action thriller that follows a non-linear chronological plot order where plot develops with real-time action, flashback and narration. The narrative as captured in the plot development follows a tragic yet realistic story arc with traditional storytelling elements like exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution. The language triangulates prominently between Yoruba and English with few instances of Igbo and Nigerian Pidgin.

Exposition

The film begins with actions and narration that present **Isale Eko** as a neighborhood with notorious criminal activities, starting with the murder of a man who is later revealed to be Obalola's father by the revered Eyo masquerade. It goes further to lead the viewer into the life of Obalola as a 10-year-old 'wanna-be' gangster surviving in the dungeon of Isale Eko with friends, Ify who desires to be a great musician and Gift, a young girl who





understands the language and attitude of Isale Eko. In the opening sequence after 10-year-old Obalola and friends robbed a woman on the busy street of Isale Eko, voice over echoes, “Isale Eko is a jungle and here, everyone does what they must to survive. Whether you steal from container or steal bags, collect unofficial taxes on the streets, run illegal bet, use struggling musicians to push drugs,”

In setting the tone for rising actions, this stage also features the trio’s acquaintance with Nino, one of the gang bosses who becomes their father, catering and sponsoring their education. Obalola confesses to Teni the effect of this acquaintance, thus,

OBALOLA: ... You start on the street, work until you are Eleniyan, owner of men, the Capo, then you can retire in politics. That was my dream too but Nino said no. He says I have head for book. That I should become an Economist like the CBN Governor or writer like Wole Soyinka.”

Although the gang boss desires to redirect Obalola’s vision of being a gangster to becoming an Economist cum CBN Governor but unbeknownst to him, his acquaintance with the trio is a pathway to their doom.

Rising Action

Nino is pitched by Alaye Bam Bam to become the next Eleniyan and as he enjoys the privilege and prepares for the task ahead, he is gruesomely murdered. This phase changes the course of the trio’s newly found hope, leaving them in a vulnerable situation. Even though Obalola is motivated to step up his game, he is equally worried if he and his friends can escape this life with their new Boss, Kazeem, as this new affiliation exposes them to more danger in Isale Eko.

Climax

The twist here finds Obalola fully enmeshed in gang wars, revenge and reflection of life. This phase reinstates in his subconscious, the harsh realities of politics in Isale Eko, highlighting manipulation and betrayal by trusted acquaintances. A major exposition after the death of his best friend, Ify, becomes the crucial twist to his decision to fight the system.

Falling Action

With the knowledge of how the system operates and his losses – dreams, father, Nino, and Ify, Obalola is at a crossroad where he is faced with the choice of revenge or redemption

Resolution

The film accentuates the notion of deprivation and questions if Obalola could actually escape the fate awaiting him and if he could, what is the fate of others who will be born



into the system where political corruption, exploitation and crime thrives. Can the next generation actually break free and now that Obalola is the new Eleniyan just as he had envisioned while growing up, what changes can he make?

Class Struggle and Economic Formation

One of the key components of Marxist film theory is the perpetual exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeois and in *Gangs of Lagos* (2023), the bourgeoisie (ruling class) represents the politicians and crime bosses while the proletariat (working class) represents the gang members and street hustlers. Following the plot development, the tension between the ruling and working class is greatly formed by the socio-economic backgrounds of the characters in the film. Olorugun and Alaye Bam Bam as members of the ruling class creates a system that maintains control either by limiting opportunities for the working class or creating a false hope for their survival. With this formidable system, they ensure that the working class depends on them for survival. For instance, Obalola, Ify and Gift are forced into the life of crime because of poverty and the influence of an environment designed by the ruling class. Obalola and Ify's father were murdered by Kazeem on the order of Olorugun and Alaye Bam Bam and this changed the course of their life, thwarted their dreams and desires, thus, setting the tone for them to be involved in crime and gangster activities.

Also, in the wake of the rising action when the hope to have a better life with the genuine fatherly support from Nino, Olorugun conspires with Alaye Bambam and Kazeem to murder Nino, yet again dashing their hope to escape the wrecks of Isale Eko.



Plate 21: MCU of the trio, Obalola, Ify and Gift returning from their new school with Nino

Obalola and friends find themselves toiling in sweat to raise funds for the forthcoming elections of Olorugun through Kazeem while Kazeem’s daughter, Teni, is given the best of education and life after education. To further show class inequality, Kazeem officially appoints Obalola as Teni’s bodyguard and driver with instruction to drive her to her new apartment in Banana Island.

OBALOLA: Teni, do you really own this place?

TENI: Technically, it’s my dad’s but he bought it in my name

OBALOLA (Voice over): Curse my father’s killer. While we Eruka suffer on the streets for Kazeem, notice how he and his own are enjoying life. Though Kazeem is a crazy bastard but this is Banana Island”



Plate 22: Long shot showing the newly acquired house for Teni in Banana Island

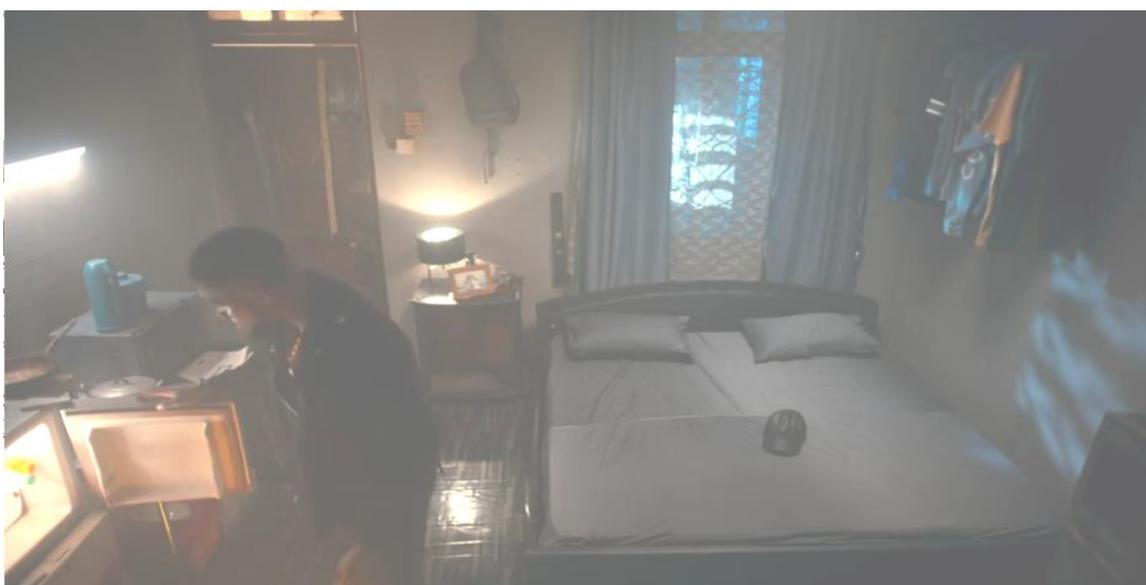


Plate 23: High angle wide shot showing the one room apartment of Obalola in the slum of Isale Eko



In another show of economic formation and determinism, Alaye Bam Bam reproaches Nino for his appeal to quit the crime world for a legitimate business venture. He rather promises Nino of better prospects in the crime world which is later understood to be the position of Eleniyan, a conspiracy which eventually leads to his gruesome murder.

NINO: Baba. I am tired of street life, Baba. Honestly, I have saved quite a bit of money. Baba, I am ready to start a new business.

ALAYE BAM BAM (*Laughs*): Akinwale. I know you are still a young man, but that does not mean you should not be wise. In this life, there are only two ways out. Number one, six feet under the ground, number 2, to take your rightful place in party politics, yes! Look, let me tell you. You are well on your way to the kind of life, don't be deceived that every aspiring, young Isale Eko boy is dreaming of. Listen, even Kazeem is no match for you. So, you want to throw all of that away? You better wise up! What's wrong with you? Just imagine!"



