

The Audience's Cognitive Attitude to Nollywood Films' Representation of Pre-Colonial South-East Nigeria

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Abstract

The emergence of Nollywood in 1992 sparked enthusiasm among scholars and stakeholders who consider it as a unique opportunity for Nigeria to tell her story by herself as against what has been perceived as “biased” portrayal of the continent and her people by foreign media. Apart from the external goal of ensuring a good image for the continent, there is the internal objective of enhancing positive sharing of experience and memory among the local population. However, in pursuing this latter goal, the internal audience must be taken into consideration because their perception and attitude towards such “African story told by Africans” will be key to how much impact the story will have on individuals and society. Against this background, this paper investigates the cognitive disposition of the audience in the South-East of Nigeria towards the historical representation of that region of the country in Nollywood films. Situated within the framework of the theories of uses and gratifications and selective processes, the study is designed as triangulated research combining survey and focus group discussion. Among others, findings indicate that the viewers perceive film as capable of functioning effectively as a medium for preserving and transmitting history. It concludes that since Nigerian films are perceived as genuinely communicating their history, they equally have the transmitting power that builds and conserves memories among the people. The study thus recommends, among others, that the filmmakers should endeavour to select contents that are healthy and beneficial aimed at enriching shared experiences.

Keywords: history, Nigerian film, Nollywood, memory, pre-colonial, representation, South-East Nigeria.

Background Analysis

The advent of the Nigerian modern film industry popularly referred to as “Nollywood” in 1992 has been greeted with enthusiasm by scholars and stakeholders who see it as a monumental opportunity for Nigeria (and by extension Africa) to tell her story by herself as against the “biased” representation by foreign (largely Western) media and books (Okoye, 2008; Nwosu, 2008, Ekwonchi, 2018)). In fact, representation of Africa in mass media and books has been a subject of contestation over the years, as African intellectuals accuse the West of capitalising on their privileged grip on modern instruments of representation such as films, television, books, and so on, to distort her (African) culture and history to suit their racial superiority template (Orizu, 1992; Agba, 2002, Omenugha and Itieke-Idamieba, 2018).

However, at the turn of the 20th century, the emergence of the first generation of radical and nationalistic-minded African intellectuals heralded the era of critical scrutiny of the representation of Africa by Western writers, scholars and filmmakers (Orizu, 1992; Agba, 2002; Nbeta & Ikiroma-Owiye, 2014, Omenugha and Itieke-Idamieba, 2018). It was this new attitude that brought about the quest to “retell” the African story from an “African” perspective devoid of the perceived Western racial and ideological biases (Adeotu, 2010). Little wonder many scholars saw Nollywood – the world’s second most prolific film industry after the Indian Bollywood – as another veritable opportunity to re-tell the Nigerian (African) story as a way of boosting her external image and creating a new consciousness of racial pride and self-belief in her inhabitants (Mba, 2006; Nwosu, 2008; Okoye, 2008; Akpabio, Mustapha-Lambe, 2013). However, for this objective to be attained, the target audience of such “re-telling” should be able not only to understand the “re-telling” for what it is but also perceive it as credible. Stated differently, their perception of the message should be positive in order to induce belief.

Against this background, this paper investigates the cognitive disposition of the audience in the South-East of Nigeria towards the historical representation in Nollywood films of that region of the country – where Nollywood itself began in 1992. Put differently, it aimed at understanding the audience’s judgment and reaction to these films in the context of how they represent their shared historical experience. The study was limited to those films that are set in the pre-colonial (pre-western culture) era – an epoch believed to have been much subject to misrepresentation in the media and literature (Orizu, 1992; Nbeta & Ikiroma-Owiye, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

The character of film as an “unreal” or stage-managed form of communication makes it a primarily entertainment media form as against news, textbooks, documentaries, etc. that are viewed as embodiment of real-time information and education (Bittner, 1989). Hence, film as a medium for conserving and transmitting history naturally inherits the burden of inducing credibility in the audience who might view it as a mere make-belief entertainment source. Therefore, the problem might not lie only in whether films possess contents that fulfil the role of preserver of social memory but also in how the audience members perceive and react to these contents. Do they perceive it as telling their story genuinely? This question embodies a central problem that makes this study necessary.

