

# AUDIENCE PERCEPTION OF THE ROLE OF NOLLYWOOD FILMS IN EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION: A STUDY OF ANAMBRA STATE RESIDENTS

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## Abstract

*This study tends to discover the audience perception of Nollywood films in development efforts of Anambra State. It also attempts to find out the extent exposure to Nollywood films influences attitude and behaviour change of the people of Anambra State. The study used the questionnaire as research instrument to obtain the feelings and views of the Anambra State residents on Nollywood films. A total number of 540 respondents derived through a multi-stage random sampling technique drawn from the three senatorial zones of Anambra State, with a population of 4,177,828 were used. The study among other things found that majority of the films produced contain development messages. Based on the findings, the study offered recommendation on how the Nollywood films could be harnessed as a proficient tool for development in the State.*

**Keywords:** Audience, Perception, Nollywood, Development, and Communication

## Introduction:

The underdeveloped countries of the world are today enveloped with series of calamities. Some of the life-threatening situations in these underdeveloped nations are; illiteracy, outbreak of diseases, hunger, poverty, war, terrorism, despotic rules, militancy, coups, ethnic and religious crises, political crises (rigging of elections, political assassinations, corruption of government officials). The liberation of the Third World countries from these predicaments remains a task, which the media must actively participate in, for success to be recorded. This is based on the fact that the enrapturing innovations recorded in the media world have significantly influenced and enhanced development.



Through the media, people's attitudes, perceptions, and opinions have greatly been influenced, affected and re-directed in amazing manners. The lives of the people are believed to have changed and are changing through the information they receive from the media; movies, radio, TV, newspaper, magazine and the newly developed and astonishing medium, the Internet.

Nollywood films, like those of the Hollywood and Bollywood have been a great channel of social integration, education and entertainment for a good period of time. Social problems were solved and culture transmitted through films. "The movies, in other words, hold a very special place in our culture. Movies, like books, are a culturally special medium, an important medium" (Baran, 2009, p.174). Films are used in exposing individuals to vital issues of discourse and positively impact morals on them. Certainly, films are a sine qua non in preservation of cultures and cultural transmission. "Movies can have a powerful and immediate effect, ... Nonetheless, movies can sensitize people to issues and have a long-term effect in shifting public attitudes on enduring issues" (Vivian, 2009, p. 152).

Several situations were taken care of through films. Vivian (2009, p. 180) states that "there is agreement, though, that movies can put issues on the public policy agenda and keep them there". According to Rodman (2006, p.157) "Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, as the film industry thrived and movie going became part of American culture, the movies in turn began to reflect that culture". Other popular movies, such as *I am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932), dealt with the economic conditions of the depression era. To escape their real-life problems, people flocked to such supernatural horror films as *Dracula* (1931), with Bela Lugosi, and *Frankenstein* (1931), with Boris Karloff. Screwball comedies like the Marx Brother's *Duck Soup* (1933) also became popular diversions, from hard times.

In Nigeria today, almost all the issues that affect the Nigerian society negatively have been portrayed in the movies with the theme or message of condemnation of such issues. Nigerian Nollywood has to a greater extent, dealt with most ills and evil practices bedeviling various societies in Nigeria. This extract sheds light:

Nollywood is not just an avenue for *chere-were* entertainment, it has dealt with serious socio-economic issues worth talking about. From the *Osu* caste system, to blood covenant (*Igbandu*), child trafficking/kidnapping, domestic violence from both men and women, ethnic enmity and killings, political scandals, dangers of drug dealing, the antics of many majesties (*Igwe*) in their evil pseudo-monarchy that is alien to Igbo republics; and the realities of deadly diseases (The Source, July 13, 2009, p.48).