Plate 24: MCU of Alaye Bam Bam reproaching Nino

In the same vein, Kazeem gives Ify false hope to introduce him to a renowned music promoter who will promote his music career. While Ify relies on this hope as his escape from the criminal space, Kazeem exploits him and orchestrates his murder.



Plate 25: CU showing Ify in all shades of joy as Kazeem promises to introduce him to a renowned music promoter

In brief, *Gangs of Lagos* (2023) explores how survival in Isale Eko is determined by wealth and power which is only possessed by politicians and gang bosses.

Class Oppression & Hegemony

The film is a social reflection of how politicians control the masses. The film shows hierarchy in power and delegation of power by the politicians to the gang for continuous enslavement of gang members and people of Isale Eko. This goes further in reflecting the concept of hegemony where politicians like Olorugun and Alaye Bam Bam maintain dominance by subtly shaping ideology and culture through the gang bosses. Politicians relegate power to gang bosses like Kazeem, Nino and London, then mandate the gangs to maintain control over the people and activities of Isale Eko. This shapes their thought, freedom and who they vote for or pay allegiance to. For instance, Terrible reports that Olorugun ordered Kazeem to kill Obalola's father, Ify's father and Bamidele's father because people love them and they were brewing up an opposition. Olorugun and Kazeem continue to maintain dominance over the market women with illegal taxes through Ify. Meweme and other street hustlers are bound to make due returns to Kazeem and at large, Olorugun. All these bring about division between the working class, thus pushing them towards immediate survival rather than collective liberation. This reflects the realities of the Nigerian society where a few are empowered by the leaders to continue to subjugate the masses on their behalf.



Plate 26: High angle long shot showing the election banner of Olorugun and Kazeem



Plate 27: Tie medium shot of Alaye Bam Bam with the two gang leaders, Kazeem and Nino

False Consciousness & Betrayal

Marxist film theory also focuses on the concept of false consciousness where the working class are deceived to believe in the illusion of being self-made in a dysfunctional system controlled by the ruling class. This consciousness comes to play prominently in the character of Nino and Obalola. For Nino, he believes he can attain freedom and break free from the crime world but despite his ability to save for his new legitimate business, he is subtly reminded of two possible outcomes – six feet under the

ground or rightful place in party politics i.e. the place of Eleniyan, the owner of men, the Capo. For Obalola, his yearnings to break free from gang life is repeatedly controlled by manipulations – from the gruesome murder of Nino to Ify, to the event that leads to the exposition of his father’s murderer and finally, his decision to revenge for all the losses. His decision to revenge leads him further to partner opposition party and this forges his elevation to the position of Eleniyan, the owner of men, the Capo. These obstacles raise the question if true liberation and freedom from the control of the ruling class is possible? This question probes the sequence leading to the death of Nino. Nino is conscious of his lifestyle and is willing to break free but is offered an alternative, the Eleniyan of Isale Eko, a position he desires to use and impact lives in Isale Eko as seen in the transformation of the trio. His transformative longing brings the working class closer to him, reduces some class division and breeds fear among the political class thus leading to his gruesome murder.

His murder and betrayal reveal how the political class manipulates street gangs for their personal gain and discards them at will afterwards. Alaye Bam Bam motivates Nino to become the new Eleniyan and pitches his potential over that of Kazeem but later takes Kazeem to Olorugun as his choice for Eleniyan. In the end, Nino is killed by Kazeem to assume the role of Eleniyan.



Plate 28: Alaye Bam Bam asks Kazeem to give them a few minutes of privacy



Plate 29: Alaye Bam Bam pitches Nino's potential ahead of Kazeem

Political Corruption, Relative Deprivation & Violence

Marxist film theory opines that chaos and violence are reaction to an action. It links the reaction to the concept of Relative Deprivation Theory where one becomes violent as a result of deprivation. For instance, Ify in his subconscious is working with Kazeem to attain his music career goals while Obalola is secretly saving up funds for his planned escape from the crime world curated by the ruling class but their failure to attain these desires and consequent losses, evoke a reaction which challenges the very foundation of Isale Eko.

OBALOLA: ...that was my dream too but Nino says no, he says I have head for books. That I should become an Economist like the CBN Governor or a writer like Wole Soyinka

TENI: I like that. You can be the CBN Governor and I will be the Chief Magistrate

IFY: And I will be the biggest musician

OBALOLA: You ke?

IFY: So, wait o, so, you don't believe me? I will even be bigger than Tuface

TENI: Yes, indeed

GIFT: And I will be his manager o''



Plate 30: Ify, Gift, Teni and Obalola sharing their dreams by the beach of Isale Eko



Plate 31: ECU of where Obalola saves his money in his one room apartment for his planned escape

Marxist film theory argues that the capitalists enjoy the chaos they create because this chaos provide platforms for control of the system and personal financial gains. In the film, crime limits access to legitimate opportunities for survival as seen in the exploitation of Obalola and friends. The film exposes how politicians manipulate the people, weaponize poverty and in the end, pretend to represent the people with a display of limited opportunities or limited access to good governance. These limitations motivate crime and violence as the struggle for survival becomes the drive force pushing



the youths in Isale Eko into crime. This component explores the theme of fate against will to reveal how the gang members are nothing more than a pawn in the game of politicians.

Conclusion

Gangs of Lagos (2023) is a film that showcases the unimaginable inequalities within Nigerian society as visible in the character of Obalola and how the deprivations of unique opportunities by the ruling class can breed violence and chaos amongst the masses. The filmmaker explores the themes of fate against freewill highlighting the extent capitalism can ruin a nation. Using Marxist film theory to interrogate the film text, this study presents *Gangs of Lagos* (2023) as a social commentary on the Nigeria's class struggle and crime culture motivated by the political class and dysfunctional system of governance. The film follows the direction of relative deprivation theory where the actions of the subjects including their involvement in crime is a reaction to deprivation rather than a choice and this calls for a systemic change in the Nigerian society.

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REIMAGINING NOLLYWOOD THROUGH THE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Victor o. Ekieno

&

Friday Nwafor

The Department of Film and Multimedia
Faculty of Communication & Media Studies
University of Port Harcourt

Abstract

It is no more arguable that social media platforms have become significant sites for creative production, employment generation, and the circulation of popular culture, which redefine the operational boundaries of Nollywood in this digital era. Increasingly, these platforms function as extensions of the Nigerian film industry by enabling new forms of performance, narrative styles, audience perceptions and stardom beyond conventional cinematic platforms. With minimal technological requirements such as a smartphone and internet access, social media facilitates broader participation across social, educational, ethnic, and religious divides, thereby increasing visibility within the creative industry. Anchored on Convergence Theory, this article conceptually examines the integration of Nollywood's performance styles and celebrity culture into social media environments. Its methodology is qualitative by engaging critical discourses and existing literature to explore the implications of this media convergence for the creative economy, wealth generation, and cultural circulation. This study argues that social media neither operates as a parallel nor competing medium, but as a reimagining site through which Nollywood sustains its socio-cultural and economic relevance, accessibility, and global reach. It recommends social media as a strategic platform for creative visibility in this era of global village and while at same time contributing to scholarship in Nollywood and digital media by foregrounding convergence as a key theoretical framework for understanding the industry's continued transformation.

