

**Navigating the Digital Landscape: Assessing Professionalism and Challenges in
Nollywood's 'Internet Film' Revolution**

By

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Abstract

The invention of the camera as a motion-picture recording device heralded the birth of film, and continuing technological advancements have since transformed filmmaking practices worldwide. As global industries adjust to emerging digital standards, Nollywood—one of Africa's most influential film cultures—faces persistent challenges in adapting to contemporary digital production and distribution trends. The growing integration of the internet as a primary platform for film circulation has intensified debates surrounding professionalism in Nollywood. This paper examines the opportunities and constraints associated with online film distribution and evaluates its implications for the industry's development. Anchored in the Diffusion of Innovations Theory and employing a qualitative research approach, the study interrogates the dynamics shaping Nollywood's engagement with digital platforms. Findings reveal that the rise of internet-based film streaming has disrupted the traditional monopolistic structures that dominated physical film marketing in Nigeria. Yet, this shift has also contributed to a surge in films perceived as substandard, potentially due to the relative openness and vulnerability of online platforms. The paper therefore recommends the adoption of more rigorous digital regulatory strategies and strengthened film censorship mechanisms to enhance professionalism and safeguard the integrity of Nollywood in the evolving digital landscape.

Keywords: Internet Film, Nollywood, Professionalism, Digital Distribution, Film Quality

Introduction

Marshall McLuhan's long-standing prediction that the world would evolve into a "global village" has become increasingly evident over the past decade, as instantaneous communication across continents is now a daily reality. Today, nearly every form of human activity is connected to the internet. Virtual meetings, online interactions, and digital exchanges occur routinely, reflecting the centrality of networked communication in contemporary society. The internet—described by Dominick as "a system that combines computers from all over the world into one big computer that you can operate from your own PC" (277)—ushered in the era of digital communication.

In the 21st century, communication technologies have advanced at unprecedented levels, with networked interactions no longer limited to computers but extended to mobile devices such as smartphones and iPads. This surge in technological innovation has fueled new practices in online communication, dissolving traditional barriers of time and space. Information in written, pictorial, audio, or video form can now be disseminated globally within seconds. As James Watson notes, cyberspace presents "new frontiers, new worlds" (236), suggesting that the internet has opened vast avenues for business and creative exploration—among the most notable being the rise of the "internet film."

By "internet film," this study refers to films distributed via online streaming platforms and digital marketplaces. Websites, channels, and social media platforms—including YouTube, Facebook, Telegram, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram—have increasingly become hubs for film marketing and distribution. Nigerian filmmakers are taking advantage of these expanding digital markets, which offer professional, experimental, and amateur creators access to potentially global audiences.

Although a substantial body of scholarship addresses Nollywood's technological evolution and patterns of digital production and consumption, the specific impact of the burgeoning "internet film" phenomenon on the professionalization of the industry remains underexplored. This study therefore, seeks to fill this gap by examining how Nollywood practitioners navigate the rapidly evolving digital landscape, the implications of adopting online distribution systems, and the direct consequences of these developments for professionalism within the industry.

Diffusion of Innovation Theory and Nollywood's "Internet Film" Revolution

It is important to note that not all ideas or innovations, be it scientific, social, humanistic or artistic, survive the test of time. While some may be accepted either at local, national or international levels, others may either enjoy partial acceptance or outright rejection by the society. In order to unravel the intricacies behind such acceptance or rejection, the diffusion of

innovation formed a research paradigm for a French sociologist, Gabriel Tarde. In the words of Kumar Abhishek, “Tarde attempted to explain why some innovations are adopted and spread throughout a society, while others are ignored” (50). He further reveals that the French researcher delved into this investigation because of many innovations that influenced socio-cultural changes he witnessed (50). His findings, even though not well specified, established the fact that people absorb new ideas or products according to their varying socioeconomic statuses.