Even though there seems to be many ills that dominate in most parts and circles of the

Nigerian society, the Nollywood has produced films aimed at sensitizing the society of such ills and as well, having a moral lesson to teach those who hamper the progress of the society by getting involved in such acts. For instance, the film, *Living in Bondage I & II* (1992) by Kenneth Nnebue carried a serious campaign against ritual. The nefarious act was on the increase as at the time the film was released. Ritual murder for sacrifice, money-making or any other purpose is evil which can work against the person using the other for this purpose. Money made through this purpose does not last. Another Nigerian film, *21 Days with Christ* (2008) by Bond Emeruwa, condemned human sacrifices and burying of kings with living human beings.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Unarguably, the media have been identified as the major vehicle for development. However, it has not been identified that for effective development media messages must contain themes specifically targeted at development issues. The continued underdevelopment in Nigeria has resulted in the use of different types of media to aid development.

In recent times, Nollywood has been popularly acknowledged as a possible means of `social and cultural development due to its popularity and acceptance by majority of the Nigerian audience. However, some of the contents of Nollywood movies have been criticized for containing messages that portray the images of Nigerian men and women in bad light; being corrupt and fetish, as ritualists and having inordinate ambition for power and money.

Therefore, these films are seen as a tool for development, considered as its agent, becomes an imperative for this study. That is why the research will explore audience perception of the role of Nollywood films in effective communication: A study of Anambra State residents.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study is guided by the following objectives to:

1. Find out the audience perception of Nollywood films in the development efforts of Anambra State.
2. Find out some specific ways these films can help in development.
3. Find out some major development themes in most Nollywood films
4. Find out how the people are portrayed in most Nollywood films.
5. Find out if the exposure to these films influence attitude and behaviour change of the people



### **Research Questions**

1. What are the audience perceptions of Nollywood films in the development efforts of Anambra state?
2. In what specific ways can films be used in development?
3. What are some major development themes found in most Nollywood films?
4. How are the people portrayed in most Nollywood films?
5. How has exposure to Nollywood films influenced attitude and behaviour change of the people of the state?

### **Literature Review**

Irrespective of the controversies; claims, arguments and counter-arguments, one salient factor remains that the media messages and programmes, have effects on human beings. Whether achieved directly or indirectly, mass media messages induce change, reinforce existing belief and can influence people to behave in a certain manner. According to McQuail (2005, p.440) “There is plenty of evidence that the media are widely regarded by their own audiences as potentially influential for good or ill and thus in need of direction and control by society”.

Since the media are unarguably a great force to be reckon with in information dissemination, which can induce or cause attitude and behavioural changes in the individuals, how the contents and the package of the media can be utilized in achieving this all important aim, form the basis of this study. Harnessing the media, especially the film medium for effective information dissemination, which can cause development, will be assessed. This is because we can hardly, meaningfully talk about national development without communication. On the marriage of development and communication, through the appropriate medium/media to achieve the nation's developmental goals, Wilson (2006, p. 9) states:

Clearly, when we speak about sustainable development as environmental correlate, we cannot avoid the role of communication in this context. And when we speak of communication we inescapably must be concerned about the appropriate media and channels that may be desirably used to achieve our development goals and objectives.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Two theories, the development media and agenda-setting theories are considered relevant to this study.

First, the development media theory postulates that the mass media are to be deployed for development, social, economic and political purposes. Konkwo (1997, p.179) notes “that mass media under this theory are used in promoting social and economic development with objective of achieving national integration.” According



to McQuail (1987, pp.119-121), the media should accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy. Mass media serve as agents of development by: (a) disseminating technical know-how (b) encouraging individual change and mobility (c) spreading democracy (d) promoting consumer demand (e) aiding literacy, education, health, population control, etc. (McQuail, 2005, p.491). The development media theory finds its relevance, applicability, and reflects the aspirations of the Third World nations. In line with this study, Nollywood filmmakers should produce films that carry development themes. The films, apart from serving as means of entertainment, should also serve as change agents through the development messages they may be produced to communicate to the audience.