Purpose/Object of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the cognitive disposition of the audience in the South-East of Nigeria towards the historical representation of that region of the country in local films. More specifically, the following objectives were pursued:

1. To discover the audience's extent of exposure to Nigerian films with pre-colonial representation of the South-East Nigeria;
2. To understand the extent to which the audience views this representation as true and accurate;
3. To find out how the audience assesses the representation of Africa by Nigerian films vis-a-vis its representation by Western films?
4. To assess how the audience generally perceives the role of film in preserving and telling history.

Research Questions

Towards achieving the above objectives, the following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. To what extent is the audience exposed to Nigerian films with pre-colonial representation of the South-East of Nigeria?
2. How genuine and accurate does the audience view this representation to be?
3. How does the audience compare the manner of representation of Africa by Nigerian and Western films?
4. What is the audience's general perception of film as a medium for preserving and telling history?

Definition of Terms

Audience: A person or body of persons who consume a given media message.

Nigerian films: Cinematic films produced by Nigerians whether within or outside the shores of the country.

Nollywood: A nickname for the Nigerian film industry.

Representation: Portrayal of a person, group or thing in the media.

South-East Nigeria: One of the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria which is the primary home of the Igbo-speaking people of the country. It comprises the five states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo.

Review

An Overview of the Nigerian Film Industry, Nollywood

The Nigeria cinema and film industry dates back to the late 1960s as filmmaking business evolved with increased investments in production and distribution networks. From a historical point of view, the Nigerian film industry can be partitioned into four eras: the Colonial period (1903–1960); the Independence period (1960–1972); the Indigenization Decree period (1972–1992) and the Nollywood period (1992–date). Hence, it was in 1992 that “Nollywood” emerged as name given to the Nigerian movie industry. It is uncertain how the name originated but according to Haynes (2000), the term was coined by a foreigner and first appeared in a 2002 article by Matt Steinglass in *The New York Times*. The name imitates Hollywood just like Bollywood, which was derived from joining Bombay and Hollywood, to describe the film industry of India. Hence, Nollywood has been linked and likened to Bollywood. For instance, inherent in both film industries is the experience of nationality in the diaspora. Scholars such as Haynes (2000) and Owens-Ibie, (2005) indicated that the emergence of Nollywood was triggered by various factors, including economic factors and the need to address social conscience as well as contribute to world culture. Nollywood has provided a platform for understanding and expressing Nigerian and African cultures. Owens-Ibie, (2005) contended that the film industry of any country should promote the well-being of humanity, which is a

critical issue given the way in which movies play an ever-greater and more important role in society. He further noted that films in Nigeria are produced on comparatively low budgets but are popular and have influence and impact on lifestyles, popular opinion and culture there.

The Nigerian film industry is adjudged the most prolific in the world and the second biggest employer in Nigeria after the government (Omenugha, 2018). PwC's *Global entertainment and media outlook 2017-2021* asserted that Nigeria produces around 2,500 films a year, a figure that makes it the second biggest production hub after India. Consequently, the rising popularity of Nollywood is increasing the level of scholarship and attracting research into its genres, production, distribution and challenges within the country, region and diaspora. For instance, Haynes (2000) contends that 'the study of Nigeria video film does not fit easily into the structures of African film criticism in still another way. Studies of African film have tended to be Pan-African, for marketing as well as ideological reasons. In addition, Pearson (2001) submits that Nigeria is one of only three countries, along with India and the United States, where domestically produced movies dominate local viewing. The industry has also been able to generate and increase revenue through extensive local and international distribution of films, including promoting overseas viewership and organizing film festivals which create awareness of new films and offer access to Nollywood films.

Literature

Literature on the content of Nigerian films have shown that these films tend to mirror the experiences of the people of the nation whether contemporary (Opeyemi, 2008; Uwah, 2009) or historical (Uwah, 2009). Aspects of indigenous life commonly represented in the films include religion (Ozele, 2012), norms and morals (Bures, 2006), and political life (Abiola, 2013), among others. All these would suggest that Nigerian films have emerged as a medium for preserving the experience of the people. In other words, Nigerian films serve as a means of storing and transmitting memory.