Tarde’s insight sparked off multiple research in this area and was adopted into many science fields the most popular of which were agricultural and medical sciences. Hence, “the fundamental research paradigm for the diffusion of innovations can be traced to the Iowa study of hybrid seed corn. Bryce Ryan and Neal C. Gross ... investigated the diffusion of hybrid seed corn among Iowa farmers” (Abhishek 50). The preference of traditional corn seeds over the newly introduced hybrid seed by Iowa farmers was what informed the study. During the process of the research, findings revealed that in spite of the many advantages of the hybrid seed, its cost, especially at a time the society was undergoing economic depression, discouraged farmers from purchasing it. However, discoveries showed that the hybrid seed later came to attention when the seed promoters exploited the various media of communication, both mass and interpersonal in marketing it. It was found through this experiment that effective communication is a strong agent in the diffusion of innovation. The two researchers, Ryan and Gross, therefore identified five major stages often involved in an innovation adoption process to include awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption (Abhishek 52).

The diffusion of innovation however became widely accepted as a theory.

... after James S. Coleman, Elihu Katz, and Herbert Menzel conducted a study on the diffusion of tetracycline, a new medical drug, in 1966. The Pfizer drug company invented this successful new drug and wanted to investigate the effectiveness of their tetracycline advertisements, which were placed in medical journals. The company asked three Professors at Columbia University to find out how physicians adopted the new innovation and how mass communication influenced this adoption process. (Abhishek 52)

The above account helps in identifying a strong correlation between diffusion of innovation and communication. Apart from the earlier-mentioned researchers who foregrounded the diffusion research, Everett M. Rogers appears to be the most important name in the study of diffusion of innovation theory. Rogers was an Iowa-born researcher whose academic reputation was earned through in-depth studies he conducted on the diffusion of innovation. His published book, *Diffusion of Innovations* “helped to expand diffusion theory. The book has become the standard textbook on diffusion theory and it creates applications of diffusion theory in such fields as ... communication” (Abhishek 54). Rogers therefore defines diffusion of innovation as “the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members

of a social system. An innovation is an idea, practice or object perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption. The diffusion of innovations involves both mass media and interpersonal communication channels” (qtd. in Abhishek 54). Grade Imoh in explaining this theory further, adds that “the more individuals can practice or try out a new behavior and then see the visible effects of their action, the more they are likely to adopt the new technology or service” (164). Diffusion of innovation therefore, involves adoption and or adaptation of an idea, concept or practice.

The emerging trends in the methods of information dissemination, as well as other communications transformations taking place daily in society, can best be described as revolutionary. Dennis McQuail affirms that “the term ‘communications revolutions’, along with the term ‘information society’, has now almost come to be accepted as an objective description of our time and the type of society that is emerging” (104). In the light of technological transformations that characterize the media industry, film inclusive, analogue forms of communication have almost given way to digital formats. The mounting need to simplify life more is a major contributor to this wind of technological change blowing across human society. Describing the society as “a world of breakneck change”, Williams Sawyer adds that “two decades ago, cell phones, pagers, portable computers with communication links barely existed; now they are commonplace. Moreover, as computers and communications technology go digital, the computer, communications, consumer electronics, entertainment, and mass media industries are undergoing technological convergence” (415). This technological convergence seems to have successfully taken place on the internet. Hence, almost all media of communication, whether print as in newspapers and magazines, audio as in radio and musicals and video as in television, music videos, and film, have adopted the internet as a crucial medium for more expansive and effective communication.