The second theory, where this work will be rested, is the agenda-setting theory of the press. This is a theory of communication, which reflects the concept of a very powerful media. It hinges on the fact that the press is certainly responsible for telling the publics which issues are vital to talk about and the one to drop. The strong ability of the media to exert influence on the individuals, telling them what to think, talk about issues and events that must form their opinion, is the postulate of the agenda-setting theory. According to Heywood (1997, p.387), agenda setting refers to “the ability to structure policy debates by controlling which issues are discussed or establishing a priority among them.

Lippmann (1922, p.16) is noted for the theory of agenda-setting, when he stated that: “the people do not deal directly with their environments as much as they respond to “pictures” in their heads.” Lippmann did not use the term, agenda setting but Bernard Cohen is universally known to have refined Lippmann's ideas into the theory of agenda-setting. His words on the theory of agenda-setting function of the press reads:

The press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about. And it follows from this that the world looks different to different people, depending not only on their personal interests, but also on the map that is drawn for them by the writers, editors, and publishers of the papers they read. (Cohen, 1963, p.13).

The agenda-setting theory was for the first time, empirically confirmed by research conducted by Maxwell. E. McCombs and Donald Shaw on the U.S 1968 presidential election. According to McCombs and Shaw (1972, p.176), “the mass media may well determine the important issues-that is, the media may set the 'agenda' of their campaign”. The result of their findings proved that voters' judgments were really

affected and influenced by the campaign issues of the media. On the Shaw and McCombs study on agenda-setting and the result it produced, Baran and Davies (2006,p. 317) corroborated by stating that “it clearly establishes that there is an important relationship between media reports and people's ranking of public issues”

Another study on agenda-setting was carried out by Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder in the U.S, in 1987. From their study, it was discovered that “those problems that receive prominent attention on the national news become the problems the viewing public regards as the nation's most important” (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987, p.16). Their study revealed that the thinking about issues and opinion of the citizens of the nation are powerfully shaped by the emphasis placed on them and how vital they are meant to be perceived, by the media. This could be seen in the content of the study report, which Iyengar and Kinder (1987, p.112) described in these words:

American's view of their society and nation are powerfully shaped by the stories that appear on the evening news. We found that people who were shown network broadcasts edited to draw attention to a particular problem assigned greater importance to that problem-greater importance than they themselves did before the experience began, and greater importance than did people assigned to control conditions that emphasized different problems. Our subjects regarded the target problems as more important for the country, cared more about it, believed that government should do more about it, reported stronger feelings about it, and were much more likely to identify it as one of the country's most important problems.

The media no doubt instill in individuals issues of discourse, making them to hold strong belief that a situation, event, an issue is momentous and therefore needs critical attention and focus.

Larson (1994) on agenda-setting, asserts that it is a theory which proposes that the public agenda-or what kinds of things people discuss, think, and worry about (and sometimes ultimately press for legislation about) – is powerfully shaped and directed by what the news media choose to present to the public. By and large, the case of the media, informing the public on the events and issues that are to be discussed and as well attached importance to is proven. McQuail (2005, p.512) on agenda-setting, concurs that “the core idea is that the news media indicate to the public what the main issues of the day are and this is reflected in what the public perceives as the main issues”. Similarly, Konkwo (1997, p.166) emphasizes that agenda-setting is “the importance journalists give to their stories by 'what they say and how they say it' helps determine how important the public thinks the topic is”. The power and ability



of the mass media to set agenda is not in question. In matters of national and international discourses, the press has always been noted as setting the pace. Madubike (1999, p.227) encapsulates that:

A medley of evidence has piled up over the years to prove that as the press goes about the task of choosing and displaying news, they play an immeasurable role in modifying our social reality. In a democracy during electioneering campaigns, or any crucial national programmes for that matter, the press, to a large extent, determines the important issues. Simply put, the press sets agenda for the campaign or the programme.