However, literature has inquired into the correctness of the memory being documented and transmitted by the indigenous films. There has been a tendency to query the factuality of the cultural representation embodied by some of the local films with the argument that the filmmakers are sometimes misrepresenting the people whose story they purport to be telling (Opeyemi, 2008; Asogwa, Ojukwu & Ezenandu, 2012; Onoja & Ojih, 2015). It is in this regard that the filmmakers have been accused of tending to focus unduly on the negative experiences of the people (in the form of social decay) as represented by robbery, fraud, violence, prostitution, promiscuity, and other social ills (Asogwa, Onoja & Ojih, 2015; Enna, Idakwo & Akpovye, 2015) – a trend which has been argued to negatively affect the self-image of the people and their external image, as well as potentially multiplying such ills in the society (Asogwa *et al.*, 2015). In this regard, feminist criticism of Nigerian films' role in reflecting the cultural experience of the people has accused the films of reinforcing and perpetuating the patriarchal structures traditional to the society (Okunna, 1996; Duru, 2008; Ukata, 2010a; and Ukata, 2010b; Prinsloo, 2011; Adewoye, Odesanya, Abubakar & Jimoh, 2014).

An aspect of this sentiment of misrepresentation is the discourse of cultural imperialism which has seen some critics such as Akpabio *et al.*, (2013) and Nbeta & Ikiroma-Owiye, (2014) contending that western ideology has so permeated the gatekeeping process in Nigerian film industry such that the content of the films now denigrates and threatens the cultural integrity of the indigenous people. In other words, the films, rather than becoming a medium for genuine self-awareness among the people, now serve as an instrument for cultural erosion that benefits foreign nations and undermines the local people.

Importantly, the potential of Nigerian films to serve as a valuable medium for preserving and transmitting history has been underscored by literature testifying the popularity of the local films amongst local audience (Onuzulike, 2007; Okoye, 2008; Shivers, 2013). Such popularity places these films in an advantageous position to serve as an informative and educative medium through which people's experiences could be preserved and shared (Abiola, 2013).

Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory presents an appropriate theoretical framework to examine questions of “how” and “why” individuals use media like film to satisfy particular needs and desires such as the desire to tell one's story by oneself. The theory originated from a functionalist perspective on media (Luo, 2002) and as argued by Ruggiero (2000) and Weiser (2001), might be characterized by an inductive approach for developing classifications of various motivation and functions of using media. The theory was first developed in research on the effectiveness of the radio in the 1940s, essentially focusing on explaining media audiences' motivations and the attendant actions. It defines why media audiences use a particular medium and what uses the medium serves for them. Kink & Hess (2008) attempted to expand the concept and society's understanding of the uses and gratifications theory by making a distinction between gratifications obtained and gratifications sought. The scholars noted that gratifications obtained denote gratifications that media audiences actually experience through the use of a particular medium; while by contrast, gratifications sought imply those gratifications that media audience are expected to obtain from a medium before they actually come into contact with it. Research by Palmgreen & Rayburn (1979) demonstrated that gratifications obtained are better predictors of media use than gratifications sought and that if the gratifications sought by an audience are met and exceeded by a medium, recurrent use will occur. The researchers contended that understanding the gap between these two types of gratifications is essential to analyzing how diverse media audience use various media, the expectations that they bring to their media habits and the gratifications they actually obtain from their exposure to diverse media products. Particularly, Eighmey & McCord (1998) noted that the uses and gratifications theory has been successful in understanding audiences' motivations and behaviours within the context of traditional media such as film. The uses and gratifications theory of mass communication underscores the fact that audience's needs and purposes for using the media are an important factor in measuring the impact the media could have on them (Ojobor, 2002; Daramola, 2003; Baran, 2010). Thus, for film to effectively serve as a medium through which people learn and share their corporate experience, their purpose of viewing film ought to conform to this objective. Luo (2002) argued that the media provide people with the platform to actively be involved and engaged in communication by building profile groupings of shared uses and gratification. In other words, gaining knowledge through engagement and learning should form part of their purpose (gratification) for viewing films.

The emergence of Nollywood, the Nigerian modern film industry, has brought about the significance of uses and gratifications as African media players are presented with the opportunity to frame and tell the African story. The framing and telling of Africa's story in the film by Western players have been adjudged to be distorting, “biased” and not reflecting the true position of the situation on the continent (Agba, 2002). Omenugha (2005), has described African news in the British media as “spiced”. This informed the argument by some African media intellectuals such as Okoye (2008), Nwosu (2008) and Nbeta & Ikiroma-Owiye (2014) that Africa has to actively use and engage the media to mobilize the audience, reshape their perception and re-tell the African story. Omenugha and Itieke-Idamieba (2018) suggested that