The diffusion of technological innovations in the area of film production can best be described as radical. Drawing a semantic comparison between evolution and revolution, Peter Rea and David Irving state that;

... technology is an integral part of film and television production. Cameras, lenses, lights, editing machines, and even film stocks have evolved with the demands of this popular medium. Most of the technological changes have occurred gradually. But whereas evolution is gradual change, revolution is quick change, and we are currently in a technological revolution. (xiii)

These explanations regarding the concept of this theory are relevant to this study and support the earlier discussed narrative regarding Nollywood being an “innovation” that has successfully diffused into both its immediate and Diaspora societies. For instance, Nollywood’s replacement of Hollywood and Bollywood as initial providers of mainstream entertainment in Africa and the switchover from the initial analogue production to digital format are some of the proofs of the diffusion of Nollywood as an innovation. Similarly, the recent trend of online distribution that

culminated in what this study referred to as “internet film” which now complements or alternates the traditional channels of marketing, exhibition and distribution of Nollywood film, is also another sign of the diffusion of innovation not only in Nigeria but the world over. The diffusion of various innovations in Nollywood is a welcome development for an industry that desires to keep up with emerging trends in an ever-evolving global community.

As Nollywood continues to grow and expand, many trends become visible. While some exert a positive impact on the industry, some pose some negative implications. Some exert both positive and negative consequences. Barclays Ayakoroma notes some of the trends that define Nollywood. According to him, “promotion of many Igbo stars”, “projection of trained and non-Igbo artists”, “the parts or sequel syndrome”, “simultaneity or back-to-back productions”, “evolution of iconography”, “scriptwriter and plagiarism”, “alternative film market”, “piracy in the industry”, “co-productions”, “film awards” are some of the developments that continue to (re)define Nollywood since inception (97 – 107). Similarly, the transition from Igbo to English language films, an important innovation that successfully diffused in the Nollywood film business, paved the way for some trained theatre artists to join the industry.

In spite of the challenge of funding, among other production constraints, which make it difficult for Nigerian film entrepreneurs to compete favourably with their counterparts in developed countries according to global best practices, the industry has nonetheless made efforts to keep in touch with trending innovations in film production. Since the production of the first indigenous commercial video film in Nigeria, various technological transformations have taken place in the industry. It is known that the industry’s journey began with the VHS camera and was later upgraded to using the video 8 camera. Shortly after, DV camera replaced the latter. Today, the Nigerian film industry has succeeded in embracing digital film production with UltraHD camera, popularly known as 4K camera. This high-tech camera, which is of different models, is used by a number of Nollywood filmmakers in shooting films, especially those intended for cinema release. Others use various grades of Digital Single Lens Reflex (DSLR) cameras for shoots. Jacob Agba affirms that “Nigerian directors adopt new technologies as soon as they become affordable. Bulky video tape cameras give way to their digital descendants ... Editing, music and other post-production are done with common computer-based systems” (157). Izuu Nwankwo, while supporting Agba’s stance, holds that digital imaging technology has blotted the dividing line between celluloid and video film in Nollywood production (503). These emergent trends are precipitated by what Joseph Dominick terms “digital revolution” being witnessed daily in the world. Dominick describes “digital technology” as “a system that encodes information – sound, text, data, graphics, video – into a series of on – and off pulses that are usually denoted as zeros and ones. Once digitized, the information can be duplicated easily and transported at extremely low costs” (68). In the light of these innovations, methods of decoding and disseminating information continue to evolve.

Digital communication is therefore a welcome development because it eases data storage and dissemination compared to the heavyweight and at times inconveniencing experiences associated with analogue versions. In the film sector, film recording, production and distribution are now carried out with much ease. One does not need to bother about tapes as portable cameras with slot-in memory card ports have taken over. With this digital dimension, filmmaking has become relatively flexible and cheap. Apart from deleting and reshooting unsatisfactory actions or scenes on location more easily, rushes are transferred to an editing system within minutes, a process that took hours during the tape era. Again, the same memory card can be used to shoot multiple films. Although, there is occasional risk of data loss associated with memory card use on account of a virus attack, disk crash or any other form of accident, the advantages of this digital format far outweigh its potential risk. Indeed, the use of professional cine-cameras for film shoots heralded the dawn of digital filmmaking in the Nigerian film industry. Editing and other post-production activities are now equally carried out with minimal technical challenge. Furthermore, different professional editing software can be used to create special effects and other computer-generated images during production and post-production stages.

