

Nollywood Films and Bastardization of African Image

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Abstract

The study examined the emergence of Nollywood Film in Nigeria and the bastardization of African image and culture especially in the eyes of foreign viewers. The study X-rayed the concepts of films and its origination. It also mentioned different kinds of films ranging from documentary films, feature or fiction films, experimental, robotic, musical and animated or cartoon films which are depicted through drawings of animals and human forms. Cultural implications attracted focus as it is demonstrated in the acted Nollywood Films. The study is anchored on cultural Norms theory which expresses that the Mass Media often selectively presents and emphasizes certain contemporary ideas or values. That the media influences norms by reinforcing or changing them. The methodology adopted for the study is the survey method of research and the data collection method was the product of secondary data. The study however, concluded that the Nollywood Film industry have not fully reflected a true picture of African image. Based on the above, the study recommends that the film industry and the regulatory film board should ensure effective scrutiny in production of films to reduce high level of fictitious presentation and guide against extreme exaggeration in the acted films since the films audience extends to non-Nigerians and non-Africans. The film producers should understand the Nigerian cultural norms and values and thus project appropriate image for audience consumption.

Keywords: Culture, Films, Mass media, Nollywood, Foreign viewers.

Introduction

The emergence of Nollywood film industry in Nigeria brought to light several revelations about the image, culture, religion and social (ethno) characteristics imbedded among the Africans particularly the people of Nigeria. In this recent era of digital globalization, Nollywood film industry has created the awareness in the minds of people about the events that happened in the past and reoccurring of such events in recent times and as well projecting into the future. It also portrayed the ways and manner of people's relationship and their attributes. Concerning the matter of the discourse, some researchers have been able to identify that the film industry in Nigeria has done marvelously in the area of portraying the image of Africa and particularly Nigeria's image in a good light to the outside world courtesy of Nollywood films. Looking at the negative portrayal of Nigeria and African image by Nollywood films, it could be deduced that many people leaving outside the African continent and most especially those who have no connection with Africa, nor have visited Nigeria or Africa nations, views the continent as barbaric and that the people in Africa, live on trees and in caves and that they are quite uncivilized. Other people in other parts of the world perceived that Africans (the black race) are cruel in their character and conduct, they are bloodthirsty in a case of killing one another for ritual purposes, practicing cultism, rivalry among brothers and are also involved in witchcraft, charms and voodooos, hired assassins and armed robbery, promoting spiritism in the case of mermaid spirit and the likes. But the same people with such mindsets tend to pollute the minds of others from believing

that the Africans are more or less like any other person of the world that are bound to be good, bad and ugly.

It is equally believed that films (home videos) have made a very positive impact in creating a positive and resounding image for Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. Many people are of the opinion that Nollywood films as acted by the talents or actors have portrayed Nigerian as a barbaric people whose activities revolved around ritualistic and cultists practices and whose behavior is violence in nature and bad portrayal of womanhood as well as being fetish in their conduct.

Based on the above perception about the Nigerian home video films, one cannot completely assume that the Nollywood film industry have failed to project the image of Nigeria appropriately.

The characterization in the Nollywood movies actually portrayed the true essence of African nature and real virtue as it is displayed. Ekwuazu (1991) sees the film as a cultural index, a cultural reflector, a socializing agent and hence, an instrument of cultural dynamics. He further explained that film constitutes an industry whose production is directly ideological. That in essence means that, the film in this case, home videos tend to project the idea in which it wants to communicate to its audience, what it seeks to market and exactly what it wants them to understand. That as it may, is the reason why it is pertinent to perceive the Nollywood home video as an image maker for Nigeria.

In corroboration with the views above, Adenugba (2007) sees films as a popular culture and as expected, it must mirror, recreates and tell stories of the societies in which it subsists. The Nigerian film industry is not an exception in totality. Nollywood film industry have been able to project Nigeria image extensively to the world at large which as a matter of fact is the reason why the Nigerian motion picture industry is a beehive of activities for research, visit and investment.

Adenugba (2007) expressed further about the film producers all over the world as working in the same direction. That in film making, they all adopt the same method by using what is in vogue to develop their plots (messages and themes) both in language, dressing and lifestyles.

Statement of the Problem

Nollywood films as acted by the Nigerian actors and actresses have paved the way to exposition of the image and culture of the Nigerian people and the entire Africans. Most acted films displayed the hidden characteristics and cultural values of the people. The movies often portray Africans as barbaric through various nefarious activities in form of rituals, kidnapping and sacrifices made to gods. That as it may, registered a negative picture in the minds of foreign viewers of Nollywood films about Africans and Nigerian cultures. Nollywood films portrayed womanhood in a bad light by subjecting a woman as a victim of circumstance passing through hardships and unruly experiences in the case of a demise of one's spouse. Based on the aforementioned problems, this study seeks to address Nollywood films aspect of bastardizing the image of African heritage.

Concept of Films

A film also known as movies, motion picture or photoplay, is a series of still images which, when shown on a screen, creates the illusion of moving images due to the phenomenon. This optical illusion causes the audience to perceive continuous motion between separate objects views rapidly in succession.

