

Content Analysis of Programs Produced by Nollywood Particularly on Africa Magic: DSTV

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ABSTRACT

The introduction of films and cinemas into Nigeria marked an important epoch in the history of Mass communication in this country. Through films and videos, the cultural background and identity of a nation are exhibited to the outside world. Films and videos have become vital mediums used to exhibit the cultures of Nigeria to the outside world. However, there are some major concerns about the way and manner the films and video mediums are used to portray Nigerian cultures to the outside world.

This study examined how films and home videos produced in Nigeria had fared in delivering and propagating the norms and values of Nigerians to the outside world. The study examined the content of the Nigerian home videos that are beamed through DSTV to the outside world. The study used both documentary survey and content analysis to generate data used in this study.

The study found out that some local and international critics see Nigeria film industry as a poor imitation of the real thing, as productions are plagued by technical glitches. The study also found out that despite the international attention received by Nollywood films the quality of its productions and the content of its stories are issues that need to be seriously worked on. The Nigerian government and private sector organizations must intervene and provide adequate funding to facilitate the production and marketing of quality films by Nollywood so that it can equate the kind of professionalism obtained in similar industries in other parts of the world.

Keywords: Content, Programs, Nollywood, Africa Magic

INTRODUCTION

In all human societies, communication is the main stream of their existence. It is the transmission of information from a point called origin or source to another called destination or receiver (or audience). In a society, there exist a group of people who have lived together long enough to evolve common culture, norms and values. Though culture varies among societies, it gives shape and meaning to existence. It is through culture that knowledge, morals, beliefs, arts, custom, technology, etc, are shared and transmitted through the media from generation to generation. Mass media is communication in written form, broadcast, or verbal that reaches a large audience. This includes the use of television, radio, advertising, movies, the Internet, newspapers and magazines.

Mass media remain a significant force in modern culture, especially in developing nations such as Nigeria. Social scientists refer to this as a mediated culture where media reflect and create the culture. The societies and individuals are bombarded regularly with messages from so many sources which include TV, billboards, magazines, books, and internet. The mass media has made it possible with the use of movies, magazines, and news media to reach people nationally and internationally.

The introduction and development of films and cinemas mark an important epoch in the history of mass communication. It combines sound and vision to produce media contents used in communicating ideas and issues. Through films and videos, the cultural background and identity of a nation are exhibited to the outside world. Over the years, there has been a propagation of indigenous films and home videos in Nigeria.

The films and home videos have been used to exhibit the desirable aspects of Nigeria's culture internally and to the outside world. The films are exported to propagate our norms, values and traditions. They are meant to educate,

socialize and play a therapeutic role in the entertainment function of the mass media. There have been issues of concern over the role of Nigerian films and videos and the image that they have portrayed about the Nigerian culture. This paper looked at how the home videos which are the most accessible form of exhibiting Nigeria's cultural heritage has fared in delivering and propagating our norms and values to the outside world.

Aim and Objectives

Aim

The aim of this paper is to examine the content of the Nigeria home videos and do an in-depth analysis of the contents especially the ones being beamed through DSTV to the entire world.

Objectives

- To examine the contents of home videos produced by Nigerians
- To examine the theme of the home videos.
- To analyse the influence of the contents on the outside world.

Statement of the Problem

The success in home video productions and the corresponding audience interest have attracted a lot of attention to the film sector. There is no newspaper and magazine in Nigeria that does not allocate space to this singularity. So many articles have been written on the quality and beauty of the home video productions. Most of the comments on video films have always been emphasised on sex, violence, fetishism, occultism, voodoo and other negative issues. In the same vein, the production quality of these films has also been severely criticized. In spite of all these criticisms, new home video films are released regularly into the Nigerian market, thus necessitating the reason for the in-depth analysis of this study. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the question: What is the perception of Nigerians and other audiences to the themes and messages of Nigerian home video films?

THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIAN FILM INDUSTRY

The Nigerian audiences' first experience in film screening was in August 12, 1903 at the Clover Memorial Hall in Lagos (Uchegbu 1992: 48). Even though film was introduced by a European merchant, it took the combined efforts of the colonial administration and the church to sustain the industry (Ekwuazi 1987: 1). During this time, film was also used as a tool for education as evidenced in the screening of educational documentaries on farming, health and other important issues through the mobile free cinemas that would tour Nigerian villages. The content of such films can be easily discerned. The British colonialist used it for their "civilizing" mission as well as to indicate the blessedness of being colonized. The church, as their involvement in education and the media industry has shown, used films for spreading the gospel.