Keywords: Reimagining, Nollywood, & Social Media

Introduction

Nollywood has, since its emergence, occupied a distinctive position within global cinema as a film industry largely defined by adaptability, speed, and cultural affinity to its African audience. Scholars widely acknowledge that the Nigerian film industry grew not through state-sponsored institutional policies but through entrepreneurial improvisations and grassroots distribution networks, particularly the home-video culture that flourished in urban markets (Haynes, 2016). The trailers during this period were exciting and fast-paced with a distinct marketer's and distributors' addresses such 51 Iweka Road, Onitsha, 1/3 Pound Road, Aba, etc., which were iconic addresses in those formative years of Nollywood. This historical foundation situates Nollywood as an industry not only accustomed to informal modes of distribution and marketing but also





to future technological innovations. Its narratives styles, aesthetics, and production practices, have consistently reflected everyday Nigerian realities, making it both a cultural exchange corridor and a socio-economic force. As Adejunmobi (2015) clearly argues, Nollywood's strength lies in its ability to absorb change without losing its cultural specificity, a quality that becomes especially relevant in understanding its present engagement with social media platforms.

The rise of social media represents one of the most profound transformations in contemporary media culture, redefining how content is produced, distributed, and consumed across the globe. Unlike earlier broadcast systems characterized by linear communication and centralized control, social media operates through networked participation, immediacy, and algorithmic visibility. Jenkins' (2006) concept of convergence culture provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding this shift, emphasizing the flow of content across multiple platforms and the growing agency of audiences within media domain. In this convergent environment, film industries are no longer confined to cinemas or television screens but extend into digital spaces where production, promotion, and reception occur simultaneously. This transformation has implications not only for global cinema but also for regional industries such as seen in Nollywood today, whose audiences are increasingly mobile, interactive, and digitally connected.

According to a study by Okorie and Ojebuyi (2021), in Nigeria today, the rapid expansion of mobile technology and affordable internet access, has accelerated social media adoption, particularly among young people. Other studies on Nigerian media consumption also reveal that platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, have become integral to everyday communication, entertainment, and self-expression. These platforms function as cultural spaces where identities are performed, negotiated, and circulated beyond geographical boundaries. For Nollywood, this digital shift has created new opportunities for visibility and engagement, allowing filmmakers and performers to reach audiences without relying solely on traditional distribution channels. Social media thus, emerges not as an external platform but as a continuation of Nollywood's long-standing reliance on accessible and audience-driven modes of circulation. Beyond promotion, social media has increasingly become a site of filmic creativity in its own right, hosting short-form narratives that draw from established Nollywood conventions. Scholars like Nwabueze & Ebeze (2020), note that digital content produced on these platforms often replicates the moral didacticism, humor, melodrama, and character typologies associated with Nigerian video. Popular Nigerian skit makers such as Untouchable, Sabinus, Mark Angel, Mr. Macaroni, and Broda Shaggi, exemplify this continuity as their performances frequently replicate





Nollywood's narrative exaggeration, social satire, and emphasis on recognizable everyday scenarios. Their prominence illustrates how social media has become a training ground and performance space that feeds directly into Nollywood's broader cultural economy.

From a scholarly perspective, the emergence of skit making cannot be dismissed as trivial or peripheral to film studies. Rather, it represents a reconfiguration of cinematic expression within constrained temporal and technological limits. Based on this view, Lobato (2019) argues that digital platforms encourage new forms of audiovisual storytelling shaped by platform affordances, audience metrics, and algorithmic circulation. In Nigeria, these conditions have given rise to compressed narratives that prioritize immediacy and relatability over formal polish, yet remain deeply cinematic in intent and structure. From the above viewpoint, social media skits therefore operate as micro-films that extend Nollywood's storytelling traditions into new digital formats. The convergence of Nollywood and social media has also altered traditional pathways to stardom and professional recognition. Historically, visibility within Nollywood was brought to limelight by producers, marketers, and television exposure. Today, performers can cultivate audiences independently through consistent online presence, strategic content production, and audience interaction. To this effect, Baym (2018) observes that creative labour in the digital age increasingly depends on sustained relational work with audiences, a reality evident in how Nigerian skit makers build loyal followings before transitioning into mainstream film roles. This shift underscores how social media functions as an alternative talent corridor within Nollywood's evolving structure.

Economically, scholars also highlight social media's role in expanding the creative economy by enabling monetization through advertising, brand endorsements, and cross-platform visibility. While Nollywood has long been recognized as a major employer of labour within Nigeria's informal sector, social media has intensified this function by lowering entry barriers and decentralizing production, according to (Haynes, 2016). This development aligns perfectly with broader global studies on digital creative industries, which emphasize the capacity of platforms to facilitate entrepreneurship while simultaneously producing new forms of precarity, concludes (van Dijck et al., 2018). Consequently, one can summarize that in the Nigerian context, this dual role reflects both opportunity and vulnerability within the expanding digital film culture.

At the same time, critical scholarship warns against uncritical celebration of social media as a purely democratizing force. Algorithms privilege certain content types, engagement metrics often override artistic considerations, and platform policies shape what is visible or suppressed (van Dijck et al., 2018). For Nollywood practitioners





operating in social media spaces, these dynamics raise concerns about sustainability, creative autonomy, and the long-term preservation of artistic standards. Nevertheless, these challenges coexist with undeniable gains in reach, participation, and cultural circulation. Culturally, the interaction between Nollywood and social media reflects an ongoing negotiation of authenticity and professionalism. Nollywood has historically blurred boundaries between the formal and informal, the professional and the popular. Therefore, Adejunmobi (2015) notes that this hybridity is central to its appeal and resilience. Social media intensifies this hybridity by collapsing distinctions between audience and performer, rehearsal and exhibition, production and reception. In doing so, it reshapes how Nigerian cinema is imagined and experienced in everyday life. In conclusion, the rise of social media invites a reimagining of Nollywood as a multi-platform/cultural formation rather than a cinema-bound industry. Social media platforms now operate as spaces of performance, distribution, critique, and community building, reinforcing Nollywood's capacity for reinvention. Situating this development within scholarly discourse allows for a deeper understanding of how Nigerian screen culture continues to evolve through convergence, adaptability, and sustained engagement with changing media environments.

An Overview of Convergence Theory

This study is anchored on Convergence Theory, which provides a robust framework for understanding the intersection of traditional media forms and digital platforms. Convergence Theory, as articulated by Henry Jenkins, refers to the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between media industries, and the migratory behavior of audiences who seek entertainment experiences across different spaces (Jenkins, 2006). Rather than viewing media change as a process of replacement, convergence emphasizes integration, interaction, and continuity. Within film and media studies, convergence has been used to explain how cinema, television, and digital media increasingly overlap in terms of production, distribution, and reception. The theory challenges medium-specific thinking by arguing that contemporary media cultures are defined by hybridity and cross-platform circulation. This perspective is particularly useful for Nollywood, an industry whose history is marked by constant negotiation with evolving technologies and informal distribution systems. Applying Convergence Theory to Nollywood allows for an understanding of social media as an extension of the industry's cinematic ecosystem. Nollywood films, actors, narratives, and performance styles circulate fluidly between cinema screens, television, streaming services, and social media platforms. Social media skits, promotional clips, behind-the-scenes footage, and audience commentary all form part of a convergent media environment in which boundaries between production and reception are increasingly blurred.





Convergence Theory also foregrounds the role of audiences as active participants rather than passive consumers. In social media spaces, audiences engage with Nollywood-related content through likes, comments, shares, and remixes, contributing to the circulation and interpretation of narratives. This participatory dimension reinforces Nollywood's traditional closeness to its audience while reconfiguring it through digital interaction. As Jenkins (2006) argues, convergence culture thrives on collective intelligence and shared meaning-making, processes that are highly visible in Nollywood's online presence. Economically, convergence helps explain how creative labour and value creation are redistributed across platforms. Nollywood practitioners increasingly operate across multiple media spaces, combining film roles with digital content creation, brand collaborations, and online engagement. This aligns with Convergence Theory's emphasis on industrial cooperation and cross-media monetization, highlighting how social media expands Nollywood's economic possibilities without severing ties to its cinematic roots. Significantly, Convergence Theory provides a conceptual lens through which Nollywood's engagement with social media can be understood not as a departure from film culture but as its re-imagination within a digital environment. By emphasizing continuity, hybridity, and audience participation, the theory supports the central argument of this study: that social media functions as a structural and cultural extension of Nollywood in the contemporary media landscape.