Film is a replacement of non-moving photographic images as recorded on either flexible or non-flexible materials that when played back seems to be moving when watched on the screen. In actual sense, the images we watch on screen do not move but can only perceive as moving. The trick about images being moved is achieved through a physiological phenomenon called a "persistence of vision"

(Kajo 2014). Film is a work of visual art used to express an experience through communication of ideas, thoughts, feelings, perception through the use of moving images.

Film or movies was developed out of photography and has become a very powerful audio-visual medium of communication as expressed in arts, science, technology and social sciences (Kajo 2014). The first recorded film was called celluloid film. It was first shot and produced by Louise le Prince in 1888. Louise le Prince was a French inventor who recorded his film at 12 frames per second. The period of history in which the films started was called "Age of Silver Screen". According to Gross (2003) film refers to movies and defines it as a "series of still images that generally move past the projector or lens at 24 frames per second. Nwanne (2010) sees film as a series of motionless images projected into a screen so fast as to create in the mind of people watching the screen an impression of continuous motion. Such images are being projected by a light shining through a corresponding series of images arranged on a continuous band of flexible material. Akpabio (2007) opined that films was introduced into the country through the colonial imperialists with the agenda of propagating British ethos, norms and values. Early films in Nigeria were mostly based on documentaries and newsreel which impacted influence on the target audience. The films by the missionaries and the colonialists had the major objectives of propagating their government and religion. It is believed that the colonialists made use of films during the 2nd world war for propaganda effort to make their colonies understand their reason for war.

The audio-visual production and motion pictures was developed by the persistence of vision in the 19th century. The idea of film production began with American Hollywood in 1910 and then Bollywood of India and Nollywood of Nigeria followed suit.

There are different kinds of films according to Kajo (2014):

1. Documentary films or dramatized films which records real life situations as well as dramatized events to reflect what actually happened in times past.
2. Feature or fiction films are produced based on imagination of the producer.
3. Experimental films are otherwise known as horror films and pornographic which has a terrifying and gory sight.
4. Robotic films are produced using non-living object in form of mechanical technology.
5. Musical films are produced for entertainment and relaxation.
6. Animated or cartoon films portrayed an object depicted through drawings of animals and human form.
7. Historical films are work set in past times or period used in the context of film and television e.g historical fiction, romance and adventure films.

Culture Perspective

Many people in today's world have various notion about culture. According to Edward B. Tylor, the founder of cultural anthropology, culture is a holistic combination of learned and shared belief, values and practices that create cohesion in a group. It is dynamic, evolving based on the need of the people within it and as one culture comes into contact with another. Tylor also postulated the theory of unilinear development of human ranging from savagery, barbarism to civilization.

UNESCO (1994) defines culture as including the whole complex of distinctive, spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterizes a society or a social group. It includes not only arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs.

Culture is a universal phenomenon that is tied to norms and values, ideas and experiences. People from different continents of the world have diverse views or opinion about culture. For instance, an African believes that the culture is a preserved tradition and a way of life inherited from their ancestors or forefathers and as such, ought to be kept and practiced.

Culture as it may in African context entails the traditional dances, drumming, music and plays, indigenous food and drinks, traditional marriages, birth and death celebration as well as traditional worship. There are different cultures in the world. For instance, African culture, Western Culture, Eastern Culture, Asian Culture and American Culture.

Basically, there are five key elements of culture which includes:

Symbols - A unifying objects, items and ideas that are meaningful to the people culture.

Language - Use of dialect for communicating with one another, sharing thoughts, feelings and experience as in pains and pleasures.

Belief - Are shared among members of a given group. It is the tenets or convictions that people hold to be true. Individuals in a society have specific beliefs, but they also share collective values.

Norms - Are the specified and acceptable standard of behavior which must be obeyed. Violation of any can lead to punishment. It is a standard pattern of behavior that is accepted in any society. Norms may differ from society to society. Actually, there are two types of norms. Formal and informal norms. Formal norm depicts a written down or laid down norms in which every individual abiding in the society must adhere to. Violating the rules of the norm written down can lead to punishment. Informal norms on the other hand refers to norms that are not recorded or written down but are generally understood and followed by every individual existing within the system.

Values - Provide culturally accepted standards for moral behavior providing a road map for right and wrong, good and evil. It is also considered as good, proper and desirable, or bad, improper or undesirable. Values influences people's behavior and serve as a benchmark for evaluating the behavior of others within the society. There is often a direct relationship between norms, values, belief and language.

Characteristics of Culture

The study of culture in anthropology, several characteristics or attributes of culture have been identified as follows:

1. Socially learned culture

Culture is a natural phenomenon found in the interaction of human beings whether in society or organizations. Whenever people gather together or come together as a group, culture develops. Culture is learned from our parents, surroundings, friends and others through culture.

2. Culture is inculcated.

All animals have the ability to learning but human beings alone have considerable measure to pass on their acquired habits to their offspring and this process is known as enculturation.

3. Culture is structured.

Culture has a definite and proper structure. That is to say, it has a definite arrangement of its components and units. Hence, it traits and complexes.