“the new media can provide platform for Africans to share ideas, experiences and collectively work together for more positive reports and representations of Africa’s concerns” (p. 97) The Nollywood film industry presents the chance to attain this objective for the continent as has been argued by Mba, (2006). Moreover, earlier studies like LaRose, Mastro & Eastin (2001), Leung, (2001) and Flanagin, (2005), have applied the uses and gratifications theoretical framework to new media which is providing a platform for media audiences to select and be in control of media contents they consume. Ruggiero (2000) observed that with technological advancement and adoption of the new media, such as virtual worlds, important new research from the uses and gratifications perspective is emerging. New media afford the opportunity for media users to engage and collaborate with one another; including being able to “tell” their stories in form of content creation. To generate, create and disseminate media content, new media empower users to intentionally select a certain medium and message source that best fits their personal needs based on certain reasons and motivation. Nollywood is very well able to use these new tools, given its fairly recent history.

Theory of Selection Processes

Similarly, the theory of selection processes – selective exposure (attention), selective retention (memory) and selective perception (evaluation) – equally helps to conceptualise the process through which films could serve in preserving and transmitting memory among a people. Although these processes had emerged from a political communication background, they are also of research value for processes in non-political contexts (Sears & Freedman, 1967).

Selective exposure helps to explain the idea that people’s interests and opinions influence the information or medium to which they attend. It argues that people are only open to messages or medium they want to receive, particularly because of the gratification they derive from the message or use of medium. Within political communication, selective exposure is sometimes used synonymously with selective attention. For the field of cognitive psychology, selective attention has a slight different meaning. It denotes the idea that people hear only what they want to hear. However, recent research like Holbrook, Berent, Krosnick, Visser & Boninger (2005) discusses the concept of opinion-motivated selective exposure which this study finds relevant in the discourse of audience cognitive attitude to the Nollywood films. Opinion-motivated selective exposure occurs under conditions as listed below:

1. Firstly, the audience must be committed to their view for this form of selective exposure to occur. It argues that the more confident a person is about his or her opinion, the less likely he or she is to exercise selective exposure. Hence, confidence has an opposite effect here.
2. Secondly, to the extent that a media audience engages in selective exposure, its effect is regulated by various environmental factors. For instance, environments in which people feel threatened or which place limits on their ability to access information produce stronger selective exposure effects.
3. Thirdly, there are certain conditions under which people will seek out opinion-challenging information. For instance, people who expect that they will have to defend their opinion often seek other viewpoints prior to debate.

Selective retention (memory) asserts that people are more likely to retain information the more personal importance they attach to it. This selective process contends that people exercise effort seeking out information or using a particular medium which they deem important and gratifying (Sears & Freedman, 1967). This effect is largely a result of interest-motivated selective exposure and not necessarily influenced by opinions. Hence, selective retention

(memory) helps to explain the idea that people would devote significant cognitive resources to achieve results on a matter of their interest.

Selective perception (evaluation) refers to the idea that people will perceive and interpret opinions or viewpoint the way they want to see them and in a manner which is consistent with their pre-existing beliefs. Sears & Freedman (1967) noted that this process occurs in two ways. Firstly, people fail to notice, or they misperceive, information that does not match their views. For instance, people tend to think that the views held by another mirror their own and will misinterpret contrary position rather than updating their views. Secondly, people frequently accept positions that support their opinions without hesitation but will scrutinize view that challenges their position carefully; including critiquing the approach, analysis as well as interrogating interpretations.

These selective processes provide means by which individuals' pre-existing values form their use of information within the society. For instance, in engaging the media for information, people tend to be more knowledgeable about personal significant topics than about topics that do not interest them, as well as inclined to know more of the evidence supporting their opinions than they know about other perspectives. The theory contends that there are two significant factors that motivate selective processing namely;

1. The complexity of the information environment. This view notes that people do not have the time or the cognitive ability to consider each and every side of an issue and, ultimately, must be selective in choosing information; however incomplete, that addresses the information need at hand.
2. The individual's experience. A negative emotional reaction denotes cognitive dissonance and could be in form of information that conflicts with existing opinions. Therefore, this point holds that people naturally seek to minimize dissonance by pursuing opinion reinforcement and finding fault with opinion-challenging information.

Against the foregoing, this theory underscores the role of the audience's cognitive disposition in shaping their manner of attentiveness, retentiveness and perception of messages. In other words, the human mind has a way of selecting what to pay attention to, what to retain, and how to perceive (interpret) such experience (Ojobor, 2002). Thus, for the audience of Nigerian films to benefit from the historical value of films, their cognitive disposition should be such that they "choose" to pay attention to historical content of films, retain such content and interpret it as a genuine representation of their corporate experience.