As is identifiable in many media theories, the public, which invariably constitutes the audience in any stage or screen show, is at the centre of the diffusion of innovation theory. Diffusion of innovation theory, which talks about people and their acceptance or rejection of an invention, whether tangible or intangible, suggests that public opinion or perception determines the extent to which an innovation can successfully diffuse within the society. Ayakoroma argues that evolution and consequent diffusion of various trends in Nollywood is also a result of the audience's acceptance or adoption of such innovation (85). In essence, the popularity of "internet film" can be attributed to the audience's adoption of the innovative approach to film marketing and distribution, which was viewed as an improvement on the traditional approach.

Professionalism and Challenges in Nollywood's "Internet Film" Revolution

It is important to reiterate the fact that the rise in internet use orchestrated by digital communication technology is a welcome innovation among filmmakers and the public at large. Hence, hundreds of videos, including films, are on a daily basis on various online channels. Today, downloading of films and videos is a regular activity for people who have access to the internet. A large popular filmgoers visit film exhibition and distribution sites on a daily basis. Abhishek affirms that "the rise of ... videos shared from online sources such as YouTube is changing the perception of who makes video and how and why it is viewed... shared online videos have become a major cultural phenomenon in a few years" (7). This does not exclude Nollywood films. Ignatius Chukwumah and Raphael Amalaha hold that "in manipulating technology to full commercial advantage, the marketers make use of the internet to sell Nigerian videos directly to consumers" (76). In view of the internet's commercial potential, filmmakers adopt its use in order to maximize the opportunities it presents.

Some Nollywood producers and marketers who have been producing film before the internet became popular, see digital marketing / distribution as a means of expanding or sustaining their business. Nollywood producer and former Vice President of Film and Video Producers and Marketers Association of Nigeria, FVPMAN, Emeka Igwemma in an interview with the researcher, explained that another advantage of online streaming of physically distributed Nollywood films is that the internet provides the producers an opportunity for wider reach and global visibility. Even though the internet supports their physical market, it cannot, according to him, replace the former as a good percentage of their audience who are rural dwellers lack basic knowledge and financial capability to afford internet-connected gadgets like smartphones or internet data in order to watch films (personal interview). Some other filmmakers regard the rise of 'internet film' as a viable alternative to the physical market, which, according to them, is marred by the monopolistic and bureaucratic stronghold producers / marketers. Filmmakers who belong to this category are majorly those who joined the industry at the inception of digital communication in Nigeria. Some of them claimed have undergone torturous experiences in the hands of film marketers in time past. Many independent filmmakers now opt for online marketing and distribution since it is faster, easier and far cheaper than the traditional method, which is cost intensive due to certain requirements that must be met like the design and printing of posters and DVD packs as well as other bottlenecks created by Nollywood producers / marketers in the physical film business sector,. These are some of the factors that contributed to the rise of internet film in Nigeria.

Due to the 'open gate' policy that is characteristic of the internet, the authenticity of content emanating from it is often called into question. Chinyere Okunna and Kate Omenugha reveal that the internet has continued to increase the number of unregulated sources of information, which poses serious threat to professionalism (173). This trend has created distrust among media scholars regarding internet content; hence Judy Pearson *et al* advise that since "some of the most outrageous news comes from the internet ... because many of the internet sites lack editorial control ... (one) should be skeptical of the information found on the internet" (340). The looseness with which the internet is associated with poses a big challenge to professionalism in the wake of internet film in Nigeria as it tends to encourage easy entry into filmmaking, thereby projecting Nollywood practice as an all comers affair. The Ghanaian film industry suffered similar fate as Africanus Aveh states that "the technical quality of many productions was deplorable for the industry was dominated by untrained filmmakers... this really created room for amateurish productions that dominated the video scene as these film enthusiasts developed the notion that there is no need for training in order to make films" (124). This is the bane of film practice. Most internet filmmakers see this trend more as a business venture than a vocation that has professional demands. This makes them churn out films with trite plot, poor audio and visual quality and worse of all, indecent content. A number of Nigerian films streamed on the internet are either uncensored or banned by the Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) for contravening certain production laws, according to Hubert