4. Culture in religion.

Socio- cultural anthropologists discuss culture in religion as it affect geographical territory in which a particular culture exist. It is marked by all the characteristics embedded in a culture which includes the modes of dressing, building styles, farming and other materials manifestation.

5. Culture is adaptive.

Human beings are capable of adapting to environment of culture. The ability to adapt to practically any ecological condition makes them very unique.

6. Culture is gratifying.

Culture also satisfies the basic biological and social needs of human beings. Where it fails to fulfill human wants, are subject to change or replacement. Hence gratification reinforces, strengthens and perpetuates cultural elements.

Nollywood

According to Alamu (2010:8) Nollywood is a term coined following the style of Hollywood (referring to the United States of America film industry) and Bollywood (referring to the Indian film industry). Nollywood is a generic name for the Nigerian film industry. It grew from the rich traditional culture of Nigeria into what is now recognized as an international industry. Before the advent of Nollywood in the nineties, theatre and television stations were the medium used by the theatre artists for the display of play and dramas.

Nollywood according to Bolanriwa (2019) is a form of cultural hybridity as it is synthesis of distinct cultural identities that is not limited to religion, language, beliefs, norms and values and artefacts each of the elements, having multiple cultural influences. The fact remains that the Nollywood film industry actually began production with the first production by Kenneth Nnebue in 1992 with the film titled 'Living in Bondage'. The characters, in the movie were Ngozi Nwosu, Kanayo O. Kanayo, Kenneth Okonkwo, Bob Manuel, Francis Agu and Nnena Nwabueze.

Nollywood film was made for the viewing pleasure of Nigerians with the messages to motivate, inspire, reprove and correct some inherent traditional practices in the political, social and cultural perspectives.

The major communication tool adopted by the Nollywood film industry is the English language for the general understanding by the generality of the society. It is worth noted that Nollywood film industry, since the 1990s has churned out thousands of titles of movies and has successfully brought to limelight many talented actors and actresses in the movies world.

Nollywood film industry has equally provided employment opportunities for the Nigerian teeming youths thereby contributing to the development of the Nigerian society and hence reflecting the societal way of living. The film makers have used the medium for the projection and correction of the barbaric traditional cultures and practices that tend to bastardize the image of the country and Africa at large.

Theoretical Framework

Cultural Norms Theory

This study is basically anchored on the Cultural Norms Theory. According to Wikispace, Cultural Norms are the shared sanctioned and integrated systems of beliefs and practices that are passed down through generation and which characterized a cultural group. (Anaeto et al). Cultural Norms Theory upholds that the mass media selectively presents and emphasizes certain contemporary ideas or values. According to the theory, the mass media influences norms by reinforcing or changing them. The media has the tendency of deliberately emphasizing and reinforcing certain cultural norms such as belief, behaviours, values and perception on people through messages transmitted to the audience. However, the Cultural Norms Theory suggests that a person's behavior is usually guided by the individuals' perception of Cultural Norms while the Mass media through selective

presentation establishes audience impression of such common norms. The media have the capacity of impacting on people's lives through their messages. That corresponded with the Marshall McLuhan's idea which he proclaimed that 'the medium is the message'. In other words, media is so powerful as to transform our experiences by impacting on the audience perception ability to believe or doubt a phenomenon as well as our society.

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study was survey method because it is a technique most commonly used by the behavioural scientists and it has some obvious advantages which can be used to investigate research subjects in realistic settings. Method of data collection for the study was a product of secondary data. A number of books, published and online materials, Journal and conference papers presented at national and international conferences were used to source information about the Nollywood films and the bastardization of African culture and Nigerian image.

Conclusion

Nollywood Film industry deserves a pat on the back for their immense contribution to the promotion and development of the country through the process of socialization, entertainment, education and mobilization. Aside from the positive promotion of the African culture and its attributes, Nollywood Film has not fully reflected an appropriate image for Nigeria. A whole lot of acted movies are dominated with the portrayal of the image of the country with occultic and fetish activities of which in most cases are exaggeration.

For people living outside Nigeria or the foreigners who view Nigerian movies often conceived in their minds a negative feeling about Nigerians and Africa based on the characterization and performance in the movies. It is not good enough. It is on this notion, that the indigenous film makers should avoid over exaggeration in the acted movies but need to maintain caution in the presentation and emphasis on cultural themes to promote the image of Nigeria and Africa at large.

Recommendation

The Nigerian film producers have done a tremendous work of promoting cultural values and practices that are quite inimical to human lives. For the purpose of sanity in the Nigerian films industry,

1. The regulatory and censors board commission should ensure that every film produced in Nigeria undergo a serious scrutiny to reduce the high level fictitious materials in the production before allowing to get to the viewing audience.
2. There should be adequate understanding of Nigerian cultural norms and values as well as the expectations or needs of the audience.
3. As a matter of fact, film producers should endeavor to use film production as a medium to promote unity among Nigerians and Africans just as most films have done in propagating the rich cultural heritage of Nigeria.
4. Basically, provocative and brutality of Nigerian and African image should as a matter of necessity be guided or controlled by the film censorship board.

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