It is in this regard that there is a gap in literature related to the role of Nigerian films in preserving and transmitting memory. Existing studies as reviewed above have failed to holistically inquire into the cognitive disposition of the indigenous people of Nigeria vis-a-vis the historical content of films they view. Stated differently, inquiries did not focus on how the audiences perceive and react to this content – an important variable in the extent such content becomes of any value to individuals and the society as whole.

Methodology

The research is designed as a mixed method study of survey and focus group discussion (FGD). The area of study was the South-East Nigeria, one of the six geopolitical zones of the country, comprising five states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. The study population was the residents of the South-East Nigeria numbering 16, 381, 721, according to official census

result (National Bureau of Statistics, 2007). A sample size of 400 was purposively selected applying the formula suggested by Taro Yamane (1967). The sample selection for the survey was done via multi-stage approach covering state level, senatorial zone level, local government level, town level and household level. For the FGD, the sampling procedure was non-probability (judgment sampling) to enable the researchers to determine the demographics of the respondents; hence, two discussion groups of six respondents each were selected. Each one comprised three males and three females, and three youths and three older people. The researchers equally ensured balance in the levels of education and kinds of profession in each of the discussion groups. A structured questionnaire and an FGD guide were respectively employed for data collection in the survey and FGD. Analysis was both quantitative and qualitative as necessitated by the triangulated nature of the study design.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Preliminary data. Out of the 400 questionnaire copies distributed in May 2017, 382 representing 95.5% were recovered while 18 representing 4.5% were not. Hence, the response rate stood at 95.5%. The high return rate of questionnaires was possible because the researchers had paid detailed attention in engaging the respondents on the purpose of the studies; assuring them of anonymity and patiently waited for them to read and answer the questionnaires before collecting back from them. Nevertheless, this approach was rigorous and time consuming as it took researchers longer days to administer and collect the research instrument. Also, the demographic analysis indicated that 59% of the respondents are male, while 41% are female. Thus, there was 18% difference between the number of males and the number of females. In addition, 5.1% of the respondents were between 18 and 29 years, 75.4% were between 30 and 39, 14.7% were between 40 and 49, while 4.8% were 50 and above. Hence, the age bracket 30 – 39 years accounted for the majority of the respondents. Further, 9.7% of the respondents had First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) as their highest educational qualification; 31.1% had Senior School Certificate (SSCE) or its equivalent; 10.7% had Ordinary National Diploma (OND) or Pre-degree diploma; 20.9% had university degrees or Higher National Diploma (HND), while 7.1% had postgraduate qualifications. Analysis also indicated that that 22.5% of the respondents were government workers; 6.6% were self-employed professionals; 11.7% were professionals in private firms; 9.7% were artisans/farmers; 8.7% were traders; 21.4% were students; while 19.4% belonged to other professions.

Exposure to Nigerian Films

Table 1: Respondents' Exposure to Nigerian Films

	Do you watch Nigerian films?		Have you watched Nigerian films set in the olden (pre-colonial) days of the South-East people?
Always	44.8% N = 171	Yes	69.9% N = 267
Sometimes	13.5% N = 52	No	30.1% N = 115
Rarely	13.4% N = 51		
Never	28.3% N = 108		
Total	100% N = 382	Total	100% N = 382

Table 1 shows that only 28.3% of the respondents do not watch Nigerian films, whereas 44.8% watch them always, 13.5% watch them sometimes, while 13.4% do this rarely. These figures clearly indicate the popularity of Nigerian films among local viewers – a fact that has been repeatedly emphasised in literature (Okoye, 2008; Duru, 2008; Uwah, 2013; Shivers, 2013). Furthermore, 69.9% have watched Nigerian films set in the olden (pre-colonial) days of the South-East people as against 30.1% that have not. This suggests that a good number of the viewers have had the opportunity of seeing films that purport to reflect their pre-colonial history.