Odeh, former Zonal Director, NFVCB, Onitsha Zonal Office, Anambra State (personal interview). An example is *A Village in Africa* (2016), directed by Henry Mgbemele, a member of the Directors' Guild of Nigeria (DGN) and produced by Amos Onwe. The film discusses the dictatorship of African leaders as well as some heinous traditional practices like the killing of twins perpetrated in Africa before the coming of the colonial masters. The film, which is distributed via YouTube, raises serious concerns regarding professionalism, especially in the area of costuming as well as other historical, cultural and technical issues.

A Village in Africa is a historical epic that is faulted on the grounds of its wrong period or distortion of historical facts, as it were. In an attempt to justify the primitivism in the pre-colonial Amagu community where the film is set, all characters in the film go bare-chested chest including females. However, wrappers and skirts worn by married women and maidens respectively were made of contemporary fabric. This contradiction betrays the director's ploy of employing obscenity as a means of gaining viewers' patronage. Although approximation of costume is an accepted practice in a creative enterprise like filmmaking especially in extreme cases especially where original materials may have gone extinct, appropriating contemporary fabrics and using the same to cover only the lower parts of female actors' bodies is not only a contradiction but a contravention of the principles of decency and good taste which every professional filmmaker is supposed to invoke. The flagrant exposition and display of the actresses' breasts is a subtle way of promoting nudity, thereby giving the film more of a pornographic appearance than a historical tone. This is capable of causing severe damage to the image of the Nigerian, nay African society in the international community, since being an "internet film", it is accessible to an unlimited population of the global audience. Worried about the trend in the Nigerian film industry, Udoka Ihentuge avers that "a great disservice has been done the society in many Nollywood films as the wrong signals are sent out to critical viewers from outside the nation" (322). This plundering of the nation's image is heightened by the increasing number of Nollywood films with negative trajectories about the country on the internet.

One can say that the director of *A Village in Africa* is torn between historical presentation and exhibition of nudity because costume and make up which are salient visual elements of filmic expression, appear to have been abused and misused in the film. As materials of culture, costumes and make up play vital roles in setting the cultural tone of a film by defining the characters that wear them in terms of their ethnic background, class, age and gender. In fact, reality is (re)presented through efficient costuming and make-up designing which should be with recourse to the promotion of the culture of the people. Charles Nwadike laments that the hope of redeeming the cultural image of the Nigerian nation pillaged by imperialistic filmmakers which was ignited at the emergence of Nollywood seemed to have been unfortunately dashed because "the producers of this new medium engaged in unbridled denigration of indigenous Nigerian cultures through unresearched storylines, historical distortions, flagrant abuse of special effects,

gaudy visual presentation, and the penchant to ape Western filmic styles” (288 – 289). Mgbemele’s *A Village in Africa* reflects most of the mentioned flaws. Based on the perspective from which the filmmakers have presented the colonial history of the African society, the film merely reiterates the hegemonic, imperialistic and pejorative insinuation of early Eurocentric filmmakers and literary writers like D.W Griffith and Joseph Conrad who captured Africa as a Dark Continent in their works; *The Birth of a Nation* and *Heart of Darkness* respectively. Hence, the film violates a fundamental precept every indigenous filmmaker is supposed to adhere to which in James Ademola’s words, is that “no exposition of Africans to ridicule” by presenting Africa as a society that lived an atavistic lifestyle before the colonial masters intervened (241).