However, the Nigerian film has expanded and grown in leaps and bounds and became the third most popular and largest producer after Hollywood of the United States and Bollywood of India. Adesanya (1997: 15) notes that cost of production greatly hampered film production. Film makers unable to cope with cost of shooting on celluloid first turned to reversal film stock and later on, video tapes. So unlike the American and Indian film industry, the Nigerian film industry popularly called Nollywood uses the video cassette format and recently the Video Compact Disc (VCD). As a consequence, the films are not shown in Cinema houses since they are shot straight into video tapes, replicated and sold for home viewing hence the term home videos. It is this ingenuity that has changed the face of the Nigerian film industry.

Nollywood films are popular in Nigeria because they have indigenous content and address issues relevant to the mass audience. Through an amalgamation of Nigerian narrative techniques (African storylines) and Western technology, these films document re-create socio political and cultural events that occurred within and beyond the country's borders.

Video films are not only popular in native Nigeria and other African countries, but in less than twenty years they have attracted the attention of many media practitioners, film festivals like Cannes, and some American and European universities.

In fact, DSTV (Digital Satellite Television), a digital satellite service in Africa, features “Africa Magic” (Channel 112, 114, 115, 117, and 118), these are channels devoted to Nollywood films and some other West African movies from countries like Ghana, Togo, Benin Republic etc.

DSTV (DIGITAL SATELLITE TELEVISION)

DSTV is Multi Choice’s multi-channel digital satellite TV service in Africa, launched in 1995. It operates from two satellites over Africa, broadcasting on Ku band via Eutelsat W7 and Intelsat 7, which only requires a small satellite dish. It was launched in Nigeria in 1996 as a joint venture between Multi Choice Africa and Adewunmi Ogunsanya. MultiChoice Nigeria provides subscriber management services to DSTV subscribers in Nigeria and has 11 offices across the country. DSTV offers direct-to-home DTH pay TV services to customers across Africa and boasts of one of the cheapest pay TV packages in Nigeria.

There is no doubt that the country Nigeria is a very important market for Multichoice. Being Africa’s largest population and home to Nollywood, it not only offers most of the movies on Africa Magic, but also offers a ready consumer market for the direct-to-home digital satellite TV service called DSTV.

Africa Magic had grown from a channel that only broadcasts for a few hours daily in 2005 to the 24-hour channels available today, in five channels;

1. Africa Magic World (Channel 112)

This general entertainment channel was created to offer viewers varieties of African programmes. It was formerly the Magic World Channel.

2. Africa Magic (Channel 114)

This is a “family friendly” African entertainment channel that features family focused movies, series, sitcoms and documentaries. It features mainly Nollywood movies and some general entertainment programmes mostly from Nigeria.

3. Africa Magic Movies (Channel 115)

Formerly Africa Magic Plus. It is a channel for movie audience who want to celebrate the vibrant legacies and traditions of Africa. From African heritage to village life, this 24-hour dedicated movie channel tells stories that relate to Africa’s rich history and cultural legacy from traditional practices to rural society. Familiar faces from Nollywood and established African film icons usually featured here. It attempts to cater for East Africa by offering movies and general **entertainments from East African countries as well as Ghana.**

4. Africa Magic Hausa (Channel 117)

It is a channel that features movies and general entertainment in Nigeria’s Hausa language.

5. Africa Magic Yoruba (Channel 118)

It is Nigeria’s first satellite 24hours Yoruba Language movies and general entertainment channel, giving a blend of the very best of Yoruba movies, music, talk shows and lots more! In addition to the multiple of Yoruba programming, what makes the idea of a 24/7 Yoruba channel even more feasible is that Yoruba language is the native tongue of the approximately 60 million Yoruba people in West Africa. It is spoken, among other languages, in Nigeria, Benin, and Togo.

CONTENTS OF NIGERIAN FILMS ON AFRICA MAGIC ON DSTV

Nigerian home video films have edge over foreign films. The rural and urban settings in which the films are shot and the various characters as well as themes and story-lines are what the average Nigerian can easily identify with.