Perception of Pre-Colonial Representation of the South-East Nigeria

Table 2: Respondents' Perception of Pre-Colonial Representation of the South-East Nigeria

	Do you think Nigerian films set in the olden (pre-colonial) days of the South-East people accurately represent their way of life in terms of norms, philosophy and ideals?	Do you think Nigerian films set in the olden (pre-colonial) days of the South-East people accurately represent their way of life in terms of social organisation?	Do you think Nigerian films set in the olden (pre-colonial) days of the South-East people accurately represent their way of life in terms of religious beliefs?	Do you think Nigerian films set in the olden (pre-colonial) days of the South-East people accurately represent their way of life in terms of arts (i.e. songs, dance, artefacts, etc)?
Always	14.7% N = 56	4.2% N = 16	44.2% N = 169	39% N = 149
Sometimes	26.1% N = 100	28.5% N = 109	16% N = 61	23% N = 88
Rarely	28.6% N = 109	38% N = 145	8.4% N = 32	9.7% N = 37
Don't Know	30.6% N = 117	29.3% N = 112	31.4% N = 120	28.3% N = 108
Total	100% N = 382	100% N = 382	100% N = 382	100% N = 382

Data in Table 2 indicate that majority of the respondents are of the view that Nigerian films set in the olden (pre-colonial) days of the South-East people accurately represent their way of life in terms of norms, philosophy and ideals, social organisation, religious beliefs, and arts (i.e. songs, dance, artefacts, etc). However, it is in regard to the last two – religious beliefs and arts – that majority felt this representation has occurred in the films either always or sometimes. For the first two – norms/philosophy/ideals and social organisation – less than majority credited Nigerian films as so frequently achieving accurate representation of the way of life of the South-East people; ultimately implying that a larger number adjudged them as doing this only rarely.

Comparison of Nigerian and Western Films' Representation of Africa

Table 3: Respondents' Comparison of Nigerian and Western Films' Representation of Africa

	Have you watched Western films portraying the way of life of (olden days) pre-colonial Africa?		Do you think such films are fair and accurate in their portrayal of the way of life of (olden days) pre-colonial Africa?	Do you think Nigerian films set in the olden (pre-colonial) days of the South-East people represent the African way of life more accurately and fairly than Western films do?
Yes	77.2% N = 295	Always	10.2% N = 39	47.1% N = 180
No	22.8% N = 88	Sometimes	25.7% N = 98	23.3% N = 89
		Rarely	30.9% N = 118	7.9% N = 30
		Don't Know	33.2% N = 127	21.7% N = 83
Total	100% N = 382	Total	100% N = 382	100% N = 382

Table 3 shows that majority of the respondents think that Nigerian films are fair and accurate in their portrayal of the way of life of pre-colonial Africa, and that their level of fairness and accuracy surpasses that of western films. However, it would appear that the respondents were somewhat more cautious in ascribing fairness and accuracy to Nigerian films in themselves than they were when comparing them with western films; hence 10.2% think Nigerian films have always been fair and accurate in representing the way of life of pre-colonial Africa as against 47.1%, who adjudge the local films as always outperforming the western films in terms of fairness and accuracy.

Perception of Film as a Medium for Preserving and Telling History

Table 4: Respondents' Perception of Film as a Medium for Preserving and Telling History

	Do you think films can be a means of telling history?	Do you think one can rely on film to learn about historical events?	Do you think using films as a means of preserving and telling history would have any particular advantage?
Yes	86.6% N = 331	86.1% N = 329	82.2% N = 314
No	13.4% N = 51	13.9% N = 53	17.8% N = 68
Total	100% N = 382	100% N = 382	100% N = 382

Data in Table 4 indicate that most of the respondents concur that films have historical value. More precisely, the respondents agree that films can be a source of relaying history, that one

can rely on this source for learning historical facts, and that film as a means of telling history is particularly advantageous. The respondents' rate of agreement was significant – at over 80% in all the cases.

Focus Group Discussion Analysis

Two focus group discussion sessions were held – one at Onitsha, Anambra State and the other at Enugu, Enugu State, both in May 2017. The two towns were selected for their strategic importance as far as local films are concerned in the South-East of Nigeria – Onitsha in terms of marketing and Enugu in terms of actual production (Mba, 2006). The sessions were conducted in the English language, even though some answers were sometimes spiced with the local language, often for emphasis. The data generated in the discussion sessions were presented and analysed below under specific themes.

Perception of Films as Historical Medium

The discussants were positive about whether films can serve as a medium for preserving and telling history. They were in agreement that films can mirror the past and also tell it to future generations. To ensure the anonymity of the discussants, names were alphabetically coded in order of A, B, C, D, E etc., showing the views of different discussants. This alphabetical ordering runs from the first Focus Group Discussion to through the second. This the first focus group discussants are numbered A – F and the second G –L. Some of the responses were as follows:

Discussant A: I am totally convinced that films serve the same purpose as history books, this time with the added advantage of providing moving pictures and sounds.