Conceptual Perspective: Social Media as an Extension of Nollywood

Social media can be conceptually understood as an extension of Nollywood in the sense that it expands the industry's creative, economic, and cultural operations beyond conventional film production and exhibition spaces. Rather than functioning merely as ancillary promotional tools, social media platforms increasingly operate as sites where Nollywood's narrative styles, performance traditions, and modes of audience engagement are reproduced and reimagined. This extension is evident in the migration of film actors, comedians, and storytellers into digital spaces where short-form content, skits, and episodic narratives circulate alongside mainstream films. Conceptually, this development reflects a shift from medium-bound cinema to a dispersed screen culture in which Nollywood exists across multiple, interconnected platforms. Scholars of digital entertainment argue that social media has given rise to what Cunningham and Craig (2019) describe as "social media entertainment," a hybrid cultural form that blends professional media logics with platform-based creativity.

Within this framework, creators operate simultaneously as performers, producers, and distributors, often outside traditional industrial hierarchies. Applied to Nollywood, this perspective helps explain how social media extends the industry's informal





production culture by enabling creators to bypass established gatekeepers while still drawing from recognizable cinematic conventions. The accessibility of social media aligns with Nollywood's historical emphasis on speed, familiarity, and audience proximity, reinforcing continuity rather than rupture in its creative evolution. From a global media perspective, social media platforms function as cultural infrastructures that reshape how local industries circulate content transnationally. Miller et al. (2016) emphasize that social media should be understood not simply as technologies but as social systems embedded in everyday life, shaping identity, creativity, and economic practice. In the Nigerian context, this embeddedness allows Nollywood-related content to move fluidly across national and diasporic audiences, extending the industry's reach beyond physical cinemas and national borders. Social media thus becomes a conceptual bridge between local storytelling traditions and global visibility, positioning Nollywood within broader digital cultural flows.

Furthermore, social media's extension of Nollywood can be understood in terms of labor and visibility. Digital platforms enable emerging creators to gain recognition through consistent content production and audience engagement, often transitioning into mainstream film opportunities. This blurring of boundaries between amateur and professional practice reflects what Jedlowski (2020) identifies as a reconfiguration of African screen cultures in the digital public sphere, where informal creativity increasingly intersects with established media industries. Conceptually, Nollywood's presence on social media represents an expanded industrial space in which cinematic identity is negotiated through platform logics, audience interaction, and digital circulation. Taken together, these perspectives support the argument that social media does not exist outside Nollywood but functions as its contemporary extension. By hosting filmic performances, nurturing new talent, and expanding audience reach, social media reinforces Nollywood's adaptability and relevance in the digital age. Understanding social media in this way allows for a more integrated view of Nollywood as a multi-platform cultural industry whose boundaries continue to evolve in response to changing media environments.

Reimagining Nollywood through Social Media: A Critical Discourse

Reimagining Nollywood through social media requires moving beyond the view of digital platforms as supplementary promotional tools to understanding them as integral spaces of cinematic practice. Social media has reshaped how Nollywood stories are conceived, performed, circulated, and consumed, extending the industry's operations into everyday digital life. Through short-form videos, skits, live streams, and interactive posts, Nollywood's aesthetic and narrative sensibilities are reformatted to suit platform logics while retaining recognizable cultural codes. This development reflects what





Jenkins (2006) describes as convergence, where media content flows across platforms and audiences actively follow, interpret, and recirculate narratives within a shared cultural space. In this sense, social media enables Nollywood to exist simultaneously as cinema, performance, and digital interaction.

The reimagination of Nollywood on social media is also evident in the transformation of creative roles and production structures. On these platforms, creators often function as writers, performers, editors, and distributors, collapsing roles that were previously separated within conventional film production. This aligns with Cunningham and Craig's (2019) concept of social media entertainment, which highlights how platform-based creativity blends professional media practices with informal, creator-driven production. Applied to Nollywood, this model explains how social media expands the industry's creative boundaries by accommodating diverse forms of storytelling that may not fit traditional film formats but still draw heavily on cinematic conventions.

Furthermore, social media redefines Nollywood's relationship with its audience by intensifying participation and immediacy. Audiences no longer engage with Nollywood solely through scheduled screenings or finished films; instead, they interact continuously with creators through comments, shares, and feedback that shape content visibility and reception. Jenkins (2006) emphasizes that convergence culture thrives on participatory engagement, where meaning is co-produced by creators and audiences. In the Nollywood context, this participatory dynamic reinforces the industry's historical closeness to its audience while introducing new forms of collective interpretation and cultural negotiation.

Economically and culturally, reimagining Nollywood through social media highlights a shift toward flexible and decentralized modes of value creation. Cunningham and Craig (2019) note that social media entertainment enables creators to monetize visibility through multiple streams, including advertising, sponsorships, and cross-platform opportunities. For Nollywood, this means that social media functions as an expanded industrial space where creative labour, stardom, and economic opportunity are generated beyond traditional film circuits. This expansion does not replace cinema but repositions Nollywood as a multi-platform cultural industry capable of sustaining relevance in a rapidly changing media environment. Overall, reimagining Nollywood through social media underscores the industry's capacity for continuity through transformation. By operating within convergent media spaces, Nollywood extends its narratives, aesthetics, and labour practices into digital platforms that reflect contemporary modes of cultural consumption. Social media thus emerges as a critical site where





Conclusion

The study finds that social media platforms have significantly reconfigured Nollywood's production, distribution, and visibility structures by functioning as an accessible extension of the traditional film industry. Through digital convergence, social media enables rapid content circulation, audience interaction, and alternative pathways to stardom, particularly for skit makers and independent creators who operate outside formal studio systems. However, the findings also reveal structural vulnerabilities, including dependence on platform algorithms, unstable monetization systems, and regulatory constraints that affect creative autonomy and long-term sustainability. Overall, social media expands Nollywood's cultural reach while simultaneously introducing new forms of uncertainty within its creative economy.

This article concludes that social media has become an integral, though contested, space in the contemporary reimagining of Nollywood. Rather than replacing conventional film structures, social media complements and extends them by democratizing access to production and visibility. Nevertheless, this expansion is shaped by external platform regulations that challenge sustainability and professional stability for creators. For Nollywood to fully harness the potentials of social media, there is a need for strategic engagement with platform policies, institutional support mechanisms, and adaptive creative practices that balance visibility with long-term economic and cultural viability.

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SPOTLIGHT ON RIVERS STATE: GROWING A LOCAL FILM ECONOMY THROUGH FILM FESTIVALS

Kenneth Chigozie Osunwa, PhD

Hensard University, Toru Orua, Bayelsa State,
Faculty of Communication and Multimedia studies,
Department of Film and Multimedia
kencmtvph@gmail.com; +234 8033247337

Abstract

This study examines the role of film festivals in fostering the development of Rivers State's local film economy, highlighting their function as catalysts for economic growth, cultural diplomatic negotiations, social interventions, and community engagement. Drawing on theories of Cultural Economics, Festival-driven Urban Development, and Creative Industry Clusters, the study utilises a qualitative research approach, including interviews with key stakeholders, participant observation at major festivals, and analysis of festival case studies within Rivers State. The research aims to understand how festivals influence local entrepreneurship, tourism, and regional identity, as well as their potential to stimulate sustainable economic development. The findings indicate that strategic festival organisation, stakeholder collaboration, and supportive policy frameworks are critical for maximising economic and cultural benefits. The study also identifies barriers such as deficient infrastructure and limited funding, proposing targeted interventions to address these challenges. By contextualising the responsibility of festivals within Nigeria's broader creative industries, the research grades their potency as tools for regional revitalisation, cultural furtherance, and economic variegation. Based on these insights, the study recommends implementing all-encompassing strategic planning, nurture multi-sectoral partnerships, and developing supportive policies to boost festival growth, infrastructure development, and capacity-building among local filmmakers and entrepreneurs. Ultimately, the research demonstrates that well-executed film festivals can serve as energising platforms for development, cultural expression, and Nigeria's expanding creative economy.