During the November 3, 1992 American presidential election, the media dictated the pace throughout the campaigns, setting the agenda for public discourse. The media then made economy a priority, thereby making George Bush's foreign exploits agenda appear less important. For the importance attached to 'economy' in the heat of the campaign, by the media, it automatically became the public's priority and choice. Bush admitted the power inherent in the ability of the media after the election result was released. He said that he did not lose to Bill Clinton, but to the hostile American press.

Now, the media, through the film medium can set agenda for the people. The filmmakers, can use the movies, in setting agenda of what should be thought about, discussed, considered, and, which can influence positively the people towards sound living and development. Movies made to impact positively on the manner in which people conduct their affairs, can readily achieve that, depending on the agenda, which the filmmakers (producers, script writers, actors, etc.) want them to set. Movies, produced to set certain agenda, can accomplish this, because they can have powerful effect on the people. "Movies can have a powerful and immediate effect.... Movies with religious themes can strike loud chords, as did Mel Gibson's *Passion of the Christ* and Martin Scorsese's *Last Temptation of Christ*" (Vivian, 2009, p. 152). Rodman (2006) states that an African American, Sidney Poitier used movies such as *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967), and *in the Heat of the Night* (1967) to set agenda that condemned racial intolerance.

Summarily, the media set agenda for the people, and cause them to rank issues they consider important and should form their basis of discussion and evaluation in order.

Wanta (1997) notes that the rank ordering that the audience assign to important issues of the day tends to match the amount of coverage that the media give to those issues. The film medium, being a medium that bring actions, pictures and sound no doubt



can always be prudently used, in setting agenda on critical and other issues.

### **Research Methodology**

To solicit for data with which to explore this study, we decided to implore survey research methods. This helped us to determine the population of this study which was drawn from the three senatorial zones of the state, that is Anambra Central, Anambra South and Anambra North Senatorial Zones. The national population census of 2006 puts the number of inhabitants of the state at 4,177,828. The state has commercial urban areas like Onitsha, Nnewi, Awka, and Ekwulobia. There are other semi-urban and rural areas in the state.

A sample of 540 was drawn from (9) Local Government Areas out of the (21) Local Government Areas, using a combination of multi-stage sampling techniques.

We started the sampling operations by stratifying the 21 Local Government Areas into the three (3) senatorial zones of Anambra Central, Anambra North and Anambra South.

After grouping the Local Government Areas into three classes of seven each for the three senatorial zones, we purposefully selected one urban-city local government each from the three zones namely; Awka South, Nnewi North, and Onitsha South respectively from Anambra Central, Anambra South and Anambra North because of their strategic importance to the development programmes of the state. In addition, we used the paper ball method of the simple random sampling technique to choose the remaining six (6) Local Government Areas.

### **Data Presentation Analysis and Interpretation**

**According to Aliede (2002, p.91), "For reliable and authentic research output, any applicable method of data analysis must aim at relating to the research problems and nature of the study". Only this, according to him will lead to precise presentation of results capable of presenting of the research objectives. On the strength of the above statement,** the first step was the presentation of the demographic data which made some of the research questions clearer and understandable. Respondents' answers were carefully collected and presented in tables.

We equally presented the research questions and then the tables that contain elements of the questionnaire. This was followed with the discussion of the results.





## **Demographic Data**

**Table 1: Sex Distribution of Respondents**

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Male	300	56
Female	240	44
<b>Total</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 shows the sex distribution of respondents. Out of the 540 respondents, 300, representing 56% were males, while 240 respondents, or 44% of the respondents were females.

**Table 2: Educational Qualification of respondents**

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Illiterate	82	15
FSLC	100	18
WASSCE/SSCE	130	24
NCE/ND	112	20
HND/ B.Sc.	86	16
M.Sc. /Ph.D.	30	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 reveals the educational qualification of respondents. While 82 respondents, or 15% were illiterates, 100, or 18% possessed FSLC. Also, 100, representing 18% have SSCE, as 112, or 20% have NCE/ND. But 86, representing 16%, and 30, or 7% represented those who possess HND/BS.c and M.Sc/Ph.D respectively.

**Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Age**

<b>Age Bracket</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
18-25	143	26
26-30	117	22
31-35	110	20
36-39	122	23
40 – and above	48	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3 exposes the age distribution of respondents. 143 respondents, or 26% were 18-25 years, while 117, or 22% have age bracket of 26-30. The other 110, or 20% were between 31-35 years of age. As 122 respondents, or 23% fall within 36-39,

then 48 others, or 9% who were 40 years and above, completed the table.

**Table 4: Area of Domicile**

Area	Frequency	Percentage
Rural	194	36
Urban	346	64
<b>Total</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4 shows that 194, representing 36% of the respondents live in the rural areas, while 346, or 64% reside in the urban areas.

**Research Question 1:** What is your perception of Nollywood films in the development efforts of Anambra State?

**Table 5: Films play vital role in development of the state**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	508	94
No	6	1
Do not know	26	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 5 reveal answers to research question 1. In table eight, 508 respondents, or 94% agreed that films play vital roles in the development of the state, 6 respondents, or 1% ticked "No", while 26 respondents, or 5% neither agreed nor disagreed.

**Research Question 2:** How can films be used to enhance development of Anambra State?

**Table 6: Films that teach people the need to embrace development should often be produced.**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	210	39
Strongly Agree	288	53
Disagree	26	5
Strongly Disagree	-	-
Do not know	16	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 6, answered research question two, revealing that 210, or 39% of the respondents were of the opinion that films meant to teach people to embrace

development should often be produced. 288, or 53% of them strongly believed this, 26, or 5% of the respondents disagreed, while none strongly disagreed on this, as 16 others, or 3% had no answer on this.

**Research Question 3:** What are some major development themes found in most Nollywood films?

**Table 7: Nature of events portrayed in Nigerian films**

Events portrayed	Frequency	Percentage
Crime/Corruption Campaign	85	16
Health related issues	53	10
Politics (power tussle)	75	14
Cultural/Traditional issues	71	13
Marriages/Family Issues	193	36
Education/Religion	41	7
Agriculture	24	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>100</b>

As shown in table 7, marriages/family issues dominated with an overwhelming 36%. Crime/corruption campaign came a distant second with 16%. Then cultural/traditional issues 13%, politics (power tussle) 14% while education/religion followed with 7%, others, such as health related issues have 10% and Agriculture 4%.

**Research Question 4:** How are the people portrayed in most Nollywood films?

**Table 8: Watching films has affected me**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Positively	460	85
Negatively	38	7
Undecided	42	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>100</b>

In table eight, 460 respondents, representing 85% ticked that watching films have affected them positively. 38 others or 7% responded that they have been negatively affected by watching films, while 42 respondents or 8% were undecided.

**Table 9: Film portrayals have made me a better Father/Mother/Child**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	481	89
No	39	7
Undecided	20	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 9, displays information on whether film portrayals have made the respondents, a better father, mother, or child. A total number of 481 respondents, or 89% said yes it has, while 39 respondents or 7% ticked “No”, the remaining 20, or 4% were undecided.

**Table 10: What are the dominant characteristics of Nigerian Women depicted in the Nollywood films?**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Rivalry/Quarrelsome	180	33
Lust/desperate for husband	106	20
Infidelity/betrayal	130	24
Caring/religious/hardworking	113	21
Do not know	11	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>100</b>

The responses as presented in table 10 reveals that 180, representing 33% favoured rivalry, quarrelsome as the dominant character of Nigerian women depicted in films. 106 respondents, or 20% ticked lust, desperate for husband, 130, or 24% responded by marking infidelity, betrayal, as 113, or 21% believed the women are being depicted as being caring, religious and hardworking, 11 others, or 2% were undecided.