Discussant B: History is about documenting and communicating the past. Any medium that can store facts and communicate them whenever required can actually be a medium for preserving history

Discussant C: I agree that film has historical value. However, the real challenge would be on how accurately the filmmaker has been able to capture the historical fact in question. In this respect, film can either inform or misinform.

Discussant D: Once the filmmaker has been able to get the important facts right, such film will be valuable in preserving history.

The foregoing indicates that the discussants have a positive judgment vis-a-vis the role film can play in preserving memory. This agrees with the data in Table 4 above which show that the respondents, by over 80%, concurred that films can be a way of relaying history and be a reliable and advantageous source for historical knowledge. However, this agreement is not unconditional, as some of the discussants raised the question of accuracy of information passed on through film – which could make or mar film's role as a medium for preserving and transmitting history.

Assessment of Films Portraying the Pre-Colonial South-East Nigeria

There were mixed reactions among the discussants regarding how much local films have represented the experiences of the pre-colonial South-East Nigeria. Generally, they were of the view that the local films set in this period (pre-colonial time) often contain some valid historical

facts about the people, but that they many a time contain some inaccuracies as well. Some of the responses underscore this cautious assessment:

Discussant B: In some of the films one can learn a lot about the religion and myths of our people; so I believe they are to this extent valuable as a source of knowing history.

Discussant E: Many of the films give good insight into the history of the South-East people. However, some of them come with some misrepresentations and exaggerations.

Discussant A: I remember I had repeatedly quarrelled with some of the things presented in these films as the native costume of our people... Some of these attires are borrowed from other cultures... I have also disagreed with the way kingship and royalty in general are presented. I don't think they accurately represent our history that we know.

Discussant F: I am impressed wherever I see Nigerian films celebrating our history and culture. I think this will ensure that the memories are preserved for generations coming in the future. But I must admit like my co-discussants that some of the images we see are not accurately representative of the people being portrayed.

Discussant G: Nigerian films have been educating in terms of the past lives and experiences of the people of the South-East. I concur that there are inaccuracies here and there, but on the whole, I think the film industry has done laudably.

The above submissions by discussants indicate that they believe Nigerian films have served as medium for preserving and transmitting the history of the people of the South-East of the country – though this role has not been without its flaws. This reflects the data in Table 2 which indicate that a significant number of the respondents were of the view that local films were not always accurate in their representation of the history of the people of the South-East Nigeria. What we find interesting is the consistent use of words such as “inaccuracies”, “misrepresentations”, “exaggerations”, etc, that have trolled the description of the representation of the Nigerian history and culture by the films. A couple of the discussants have used the expressions “disagreed”, “repeatedly quarrelled” – both vey emotive words that show strong displeasure. To us they equally show that probably agendas are set and the films provide impetus for further discussions and arguments among the people.

Comparison of Nigerian and Western Film in Representation of Africa

The discussants believed that Nigerian films are often more accurate and fair than their Western counterparts in their representation of the history of the South-Eastern people of Nigeria. This conviction appears to stem from their belief that the West appears to possess a biased and racist disposition towards Africa and that the local film producers would on the contrary be friendlier. Some of the responses went this way:

Discussant H: I am convinced Nigerian films would be more objective in portraying Africa than what we see in Hollywood, for instance. Western filmmakers are more likely to paint Africans as uncivilised, savage and the like.

Discussant B: The local films could also be biased in favour of Africa but I believe that, ultimately, the African story is best told by Africans. When told by outsiders, accuracy is more likely to suffer.

Discussant I: African filmmakers will tell the African story from the viewpoint of an insider; they will be in a better position to understand the contexts of the events and culture they are presenting. Contrarily, foreigners will fail to understand and rather impose their own meaning on local phenomena.

Discussant E: I have no doubt that Nigerian films would represent Africa better. [...] I mean in terms of telling the truth without being sensational or trying to portray the indigenous people in negative light.

The foregoing clearly indicates the discussants' bias for local films in terms of being the "better" teller of African history than Western films. The data in Table 3 further illuminate this position; the data show that the majority of the respondents were in agreement that Nigerian films – always or sometimes – tend to be more accurate and fairer in representing Africa than their Western counterparts. Interestingly, a closer scrutiny of the choice of tenses and words shows expectations rather than the reality on the ground. Words like "more likely" "will tell", "would represent", "could also", and so on, are not definitive. To the discussants that are in conversation with us, what is desirable is a fairer representation of the African culture by the films, more than the Western counterparts. Arguably, this may not really have happened.