Keywords: Rivers State, film festival, creative industries, cultural economics, policy support, social intervention.

Introduction

Film festivals are not mere red-carpet events; they are marketplaces of ideas, talent, and investing. They converge together filmmakers, producers, actors, distributors, and audiences, creating an enticing environment for cooperation. Within the last decade, film festival has shown a fast growth at all levels. This rapid growth of film festivals has created the need for diversification and improvement of festival products of each destination. Hence, in this extremely competing environment, each film festival destination desires to better and exhibit its cultural products utilising existing film festival structures or creates new attractions during the festivals to increase appeal. In





fact, the effects of cultural festivals, as noted in the international scenes, are multifarious and multilayered, inasmuch as film festivals do not only contribute to tourism experiences and economic development of a state but also it contributes to cultural development and commerce. As a result, more and more states in Nigeria want to extract positive results from film festivals in the areas of economic, cultural and social level benefits. Osunwa (2024) summaries the concept of film festival and the shift that occurred due to the influence of technology and digital age;

film festivals have long served as essential platforms for showcasing innovative cinematic works, aiding in industry networking, and boosting cultural dialogue. Traditionally held in physical venues, these festivals have supported a communal atmosphere where filmmakers and audiences gather to celebrate and critique movies. Nevertheless, with the advent of digital technology and the rise of video-on-demand services, the entire concept of film festivals is undergoing a significant transformation, allowing more participation from those who could not attend in person due to geographic, economic or physical barriers (pp.180-181)

Rivers State, located in the southern part of Nigeria, boasts a rich cultural heritage and a flourishing creative sector, abundant natural resources, and a diverse population. Despite these endowments, its economic landscape remains greatly reliant on oil and gas, leaving the state susceptible to instabilities in global commodity markets, the local film industry is underdeveloped relative to other Nigerian regions like Nollywood's hub in Lagos and Delta States; the local industry is mired by infrastructural deficits, limited funding, and inadequate platforms for exposure and collaboration. As Nigeria's economy struggles for diversification, emerging sectors such as creative industries, including film and music are gaining progressive significance for sustainable growth and development. Film festivals can serve as strategic platforms to elevate Rivers State's film industry by providing support, nurture talent, networking opportunities, and economic incentives that can arouse small and medium enterprise's (SME) growth. This article explores how leveraging festivals can nurture a vibrant, sustainable film economy in the state.

Interestingly, the Nigerian film industry, universally known as Nollywood, a leading film-producing country in Africa has become a major cultural export, contributing considerably to the national economy through employment, exports, and cultural international relations. This gap presents an opportunity for Rivers State to harness film festivals not only as cultural events with cultural pride and identity but as a main stay for economic diversification, regional development and branding for viable pathways. Inasmuch as film festivals are increasingly recognised worldwide as an influential platforms for artistic expression, they provide a space for showcasing local



narratives, nurturing talent, attracting visitors, and fostering industry networks. Therefore, for Rivers State to invest in and develop a robust film festival ecosystem means that the state is purposefully arranging itself as a notable player in Nigeria's creative economy. However, this study explores the potential of film festivals to grow Rivers State's local film economy, highlighting theoretical foundations, practical strategies, and policy recommendations.

Off course, Rivers State is not strange to festivals, between 1988 and 2014, there were government-sponsored festivals and cultural events to promote tourism, cultural heritage, and unity, such as Rivers State Festival of Arts and Culture (RIVIFEST), 1988 and 1992 at Aggrey Road, town axis of Port Harcourt; it featured different dances, music, drama, and craft exhibitions from the grass root. It was intended to promote unity and cultural pride in the state. It later became CARNIRIV, called Port Harcourt Carnival, a week long colourful event featuring parades, masquerades, music performances, dance troupes, and floats, organised periodically to promote tourism and cultural display (2008 - 2014). Regularly, Rivers State Sports Festival and Cultural Festival held to promote unity among various ethnic groups, combining sports competitions with cultural activities. These festivals were not basically for economic purposes as a result the government did not pay adequate attention to its intrinsic benefits and it has been abandoned since 12 years ago. According to Rivers State Tourism Development Agency's report, the Government of Rivers State "recognises Carniriv as its biggest tourism export. With economic interests increasingly identifying tourism as a viable alternative to the fossil fuel economy" (RSTDA, 2013).



Carniriv Centre Aggrey Road, PH

A brief history of the Port Harcourt carnival as cited in Wikipedia states that;

...from 1988, through to 2008, the idea of staging a carnival with statewide participation morphed in a number of forms- most notably in the form of RIVIFEST, until the emergence



of the current carnival. CARNIRIV: The Port Harcourt Carnival was construed and staged in 2008; and with it came the poignant allure to build a sturdy and ultimately attractive carnival brand. CARNIRIV is good for the economy of Rivers State and of Nigeria, by extension; and with a future burning bright, the direct impact on the economy, in an entirely positive way, can only be fathomed with unbridled glee (RSTD 2013).

Sam Dede, the then Director General of RSTDA say “CARNIRIV is a unifier. It does not discriminate based on religious or political beliefs. It is the carnival of the Rivers people, irrespective of political or religious leanings”(BusinessDay 2014). There is the need to reappraise the festival bearing in mind the business opportunities it creates for the state. Accordingly, a successful film festival should not “be a one-time political event rather it should be planned as an annual international cultural event with clear structure and professional management team”(Dike Cornelliuss, 08/03/2026).

According to Janiskee (1980, pp. 96–104) as cited in Sofia *et al* (2017, pp.413 - 416) defines festivals as “formal periods or programs of pleasurable activities, entertainment, or events having a festive character and publicly celebrating some concept, happening or fact”. Meanwhile, Getz (1997) gives a compact but enlightening definition of festivals as “public themed celebrations”. Saleh and Ryan (1993, pp. 289–297) state that a festival must offer “significant experiences that attract significant numbers of visitors”. These visitors will be able to affect the economy of that locality positively. The impact of cultural festivals are primarily social, which means the effects that could have resultant effect on the quality of life of local dwellers, which include economic, touristic, cultural, and state of affairs impacts, depending on the magnitude and number of visitors attracted (Fredline *et al.* 2003, pp. 23 - 37).

A brief History of Rivers State

Rivers State is an epochal and vibrant state in Nigeria, strategically located in the Niger Delta, famous for its rich cultural heritage, economic importance, and historical importance. The state is home to various ethnic groups, including the Ikwerre, Ijaw, Ogoni, Ogba, Epeye, Etche and Kalabari, each contributing specific traditions, languages, and customs. Historically, Rivers was part of the Eastern region civilisation, known for its complex trade networks, rich oral traditions, and early maritime activities.

The contemporary history of Rivers State began with the discovery of oil and natural gas reserves in the 1950s, which transformed it into Nigeria’s leading oil-producing area. This development earned Rivers the nickname "Treasure Base of the Nation," in 1992 by the then Governor, Chief Rufus Ada George, as its resources have been vital to Nigeria’s economy. The origination of Port Harcourt in 1912, ab initio as a





colonial administrative centre and later became a state capital, was named after a British Secretary of State for the Colonies Lewis Vernon Harcourt. The city grew quickly into a major industrial and commercial hub due to the thriving oil industry.

The state brags amazing infrastructural assets, including its deep seaports, Port Harcourt Wharf and Onne Port, making it a critical gateway for international trade and maritime activities in Nigeria. In addition, the state's international airport, Port Harcourt International Airport, facilitates global connectivity, supporting both economic growth and regional integration.