### **Findings**

Our major concern in this research work was to inquire about audience perception of the role of Nollywood films in development effort in Anambra State. This was borne out of the fact that film is a powerful medium for attitude formation and change. It could have both direct and indirect effects on its audience. Film has also been found to be a vital medium for entertainment and information. This is one of the reasons why in the United States of America “on May 26, 1952, the Supreme Court announced in *Burstyn Vs. Wilson* that motion pictures were a significant medium for the communication of ideas, which were designed to entertain as well as to inform” (Biagi, 2003, p. 157).

Films play momentous roles in the development of the state. This is clearly analyzed in table 5, where an overwhelming number of 508 respondents or 94% attested to the fact that film promotes development efforts. Respondents admitted having knowledge of family planning through films. A greater percentage as well accepted knowing how vital it is to protect government property through films. Summarily, we can deduce from the responses that the Nigerian films in no small means promote development.

The Nigerian films bring vexing issues to fore. Majority of the respondents agreed having the knowledge of gender equality, child labour and trafficking through films. These are critical issues, which constitute social problems. This substantiates the fact that the film medium is a good channel of communicating new ideas to the people.

Exposure to films has positively affected the film audience. Through the exposures, greater number of them had their belief that no crime of any nature pays, reinforced. This implies that exposure to films could have great change on the people, causing them to often avoid getting involved in crimes of any magnitude. Gwam-Nzekwu (2008, p. 291) lends support to the influence of film on the individuals, when she stresses that “the influence films exert on the human mind is perhaps hardly completely quantifiable”.

Mainly, the Nigerian films create bad impression about Nigerians. The Nigerian men are usually portrayed as corrupt and rich. On the contrary, the women are usually portrayed as being poor and wicked. The dominant characters of Nigerian men depicted in the Nigerian films are, lovers of money and power, being fetish and as ritualists. The women are constantly projected as being quarrelsome and unfaithful.

### **Conclusion**

It will be pertinent to conclude here, based on all the works and findings made in this research, that the film medium is obviously one of the main factors that enhance development. It causes development as well as aiding the people to embrace it. On this premise, all the major players-producers, script writers, actors/actresses, etc and the government should as a matter of fact take this medium (film) that can promote development and economic growth, seriously. Hilliard (1969, p. 15) opines that several important aspects of national development, in no concrete way, contribute to economic development and some actually make heavy claims upon the economy. In addition, he states that the required manpower and important human skills must be taken into account by intelligent national human resources policy.

Based on this assertion we can now believe that film is one aspect that can be

prudently packaged to enhance national and economic development.

### **Recommendations**

From the findings of this study, we proffer the under-listed panaceas: Nigerian government should be actively involved in the dissemination of information through films. In some countries, the governments have released funds to film industries, mandating them to produce films with themes that are expected to solve health, social, or other problems. Government can also fund erecting adequate viewing centers at strategic places, to minimize the problem of poor access to the media. Onyekakeyah (2009, p. 67) discovered that many Nigerian evergreen musicians and actors like Chief Hubert Ogunde, Chief Bobby Benson, Fela Anikulapo Kuti, Chief Osita Osadebe, Balla Miller, Rex Lawson, and many others have collapsed entertainment empires that were single-handedly built over the years because there is no government support. He queried how we could build a country's image, concluding that Nollywood needs government support to build a strong entertainment industry that would further boost the country's image. Film and other media remain sine qua non in the quest of any government to positively change the attitudes of her citizenry, towards development. Aware of this fact, Akunyili (2010, p. 27) in her re-branding campaign asserts that:

A campaign for change has to be sustained for it to permeate existing stereotypes and idiosyncrasies, especially when certain habits have been institutionalized over several years.... We have traversed the country intimating the populace and their leaders on the need for us to change our attitudes, imbibe our good old cultural values, instill discipline and restore our patriotic zeal.... We have had meetings with the media, corporate Nigeria, Writers and Authors, Nollywood... We have common ground and are working towards achieving that critical mass that will spur actual change.

The former Minister of Information and Communications, knows how momentous the media are in nation building and development of the society, the government should follow up by looking into the Nigerian film industry and other media, make significant contributions that will enhance productivity.



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