Nigeria Home videos tell us what our actual lifestyle is. There is too much emphasis on themes such as sex, violence, prostitution, sibling rivalry, evils of polygamy, devilish spiritualism and rituals. Media have effect on vulnerable

members of the society. Movies have the ability to reflect goings on in the society and this determines the influence they have. Some of these films reflect the Nigerian culture. Some movies are based on myths, legends, folktales and other traditional forms which bring about the synergy that is required for better message reception and influence on the larger society. (Akpabio 2004: 8)

The circumstances surrounding the development of Nigerian home video films or Nollywood, distinguishes it from those of other countries around the world in general and Africa specifically. Yoruba artistes were actually the ones who pioneered films using the home video format but they could not translate it into commercial success due to overemphasis on the Yoruba language and world view which alienated other audience members from other countries of the world.

The Igbo businessmen are the ones who helped to develop the structure on which the Nigerian film industry presently stands. The Igbo businessmen (known as marketers in the industry) have their stamp on the various productions. This is because they put down the money used in making the films. The audience determines the commercial success of any film production; their interests should be of utmost importance. It is observed that some audience love negative themes. Some audience prefer love, romance and this is becoming popular in films presented on Africa Magic.

Anyiam-Osigwe (2001) traced emphasis on negative themes by these films to marketers. Her study found out that in order to satisfy the profit orientation of these marketers, script writers, producers and directors roll out movies focusing on themes of violence, rituals, occultism and fetishism.

THEMATIC ISSUES IN NOLLYWOOD

One of the major criticisms of the Nigeria film industry is obsession with the occult world (juju, black magic, sorcery, ritual murder, witchcraft), obscenity, prostitution, kidnapping and “money worship.” Nigerian video films, along with their Ghana counterparts, have been described by Larkin (2005) as a mixture of “horror, magic and melodrama”.

There is nothing wrong with a film dealing with any of these themes, but critics frown at the fact that they reoccur, film after film. The industry seems beset with a seen-one-seen-them-all syndrome. Producers may argue that video films address the social problems plaguing society, yet many people are disturbed by their treatment of ethical and moral issues.

Though it is believed that ethical re-engineering in the larger society may be a prelude to sanitizing the video industry, he nevertheless observes that the situation does not obviate the need to urgently re-examine the ethical foundations of the video industry itself. Many of the ethnic groups in Nigeria still hold firm to their cultural ties and norms. As elsewhere in the world, deviations in behaviours are the exception rather than the rule, and this is the message home video producers should convey to the public.

The Nollywood films have come to assume an authority over the values of people lives, such that what people see in them comes to be taken not just as fictional projection of imaginative consciousness, but as the true, authentic mirror of what the society is; a veritable market of what the society represents, and much worse, of the ideal that it aspires, or must aspire, towards.” Another issue is the representation of women. Okome, a respected film academic and promoter of the Nigerian video film, has on occasions spoken on aspects of the representation and “objectification” of women in Nigerian movies. It is only in few Nigerian films that women have been portrayed relatively positively.

The impression is that women are negatively portrayed in order to appeal to the male-dominated audience (Anyanwu, 1987). In some films, women are portrayed as prostitutes, wily lovers, and witches and all manner of imaginable criminality. Some films are gender insensitive and many still abide by the traditional and conservative attitude toward women. This image of women as portrayed in Nigerian home video films cut across the country from North to South, though with differing intensity.

The difference being that the rituals and murders, which occur in Southern films, do not yet appear in Northern movies. Still, women in the Northern films are not reflected any better; they are seen as greedy, fickle minded, weak, unable to make their own marital decisions and are available for purchase by the highest bidder (Anyanwu 84-85). Nigerian movies perpetuate sex role stereotypes and reflect the patriarchal social values dominant in Nigerian society, which amounts to what Tuchman calls the “symbolic obliteration of women”

DESCRIPTION AND STYLE IN NOLLYWOOD FILMS

Nollywood draws on many cultural influences, both domestic and foreign, but it remains fundamentally distinctive (Haynes, 2005: 132). In terms of personnel, production techniques, administrative structure, and narrative elements, Nollywood is not sharing a similar value with foreign traditions. The Nigerian film industry is instead defined and sustained by Nigerians. The commercial success and fame of Nigerian films stem from their stories, which the audience finds fascinating and consonant with their expectations.