Despite challenges related to resource control and environmental concerns, Rivers State remains an economic powerhouse and cultural melting pot, playing a pivotal role in Nigeria's national progress. Its combination of natural resources, strategic infrastructural assets, and different ethnic groups make Rivers State a vital region in Nigeria's socio-economic landscape.

More importantly, beyond its economic significance, Rivers State boasts a colourful cultural scene, with numerous festivals, traditional practices, and artistic expressions that reflect the diverse identities of its people. Its unique blend of natural beauty, economic vitality, and cultural richness makes Rivers State a phenomenon in economic activities.

In film and creative arts, while Lagos continues to be Nigeria's film hub, Rivers State's creative scene has produced illustrious actors, musicians, and filmmakers. The state's local stories, oftentimes depict traditional lifestyle, have been integrated into bigger Nigerian narratives. The Rivers State based entertainment prospect continues to expand with festivals, music concerts, and cultural exhibitions across the 23 local area councils. Interestingly, film festivals appear in different formats, which include the various styles and structures through which film festivals are organised, and their presentation methods. Several film festivals, including Rivers International Film Festivals (RIFF), Afrik International Film Festival (AFIFF), Actors Guild of Nigeria (AGN) Rivers State Festival of Films, Garden City Short Film Festival, and Centrum Film Festival, in the state adopt hybrid formats that combine in-person events with online participants, which works with new formats like viewer-friendly scheduling, or interactive assemblage events. Whereas the traditional film festivals pertain to long-established models of hosting film screenings and associated events in physical venues, often defined by in-person attendance, panel discussions, and community engagement. It has historically served as important cultural events that showcase films, promote filmmakers, and foster people interaction. This type of festivals often provides unique experiences that can differ substantially from virtual formats, such as networking face-





to-face, attending live premieres, and partaking in the festival atmosphere. This is the focus of this article, a festival that can promote and expand the economy of Rivers State.

According to Throsby (2001) cultural industries, which include film are critical drivers of economic development that help in job creation, innovation, and branding (pp.110-136). Festivals majorly enlarge these effects by increasing visibility and market access for local creatives. Meanwhile, cultural economics is a branch of economics that studies the role of culture, such as artworks, music, film, festivals, performances and heritage sites, in economic activity and growth. Again, it examines how cultural goods and services contribute to economic development, how they yield income, create jobs, and influence social well-being. Accordingly, Rivers State can invest, encourage and develop her own festivals in order to harness the benefits inherent in cultural goods and services, which have unique attributes like intangibility, sound judgement, and emotional value. The government through her agencies can release cultural capital, which include skills, knowledge, and cultural assets that has impact to economic productivity of the state.

Florida (2002, pp.3-6) says that “cities that cultivate creative environments attract talent and investment”. In this regard, film festivals act as central points that improve the state’s cultural attractiveness, rousing economic diversification beyond traditional sectors like oil and gas, agriculture or manufacturing. Florida Richard continued to express his thoughts that “the key to economic growth lies not just in the ability to attract the creative class, but to translate that underlying advantage into creative economic outcomes in the form of new ideas, new high-tech businesses and regional growth (pp.1-2). Therefore, the state has to invest in technology to sustain creative environment. Importantly, film festivals help to define and promote regional identity, which can attract tourism and investment in such sectors. Anholt (2007) maintained that “cultural events contribute to the perception and reputation of a locality” (pp. 113-128). In this sense, cultural activities can rebrand the image of Rivers State to global community. Therefore, policies of government that support creative sectors can boost innovation, attract tourism, and enhance a state’s cultural visibility internationally.

From the perspective of Festival-Driven Urban Development theory, it suggests that cultural festivals like Rivers International Film Festival (RIFF) and other events serve as catalysts for city re-formation and economic revitalisation because festivals attract visitors, stimulate local enterprise, and encourage infrastructural improvements such as roads, venues, public spaces, electricity, hospitals, etc., transforming cities and communities into colourful cultural hubs with economic multiplier effect, as the influx of visitors increases demand for services such as hotels, restaurants, transport, film location scouting and site seeing, which in turn creates jobs and increase the state





economy. It is important to note that states or cities that host successful film festivals often experience long-term benefits, including increased property values, improved urban infrastructure, and greater global visibility specially a hybrid festivals with global picture in view. These outcomes contribute to sustainable state economic growth and cultural vitality and awakening.

Connecting these frameworks to broader economic development, cultural economics accentuates the importance of investing in creative industries and cultural assets as drivers of income, employment, and international trade. Whereas festival-driven urban development viewpoint underlines how cultural events and festivals can ignite urban restoration where the city or state has been left undeveloped, attract tourism, and foster local enterprise, signifying that culture is a strategic asset for economic growth. In the context of Rivers State, promoting Nollywood and hosting festivals like RIFF, AIFF and others can boost cultural exports, attract tourism, and generate employment, which aligns with cultural economic principles as well as it improves urban regeneration in urban centres like Port Harcourt, Obio Akpor and its environs making them attractive for both residents and visitors, thus fueling economic development.

The Role of Film Festivals in Cultural and Economic Development

- i. Film festivals serve as channels for showcasing local narratives, fostering cultural pride, and creating profitable opportunities. They attract visitors, media coverage, and industry professionals, which can lead to increased tourism and investment. For instance, the Rivers State Film Festival (RSFF) when it comes on-stream can become a state flagship event, drawing attention to local narrations and talents.
- ii. Building a Sustainable Local Film Industry: Festivals can catalyse the development of local filmmakers by making available training, networking, and funding opportunities to participants. They can also help to set up distribution and marketing channels for regional films. Strategically integrating workshops, pitch sessions, industry related panels sessions, film and production equipment markets within festivals raises capacity building and film business enlightenment.
- iii. Economic Impact of Festivals on Local Communities: Film festivals generate direct commercial benefits through ticket sales, accommodation, transportation, and feeding. The indirect economic benefits include job creation and business opportunities for artisans, vendors, and different service providers.
- iv. Policy Recommendations for Growing a Film Economy Through Festivals: It is important for the state of Rivers to develop supportive policies and funding execution mechanisms that is crucial for festival sustainability. Which include but not limited to establishment of dedicated funding and grants for festival organisers





in the state; foster collaborations among government, private sector, and educational institutions both secondary and tertiary within and around the state; promotion of digital distribution and online festivals to reach broader audiences; integrate festivals into broader state developmental strategies. However, having infrastructure investment, and capacity-building initiatives are necessary to ensure festival survival and impact.

- v. **Challenges and Opportunities:** Despite the prospects, several challenges can hinder the actualisation of festival-driven economic growth in Rivers State, including funding constraints, infrastructural deficits, and limited experience in festival management. Nevertheless, opportunities exist through public-private partnerships, regional collaborations, and digital platforms for wider outreach can surmount the challenges.

Professor Femi Shaka, speaking as a keynote speaker during Afrik International Film Festival (AIFF) in Port Harcourt, under the theme “Where Cinema Meets Culture: Catalyst for Economic Development”, he opined that “globally, film industries contribute significantly to GDP, think Hollywood, Bollywood, and increasingly, Nollywood. Nollywood as Nigeria’s second-largest employer after agriculture, provide jobs for actors, crew, transporters, marketers, hotels and more. Film generates revenue through cinema tickets, TV broadcast rights, streaming platforms, DVD sales, and ancillary products. Beyond direct earnings, it boosts tourism, hospitality, fashion industry and related sectors” (Lecture note 28 February 2026)

Amazingly, harnessing the power of film festivals allows a strategic pathway for Rivers State to grow its local film economy. By fostering cultural pride, stimulating economic activity, and enhancing visibility, festivals can serve as catalysts for sustainable development. Strategic planning, stakeholder collaboration, and policy support are essential to realise this potential and to position Rivers State as a vibrant hub for film and creative industries. In an era where cultural industries are progressively accepted as vital economic assets, Rivers State stands at a critical point. Investing in film festivals can be the magic wand, a step towards aligning the state as a prominent player in Nigeria’s thriving creative economy. To flourish in the creative age, the state has to offer the citizenry climate that satisfies the people’s social interests and lifestyle of necessity, which include film festivals and cultural activities.