Another disturbing dimension to the seeming promotion of nudity in the film is its corruptive tendency. The unwarranted exhibition and display of the breasts and the entire upper body contours of the female actors through emphatic camera angles and shots objectifies the female gender, presenting her as a sex symbol. This is capable of damaging the moral life of viewers especially the young. It was observed during this study that in this day and age, internet surfing has become a regular activity among adolescents and youths as ownership of internet connected mobile phones seems to have become commonplace. The prevalence of juvenile delinquencies and other vices among young people nowadays may not be unconnected with the negative impact of internet content consumption, as such content is capable of exerting severe corruptive tendencies especially among young people and even adults. Worried about the pornographic undertone of some Nigerian films due to poor or wrong costuming, Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh points out the inherent dangers of the costuming to corrupt tendencies of some Nollywood films. According to her,

A provocative or sexy costume is bound to divert the viewer’s attention from the story of the film to unwholesome and perhaps perverted thoughts about the person of the actor or actress or even members of the female species. This would consequently galvanize the mind towards other unwholesome acts, such as rape or lesbianism. This has become the bane of the Nigerian film industry in recent times. (69)

YouTube’s distribution of Mgbemele’s *A Village in Africa*, despite its glaringly unethical content, may be for two reasons. First, it presupposes that the video distribution site had envisaged huge patronage that would follow its streaming. Secondly, YouTube, being a foreign-owned distribution platform, may have less to lose and more to gain by showing a film that presents the trajectories of a “subordinate” continent from a Eurocentric perspective. It was noticed from the viewership indicator on the channel handle that over a million people viewed the film within six months of its release. The political economy of control, domination and subjugation using modern tools of imperialism may have gone into play.

Costuming in film is a visual art meant to add to the aesthetics and overall interpretation of the story. The costume designer, in collaboration with the director, composes costumes that best define

and project the personality of each actor in relation to others by paying close attention to how the basic elements of design, like colour, texture and pattern, can be creatively manipulated to achieve emphasis, balance and contrast thus visually aiding the narrative. This fundamental principle in design is however, given minimal consideration in *A Village in Africa*. For instance, the chiefs of Amagu community are all costumed with the same fabric not minding that the duo oppose each other in most of the scenes they appear. For instance, Ichie Amaefule stern opposition to Ezemuo and Amaefule's co-chiefs' decision never to cede Amagu community to the Whiteman is not given any visual interpretation through costume selection or design. There is also no attempt to distinguish Ikenga, who is the lead warrior and strongest wrestler in Amagu, from the other young men of the village. Upon becoming the Whiteman's representative, Ikenga is further costumed in apparel made of the same fabric as that of the chiefs. Even though the change of costume suggests a change in class, the use of the same material for this purpose seems to blur the contrast that is supposed to be achieved between Ikenga's new personality as an arrogant and tyrannical paramount ruler and the chiefs, whom he constantly bullies.

A close reading of this film exposes the fact that Ikenga's oppressiveness must have been cultivated in the course of being trained by his new boss, Lord Peter. Although Lord Peter is depicted as the messiah of Amagu and other communities he invaded, a deeper interrogation of his actions reveals him as a bully and sexual molester. Instances include the manner in which he screams at Ikenga while kicking him viciously, and also the way he disguisedly fondles his maids' breasts during their respective physical exercise sessions. Although the director's major thematic preoccupation in the film is the redemption of Africa from heinous traditional practices and the archaic leadership system by the West, it is difficult for Afro-centric scholars to believe there was any positive agenda behind colonialism as evidenced by some of the actions of the "sanctimonious" Lord Peter, who represents the West in the film.