The thematic and aesthetic choices of Nollywood are determined to a large extent by the preferences of its audience, which is why the recurring themes in these films are those with broad appeal. These themes are based on subjects such as infidelity, treachery, lust, hypocrisy, armed robbery, marital problems, murder, cultism and occultism, witchcraft, polygamy and so on. The themes are indeed broad and mirror Nigerian society. To the filmmakers, therefore, Nigeria is the narrative entity and their (the filmmakers') films are the agents in this narrative act.

Due to their status among the society's primary mass media, Nigerian films are stabilizing forces that contribute to the preservation of social order. They emphasize the collective mentality of Nigerian society, educating large audiences along certain established lines: developing collective memories of the past, maintaining a distance from the frightening present, and projecting life in the future.

For these reasons, films display a range of ethical and cultural positions that are consciously portrayed by filmmakers in their stories. Nigerian films are therefore responses to the transformational needs of Nigerian society offered through the aesthetic possibilities of film technology. Though there have been several condemnations about recurrent themes such as witchcraft and the proliferation of black magic, which they find repulsive, it is also true that these themes have roots in popular cosmology. Furthermore, such themes are only employed for informative purposes to show that good always overcomes evil.

The informative elements in Nigerian films are somewhat similar to the moral and cultural belief of the Nigerian people. This parallel is consistent with Parson's sociological theory of structural—functionalism, which centres on cultural systems and the overall integration of societies (Parson, 1964: 22). The thrust of Parson's theory is that culture and the social actions of individuals, which result in social institutions, involve choices based on values and norms that are specified within the cultural system of a society.

In other words, people behave as they are expected to behave in a given situation because they have adopted the norms and values that comprise the culture of their society. Durkheim (1971: 15) also referred to this phenomenon as "morality," which ensures the stability of both the individual and the society.

The use of this approach by Nigerian filmmakers underlies the creation of films conveying the intense feeling that urbanization and industrialization have created an excessively volatile and unstable Nigerian society. Films present the crimes and tragic events that have resulted from these changes and that should be repressed through the power of the medium of film. They must use their films to rescue contemporary Nigerian society from the erosion of its value systems caused by decadence.

As a miniature of the society and as an important institution in the life of any country, the family has been a major emphasis of Nollywood films. Matters pertaining to the relationship between husband and wife, mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, children, stepsons and stepdaughters and so on have been highlighted in Nigerian films. In addition to the family emphasis, Nigerian films also highlight important contemporary social problems such as HIV and AIDS, cultism and ritual killing, armed robbery and more recently, kidnapping. Films such as 'Jenfa' written by Funke Alcindele, for instance, use the HIV scourge as their focus.

These films admonish teenagers to abstain from non-marital and unprotected sex and to avoid having multiple sexual partners to prevent this dreadful disease, which is killing many youth and exerting exponentially damaging effects on the socioeconomic fortunes of the nation. Related to AIDS is the issue of prostitution, which has led to devastating health problems for many young men and women.

Additional evils have deeply penetrated into the fabric of Nigerian society. The high level of corruption in Nigeria and the "hero" worship and recognition accorded the "wealthy" have conveyed the false idea to many youth that becoming rich through whatever means is only the way to be relevant.

The killing of humans by cultists has therefore become rampant in contemporary Nigeria. Some Nollywood films generally portray the culture of idolizing questionable or illicit wealth, a culture involving many Nigerian youth, to

be unacceptable. The problem of armed robbery is also not ignored. Filmmakers depict armed robbery as a menace that contributes to the current general insecurity in the country.

Films on rituals and armed robbery present a tragic turmoil of violence in Nigerian society.

Although Nollywood has conventionally defined its products as entertainment, the industry has also depended on topical issues for acceptance and commercial success.

However, the political themes in Nigerian films have not been very tough. The industry does not possess an exciting tradition of political filmmaking. Though it can be argued that contemporary films in Nigeria do not have any interest in shaping current political discourse and situations. It is expected that in the context of Nigeria's new democracy and the failure of the political class to establish enduring and quality rule, filmmakers would have created films that address the ills of democracy.