Findings

The first research question sought to find out the extent the audience is exposed to Nigerian films with pre-colonial representation of the South-East Nigeria. Data in Table 1 indicate that almost 70% of the respondents have watched Nigerian films set in the olden (pre-colonial) days of the South-East people. Hence, it could be stated in answer to the first research question that a significant proportion of the audience are exposed to films with pre-colonial representation of the South-East of Nigeria.

The second research question sought to discover how genuine and accurate the audience views the representation of the pre-colonial South-East of Nigeria to be. Data in Table 2 show that although the majority of the respondents agree that Nigerian films accurately represent the way of life of the people of the South-East, they are divided on how often the films do so. In fact, a significant number think they have done this rarely. However, in terms of the people's religious beliefs and arts, the majority tend to agree that the representation has been always or sometimes accurate. Answers emerging from the FGD sessions (as presented in 4.2.2. above) equally reinforce this view of the role of Nigerian films vis-a-vis representing the pre-colonial way of life of the people. Based on this, it could be affirmed, in answer to the second research question, that the audience largely views the representation of the pre-colonial South-East of Nigeria in Nigerian films as accurate, though they are cautious as to how often this accuracy occurs.

The third research question sought to find out how the audience compares the manner of representation of Africa in Nigerian and Western films. The quantitative data in Table 3 as well as the FGD data (as presented in 4.2.3.) indicate that respondents/discussants believe that Nigerian films are largely more accurate and fairer in representing Africa than their Western counterparts. To this extent, it could be stated in answer to the third research question that the audience rates Nigerian films higher than Western films in terms of telling the African story

accurately and fairly. The choice of words of the discussants in doing this however presents a conflicting scenario. Thus, even though the Nigerian films are desirous of a fairer representation of Africa, they are arguably not doing a very good job of it.

The fourth research question sought to find out how the audience generally perceive film as a medium for preserving and telling history. The quantitative data in Table 4 indicate that the majority of the respondents are convinced that film can play an important and effective role in preserving and communicating history. This position is affirmed by the responses given by the discussants in the FGD (as presented in 4.2.1). Therefore, it could be affirmed in answer to the fourth research question that the audience perceives film as capable of functioning effectively as a medium for preserving and transmitting history. This answer is perhaps expected as it is not in doubt that the media are harbingers of values, culture and history. How one is presented in the media goes a long way to confer status on the person. It is not surprising that Africans have long clamoured for the telling of their own stories. Nollywood is poised to tell the stories. How these stories are told is of great interest to Nigerians and the world at large.

Conclusions

The media, in this case the Nigerian film, no doubt is a transmitter of values, culture and history. The discussants in conversation with us in the study have reinforced this long age belief. The clarion call of some scholars (such as Mba, 2006; Nwosu, 2008; Okoye, 2008; Akpabio, Mustapha-Lambe, 2013) for a people to shape their own history through telling their stories themselves is even stronger. Nollywood for Nigeria (and Africa) provides the platform for such shaping of history and shared experiences. This study has shown the wide exposure of a great number of people to Nollywood as viewers and active participants. Their active participation gives them the impetus to interrogate some of the representation of Nigeria/Africa by the Nigeria films. Even though the audience feel that Nigeria film presents a better representation of Africa than their Western counterpart, what comes out stronger is that there is an expectation that still remains unfulfilled. Nigerian films would need to aim for contents that are healthy and beneficial, aimed at enriching shared experiences. If this is not done, spiced stories about Africa by the West will arguably remain largely unchallenged.

Recommendations

Following the findings of this study, the recommendations below were made by the researchers:

- a. Given the influence of local films on the local audience, filmmakers in the country should rather than see themselves as mere entertainers, be conscious of the fact that whatever content they provide the public with could have some far-reaching impact on society. Therefore, they should endeavour to select content that would enrich common experience and enhance corporate memory in a healthy and beneficial manner.
- b. More support should be given to Nollywood with the view to strengthening her professionally towards playing a more robust role as a platform for sharing common experiences among the people. Thus, the support of the government is paramount towards arresting piracy (which is a major burden on the industry) and creating a policy framework within which the industry will grow bigger.

- c. A content analysis counterpart to this study should be undertaken; this time with the aim being to systematically analyse the historical content of Nigerian films with the view to understanding its dominant patterns i.e. its recurring characteristics. This will help complement the results of this study for a more holistic appreciation of the subject of interest.

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