It is necessary to note here that not all Nollywood internet films raise worrisome concerns. As a matter of fact, some online distribution sites like Netflix, Showmax, IrokoTV, FilmHouse, and Nollyland are notable for streaming high quality Nollywood films and have metamorphosed into virtual cinema centres. This study observed that these distribution sites are mainly subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) platforms, which require prospective viewers to download their app through which they can subscribe for viewership on a monthly basis. Upon subscription, all films released on the platform will be accessible to subscribers until the expiration of their subscription. More or less, the sites can otherwise be regarded as an internet television, only that, unlike the physical television, in which content viewing is determined by the various channels, the viewer, on the other hand, chooses what to watch at any moment. Although some critics accuse these registered SVOD sites of attempting to establish some kind of monopoly and thereby control the film business, their insistence on quality, however, encourages professionalism. A film producer

and participant in a Focus Group Discussion conducted by the researcher recalled his experience with an online distribution site. He explained that

... these standard online film distribution platforms are very strict when it comes to content. They have a team of assessors who evaluate the quality of film you submit for streaming. They base on a number of criteria like storyline, camera quality, cinematographic display, role interpretation and many others in judging films submitted to them for consideration. Your film will be trashed if it does not meet their basic requirements. (FGD)

The discussant's explanation shows that, unlike the conventional Nollywood marketers who are mainly concerned about profit to be garnered without much recourse to quality, the SVOD platforms are insistent on quality and accept only films that meet certain criteria. Such a stringent censorship procedure in some way encourages professionalism in the industry. The researcher regards the acquisition and streaming of Genevieve Nnaji's *LionHeart* (2018) by America-owned Netflix as a big breakthrough for Nollywood being the first Nigerian film to be streamed on one of the biggest digital film markets globally. Data gathered through interviews conducted during this study supported the researcher's stand, while adding that the stride was achieved due to the film's artistic and technical quality. Some other Nollywood films like Kemi Adetiba's *King of Boys: Return of the King* (2021), Moses Inwang's *Unroyal* (2021) and Seyi Babatope's *Sanitation Day* (2021), among others, had streamed on Netflix after Nnaji's record-breaking achievement with *LionHeart*.

In essence, some Nollywood filmmakers have been working hard to curtail the earlier raised negative dimension of Nollywood's "internet films" by making efforts to stream films that raise the standard of the industry significantly. Some of the films, which are sometimes regarded as "New Nollywood films" because of their peculiar composition, are at times screened first in cinemas both in Nigeria and abroad and afterwards distributed on the Internet. Kunle's Afolanya's *The Figurine* (2008) is good example. *The Figurine*, which tells the story of two friends who encounter a mysterious effigy that gives wealth to anyone who takes it in for seven years, after which it visits such a person with misery and woes, is set in both a pre-colonial Yoruba village and contemporary Lagos. Unlike *A Village in Africa*, the priest's costume and make-up in *The Figurine* are distinctly designed to aid him in exuding an aura of a mystic, which is strikingly different from the conventional Nollywood design. The film's prologue is exemplary of the stylistic departure of new Nollywood from the conventional Nollywood in content and form. With a panoramic shot that provides some details including the passage of time between the carving of the figurine of Araromire, the goddess that brings seven years of fortune to the community named after her, and her veneration by the carver-priest, the viewer is presented a visual aesthetic dramatically different from what conventionally obtains in Yoruba and English language Nollywood epic scenes as shown in **picture 1** below:



Picture 1: The priest of Araromire venerates the figurine in *The Figurine*.

From the picture above, one notices that the figurine is neither smeared with blood nor with any other ritualistic adornment as obtains in the Yoruba cosmological films. The picture further shows the priest venerating Araromire, the goddess of wealth, upon coming to the earth as represented by the figurine. The priest communes and welcomes the goddess using mystical words and esoteric lingo unfamiliar in the Yoruba milieu of idioms and proverbs. Such an uncommon pattern of incantation and *mise-en-scene* composition gives the scene an air of superior cultural aesthetics. Right from the travelling theatre age to the modern cinema period, the Yoruba folklorist performances are laced with ensemble cultural iconicity subsumed in music and dance. Afolayan however refuses to take this religious dimension which Jonathan Haynes says has been reduced to almost a formula in Yoruba films (104). The director adopts a personal creative approach in stuffing the film with cultural motifs that convey deep meanings. Kolker states that there is a difference between the realistic and the familiar in films. According to him, “what we call realistic in film, is more often than not, only the familiar” (6). Kolker’s assertion, in essence, implies that the realistic is often mistaken for the familiar scenes, theme, storylines or approaches to filmmaking which audiences are often used to in films. To make one’s work distinguished therefore, one needs to take a unique or creative dimension to one’s realistic presentations or interpretations.