Internationally, movie industries contribute reasonably to GDP. Professor F. O. Shaka speaking as a Keynote speaker during a film festival organised by Afrik International Film Festival in Port Harcourt, says “Nollywood is Nigeria’s second-largest employer after agriculture, providing jobs for actors, crew, transporters,





marketers, hotels and more. Film generates revenue through cinema tickets, TV broadcast rights, streaming platforms, DVD sales, and ancillary products. Beyond direct earnings, it boosts tourism, hospitality, fashion industry and related sectors” (2026). Rivers State can take advantage of the Nollywood’s economic benefits to promote a film culture that can help drive the economic sustainability of the state.

Surely, there are profitable prospects of the motion picture industry for economic and social development in Rivers State, which include:

1. **Economic Growth and Revenue Generation:** Rivers State can capitalise on the film industry's ability to connect with the masses by hosting local and international film productions and festivals. A well produced films can generate revenue through ticket sales, streaming and broadcast rights, bringing direct financial gains to local businesses such as hotels, restaurants, and transportation services during the production and exhibition.
2. **Job Creation and Skills Development:** Proper planning and budgeting in film related events can create employment opportunities for residents, actors, technical crew, marketing professionals, and support staff, improving local skills and reducing indolence.
3. **Infrastructure and Investment:** Investing in film infrastructure such as production studios, editing facilities, and grooming centres can position Rivers State as a regional hub for film production. These infrastructure attracts filmmakers and production establishments, leading to sustained economic activity.
4. **Promotion and Tourism:** Films made in Rivers State or showcasing its culture and locations can serve as powerful marketing tools, boosting tourism. Visitors may be attracted to film locations, festivals, and events, growing government income in the tourism sector.
5. **Leveraging Multiple Revenue Streams:** Developing local film festivals, training initiatives, and distribution outlets, Rivers State can exploit revenue streams beyond just film production.

Case Study Using : Rivers International Film Festival (RIFF)

From the maiden edition, RIFF has positioned itself as more than a celebration of cinema, it is a platform for social, economic and cultural empowerment. By featuring indigenous stories, training workshops, business round-table discourse and panel discussions with industry leaders, RIFF nurtures talent while connecting Rivers State to the global film network. Each edition of Rivers International Film Festivals generated





increased interest from filmmakers seeking fresh locations, resulting in on-location shoots that inject money directly into rural communities within the state. These activities present opportunities for public-private partnerships, investment in film villages, and policies that will propel filmmakers to choose Rivers State as their base.

According to Osunwa (2024, pp. 24-26) Rivers International Film Festival (RIFF) events in the state is usually a historic milestone as the first indigenous film festival in Rivers State, that celebrates the affluent tapestry of local culture and nurtures integration among the participants. “Through this platform, filmmakers were able to showcase their talents, and promote cultural understanding notwithstanding some challenges along the way. The festival emphasises the value of indigenous tales and set the stage for future events aimed at empowering local artists”. The last two editions rewarded the best indigenous films with a plot of land to encourage local narratives. The lands were given by RIFF’s partner, which goes to show that film festival can attract corporate sponsorship. It is therefore, necessary for the state to invest in film festival in order to tap into huge markets and opportunities film festivals bring to table.

In the context of Rivers State, having a vibrant film festival ecosystem can touch on local entrepreneurship by providing filmmakers, producers, and artists with possibility for exposure, networking, and distribution. Festivals can pull in investment from private sponsors and government bodies, creating direct economic benefits such as job creation and enlarged transaction in hospitality, transportation, and retail sectors. This influx of ingenious professionals and the consequent cultural resonance can improve the state’s overall economic hardwork and modify its income streams beyond agriculture, oil and gas exports. Moreover, by promoting local stories and talents, the state can develop a unique cultural commodity that differentiates it within Nigeria’s creative economy.

More importantly, this paper examines how film festivals, particularly the Rivers International Film Festival (RIFF), can serve as an accelerator in growing a sustainable local film economy, because Rivers State can become a booming film hub as festivals are key to unlocking this potential. This is the right time to invest in film festivals as a catalyst for economic growth, youth empowerment, and peace building mechanism in Rivers State because the youths are eager and available to explore their talents in creative industry.

The spotlight on Rivers State is not just about promoting cinema experiences, it is about establishment of legacies of good fortune, identity, and global commendation through film. An interview with some practitioners in Nollywood proved that hosting





film festival is a unique medium of economic emancipation and restoration of the state. Below are few questions and answers conducted in Port Harcourt, Rivers State:

Question: What should government of Rivers State do to grow her economy through film festival?

Answer: According to Kelvin Pepple, a filmmaker who is based in Rivers State suggests that the Rivers State government can grow its economy through film festivals by focusing on the following strategies:

...can work with filmmakers in Nollywood to produce films that highlight Rivers State's specific traditions and landscapes. They can also offer incentives, such as tax holidays or give direct funding to encourage film production in the state. More importantly, they can engage in targeted publicity and marketing efforts to advance Rivers State as a film-friendly state. However, the government through her agencies can hire or partner with influencers and media organisations to exhibit the state's attractions (Personal Interview in Port Harcourt on 03/02/2026).

Speaking further, Pepple stated some possible action plan for the government by “appointing a special adviser on entertainment to drive the rebirth of the entertainment industry and create jobs in the state. Providing infrastructural support such as film villages, comedy centres, and cultural centres and halls”.

Question: How can the Industry players in Nollywood help to improve the film festival interest in Rivers state.

Answer: Tobias Okeke speaking on this question states that industry players in Nollywood can help improve film festival’s interest in Rivers State by:

Working with Rivers State-based filmmakers to produce high-quality content, setting the state's culture and scenery. Investing in local raw talent, which include supporting local actors, directors, production managers (PM), cinematographers, producers, artistic directors, etc. through workshops, training, and mentorship programs with close supervision. Again, regularly organise film screenings, workshops, and events that bring together local communities and foster a culture of film appreciation and competition (Personal Interview in Port Harcourt, 15/02/2026).

Question: If you are the Commissioner for Tourism in Rivers State what should be your priority in making film festival and other festivals to boost the economy of the state?





Answer: George Ezeakonobi says that as a Commissioner for Tourism in Rivers State, his priority would be to create a vibrant film festival ecosystem that showcases the state's rich cultural heritage that drives economic growth by:

Developing a robust film policy, provide positive stimulus for filmmakers, streamline production processes, and ensure security for film cast and crew members working in the state. I will highlight Rivers State's unique traditions, music, art and culture through film festivals, concerts, and exhibitions. I will work with the existing Nollywood structures, associations and guilds, film schools, and international partners to co-produce films, host film and cultural events that can attract global attention towards our state. Again, I will improve venues, screening rooms, digital platforms for hybrid festivals, accommodations, and amenities for filmmakers and tourists to use for events at reduced prices (Personal Interview in Port Harcourt, 05/01/2026).

By focusing on these priorities, he added that “film festivals and other social-cultural events can become an epochal driver of economic growth and cultural exchange for Rivers State”.

Question: Is Nollywood’s current economic model sustainable, or does it need a radical shift towards digital and global markets?