Indeed, we have a need for a national critical cinematic movement that attempts to influence the political agenda. Such a development would signal a shift away from the efflorescence of familiar stories and encourage a young anti-establishment audience who are already becoming impatient with conventional films. The issue of commitment and art has been discussed by literary critics. In general, artistic commitment has been viewed as a matter of orientation, with the artist perceiving socio political realities and making such perceptions available in his work to either promote the understanding and preservation of current social norms and values or to facilitate the criticism and alteration of such norms and values (Chinweizu et al., 1980; Nwoga, 1973).

By contrast, American cinema has succeeded in creating a vibrant tradition of political and social filmmaking. Their films picture a quasi-fascist America with a crumbling infrastructure under authoritarian political control (Dixon, 2000: 65) while some are devoted to social causes and justice.

Thus, despite preferences for gangster movies and thrillers, frequent themes in American films, some major Hollywood producers devote their films to front-burner political issues in a sustained and ambitious manner. Considering the depth of the socio-political misery in Nigeria, Nollywood should devote their films to condemning the inequalities and corruption in the political class that have weakened the ability of democracy to make much difference in the lives of the people. We have a need for patriotic dedication in the products of Nigerian film producers.

PRODUCTIONS OF NOLLYWOOD FILMS

Several technical deficiencies have been noted in some films produced in Nigeria by Nollywood. These can be partly attributed to a lack of competency and sophisticated equipments required for quality production. The film industry lacks certain equipments, especially cameras, which could provide sharper images, better resolution, more efficient lighting low-light situations and improved sound technology. Post-production laboratories for editing are also not generally well equipped.

Some producers also do not have the sufficient budget that can successfully aid the production of their films. It is common knowledge that good equipments including computers and software can be used to generate many special effects, produce higher resolution images, enhance colour fidelity and range, and produce digital sounds that enhance the quality of films. Low budgets cannot guarantee the purchase or rental of such equipments for the number of days required for production, let alone enable paying members of the cast. This problem has also affected how supernatural characters are depicted and presented. Photographers, due to obsolete equipment, cannot employ a great variety of optical or special effects in presenting the supernatural.

Thus, we have been witnessing amateurish presentations. Given that the esoteric world of the supernatural is a common theme in Nigerian films, filmmakers should create a unique way of presenting these phenomena to enhance their realism, perhaps by following the example of Hollywood films that deal with the same themes or with science fiction.

Mastering high-level computer-generated images (COI), which enables technicians to create characters, objects and settings that are composites of real images, can provide additional assistance. Nigerian filmmakers should look into the production of animated (cartoon) films, which has become a popular genre among children in many countries of the world.

The Nigerian film industry is controlled by the market. Unlike the film industries in some other countries, such as the US and India, where professionalism is respected and the government provides an environment in which the industry

can flourish, the Nigerian government has shown little interest in the development and improvement of Nollywood. Without much needed funding from the government and private businesses, producers have had to rely on marketers for the funding of film projects. Thus empowered, many marketers dictate to producers and contribute to production decisions. The practice of marketers influencing casting and story is now rampant in the industry. Because he who pays the piper dictates the tune, many directors do not have the courage to challenge this undue influence. -

Indeed, the production of films in Nigeria is driven primarily by the goal of marketers to recover their investments, and little consideration is given to the thematic or structural quality of the products. This accounts for the many indifferent, mediocre, poor or uneven films in circulation.

However, not all Nigerian films are of poor quality. Although many films are not thoughtfully constructed or are haphazardly produced, a few with good story lines, impressive character development, and sophisticated film techniques that enhance their quality are also available.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Despite its fame, however, some critics both local and international see the Nigerian film industry as a poor imitation of the real thing. Productions are plagued by technical glitches. The description and style of Nollywood films have also been criticised. It is observed that, despite the international attention currently received by Nollywood, the quality of its productions and the content of its stories are still issues that need to be worked on. It is seen that a few high quality films can be found in the midst of the mediocrity that generally dominates the Nigerian film industry.

The Nigerian government and the private business sector must intervene to provide funds to facilitate the production of quality films and the

development of Nollywood so that it can equate the professionalism characterizing the industry in other parts of the world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The producers should down play morally repugnant themes and produce videos that are of greater good to the larger society, videos with “good morals” and “ennobling virtues.”

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