The priest of Araromire’s appearance contrasts with that of Ezemuo, the chief priest of Amagu community in *A Village in Africa* as presented in the picture below.



Picture 2: Ezemuo Addressing Amagu Chiefs in *A Village in Africa*

Ezemuo's character as shown in the above picture is given a stereotypical interpretation as obtainable in conventional Nollywood. Hence, he is costumed as a traditional priest with other body adornments that presents him within the purview of Nollywood. There is no identifiable attempt at capturing Ezemuo as a pre-colonial chief priest through costume and make up designs despite being a period film. Ezemuo's appearance is, in fact, stereotypical of chief priests and native doctors seen in both epic and contemporary conventional Nollywood films. Furthermore, Ezemuo's acting is patterned according to the mainstream Nollywood formula – high pitch vocal accompanied by exaggerated facial expressions.

Piracy is another serious challenge confronting Nollywood's internet film revolution. The fear of losing huge sums invested into film business to piracy tends to discourage prospective investors from confidently adopting the innovative opportunity the internet offers. Even though, "Nigeria has one of the highest rates of internet usage in Africa", according to Daniel Kunzler (qtd. in Jedlowski 29), producers and intending investors are skeptical about utilizing the opportunities it offers due to the high risk of piracy associated with it (Nwadigwe and Ilukwe 156). Nwadigwe and Ilukwe further observe that part of the reasons internet piracy appears to be on the rise in this digital era is due to lack of effective anti-piracy laws in Nigeria and the use of obsolete and near ineffective equipment by the Nigeria Copyright Commission (NCC) in carrying their regulatory responsibilities which makes it difficult to apprehend perpetrators or sufficiently punish culprits considering the weight of their offence (162-163). The porous nature of the internet also accounts for the proliferation of internet film sites, many of which do not have the required permission or license to stream films a challenge that significantly affects the growth of the Nigerian film industry.

Conclusion

The internet is an innovation that has successfully diffused into the society. Virtually all business, academic and personal undertakings have some form of affiliation with the internet. The Nigerian film industry like other film industries elsewhere has imbibed this emerging trend as most films produced in Nigeria today are streamed on the internet. This is a welcome development for an industry that desires to keep up with current trends in an ever evolving global community.

This study identifies certain professional issues that tend to hinder the supposed positive impact of this trend on Nollywood practice while drawing the attention of relevant stakeholders to the identified concerns while hoping that steps are taken towards providing possible solutions to the issues raised. The study while also triggering further interest in the area of “internet film” research, recommends that practitioners in the creative industry should, in addition to undergoing constant (re)training, be licensed as a way of holding them accountable as critical stakeholders in societal development. Furthermore, there should be an adoption of more technology-driven approaches by film regulatory bodies like the Nigeria Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) and the Nigeria Copyrights Commission (NCC) in carrying out their regulatory responsibilities.

Technological innovations have, no doubt, impacted the growth of the Nigerian film industry from various angles. For instance, from the VHS format, Nollywood became packaged and distributed in VCDs and, thereafter DVDs. With the introduction of internet technology and digital filmmaking, “internet films” emerged. The consequent launch of online distribution sites like YouTube, Netflix, ShowMax, IrokoTV and so on marked a shift from physical marketing and distribution to online distribution. As Nollywood continues to adopt the latest trends in digital technology, as well as adapt to its dynamics, it is expected that practitioners, as well as critical stakeholders of the industry, should navigate the digital landscape with professionalism.

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