Answer: Femi O. Shaka in his words “the Nollywood’s current economic model has shown remarkable resilience, thriving on production, low budgets, and a deeply connected local audience. However, it is not fully sustainable in its present form, only few filmmakers are making progress. Therefore, to secure long-term growth, Nollywood must evolve, not abandon its roots, but radically shift towards digital and global markets and make huge investment” (Unpublished Keynote Address, 28/02/2026). He listed individual filmmakers making success in Nollywood to include:

Funke Akindele's films have become money-making machines by pairing massive cinema runs with aggressive digital pushes. *Omo Ghetto: The Saga*, pulled in over ₦636 million at the Nigerian cinema and then kept earning on streaming platforms like Netflix, where it became the most-watched Naija title for 98 days. Her later releases *Battle on Buka Street*, (₦668 million) and the 2025 blockbuster, *Behind The Scenes*, have each crossed the ₦2 billion mark, with *Behind The Scenes*, becoming the first West-African film to hit that milestone and still counting. Mo Abudu (EbonyLife TV/Films): Leveraged social media to promote films like, *The Wedding Party* and *Oloture*. Partnered with Netflix for global distribution,





earning licensing fees and reaching international audiences. Kunle Afolayan (Golden Effects Pictures): Used YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter to market films like *Citation* and *Mami Wata*. Secured a Netflix original deal for *Citation*, reportedly earning millions of Naira in licensing fees alone. Expanded his audience beyond Nigeria, gaining financial returns from global streaming. Kemi Adetiba (Kemi Adetiba Visuals): Promoted *King of Boys* heavily on social media, creating buzz and anticipation as the company partnered with foreign platforms for a sequel series, *King of Boys: The Return of the King*, earning substantial revenue from the licensing deal. (Shaka, 28/02/2026)

The foregoing shows that film related events and festivals can be a cash cow to a government that is tied to only on one source of revenue. Rivers State can stand out as a shining star in Africa's film production. Again, sponsoring one film festival at a time can be a major source for economic and cultural sustainability, which will be attracting investment, creating jobs, and telling her stories to the world.

Film Festivals as a Tool for Youth Empowerment and Peace

Beyond economic benefits, film festivals can serve as a social intervention tool in Rivers State. By committing large sums of money in film festivals, the government can engage certain number of restive youths, create jobs, and foster peace. As Osunwa (2023) asserts, "film festivals can transform the Niger Delta from a region known for crude oil to one celebrated for its creative output, providing youths with meaningful employment and reducing social unrest". Social interventions programmes that should be initiated will be able to support, engage, and empower young adults in their respective communities, which will reduce urban migration within the state. These programmes aim to encourage positive development, reduce unsafe behaviours, and further friendly inclusion. Examples include forming a youth football clubs, arts initiatives such as music and film production events, etc. These activities surely help build peace, social skills, improve mental health, and encourage civic engagement among youths.

More importantly, festivals can channel youthful drive into creative expression, providing career path in film industry such as directing, acting, cinematography, editing, production management, set and pros person, and event management. It is worthy of note that if the state government can have thriving film festival ecosystem, the state can be as famous as its film culture as it is for its oil sector, creating a flourishing , peaceful, and comfortable future for her citizens. That is to say, engagement in film festivals offers them opportunities to acquire a wide range of skills, including storytelling and technical filmmaking to raise their future livelihood.





In creative empowerment, film festivals serve as a useful platform for young people to explicit their unique voices and views. By producing and distributing films, youths increase self-confidence in their abilities to convey ideas, tell stories, and influence others. This sense of empowerment inspires them to become actively involved in their respective communities, groups, and sphere of influence, and fosterage of self-esteem and leadership attributes.

Above all, film festivals enable cultural exchange and understanding to thrive as it often bring together people from different cultural, social, and geographic backgrounds and experiences. This one boost intercultural dialogue, helping young people to expand their understanding of different perspectives of life, help to challenge stereotypes, and build empathy within their sphere of influence. Likely exchanges of ideas, relationships and collaborations can break down preconception biases and help to promote a culture of respect and tolerance in the society.

It is important to note that film festivals can be used as a tool for advocacy, peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Interestingly, films created by teens and youths can highlight issues related to conflict, violence, and social injustice. Screening these narratives in film festivals inspires talking about peace and reconciliation. Youth-led films can excite groups to work towards understanding and peace, making festivals essential spaces for peacebuilding organs. In all sense of it, gives voice to marginalised, for instance people from conflict zones, minority groups, or impoverished sets of people. Bringing these youths into filmmaking production exercise and festival participation assists to advance social cohesion, equity, and a sense of belonging.

Moreover, the long-term impact of a film festival to youths are amazing as it has a lasting effects on participants especially the enthusiastic youths. It breeds a generation of socially awaken individuals who are prepared and driven to continue advocating for peace, justice, and sustainable development in their environment and beyond. Dike Cornelius says that film festivals strengthens the creative sector and reduces overdependence on traditional business (Personal Interview, 23/01,2026).

Conclusion

Film festivals invest in youths by providing purposeful avenue to express their voices, exchange ideas, build skills, and further confidence; making them effective tools for peace building in the society. Generally, film festivals inspire lasting positive change by rearing empowered, skilled, and socially conscious young greater tomorrow committed to harmony and justness. Rivers State Government, private investors, and cultural stakeholders, again, now is the time to invest in film festivals as a catalyst for economic growth, development, social intervention and peace-building advocacy. By making





available funds, infrastructure, and policy support, the state can become Nigeria's film festival headquarters, creating massive jobs, attracting tourism, and changing the state's global image from oil to creativity and entertainment haven.

The first thing that the government should do is to establish a clear vision and mission of what she wants to achieve with film festivals, thereby defining the purpose of the intended brand. This begins by articulating the vision and mission of the brand of film festival. Work out the brand's core objective. State it down in black and white if it is to promote local talent, create a platform for diverse stories, or engage specific audiences?. Document it. Assign a long-term goal(s) by identifying what it's success will look like in 5-15 years. This could include attendance numbers, sponsorship drives and achievement, or impact in the film industry. There should be a proper a marketing plan, such as setting marketing objectives, which include specifics, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals for marketing efforts. For instance, the government should try to establish the rate at which the social media following should grow, at least by 15% within six months or more; build a responsible team by identifying roles and responsibilities as these roles determine what roles are needed to manage the brand and its various aspects such as marketing, operations and sponsorship; to succeed in managing the state's film festival brand, engage volunteers who are enthusiastic and passionate about film and can help with various tasks. The study recommends as follows:

- a. **Develop a Comprehensive Brand Strategy:** Establish clear brand values, messaging, and visual identity that aligns with filmmakers and audiences alike. Regularly revisit and polish this strategy based on audience feedback.
- b. **Invest in Digital Marketing Efforts:** Try to leverage social media, content marketing, and email campaigns to improve reach and engagement. Employ analytics to monitor campaign performance and make data-driven decisions.
- c. **Enhance Event Management Practices:** Engage advanced event management software package to streamline operations and improve participant experience. Concentrate on logistics planning to ascertain every event runs smoothly and meets technical requirements.
- d. **Seek Diverse Sponsorship Opportunities:** Actively pursue partnerships with brands and companies that agrees with the festival's mission, highlighting bilateral benefits and nurture long-term working relationships.
- e. **Implement Sustainable Exercise:** Incorporate an eco-friendly initiatives into all aspects of the festival, from humanistic care to community outreach, to promote





social responsibility and attract environmentally conscious audiences. Again, strengthen professional engagement that is to initiate event programs to engage local filmmakers and communities, transforming the film festival into a platform that not only showcases films but also supports grassroots initiatives and rising natural endowment.

- f. **Prepare for Crisis Management:** Develop a crisis management plan that includes communication guidelines, risk appraisal protocols, and eventuality strategies to address potential dispute effectively. Make provision on how to manage gossips, controversial issues and even fights.

Following these recommendations, the government through her agency can fine-tune operations from time to time, raise audience engagement, and secure its place as a prima film festival, thus building an enduring inheritance in the film industry. Leverage data and feedback. Post-festival surveys to stay connected with fans and audience.

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