International Journal of Arts and Humanities: ISSN-2360-7998 (Print) and Open Access:
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23542765
Abbreviated Key Title: *Int. J. Arts Humanit.*
ISSN: 2360-7998 (Print) and Open Access
Volume-13 (Issue): 4, April, Pp 59-65, 2025

Full Length Research

Echoes of the Screen: A Study of the Narrative Structure of Nigerian Cinema in the Time of Digital Multimedia

[1]Oghenekaro Francis EKEVERE and [2]Patience Flourish IDODO

[1]Department of Theatre Art, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria.
francisekevere@gnail.com
[2]Department of Educational Planning and Administration, NOUN, Benin City(idodoflourish@gmail.com)

Abstract.

The research is interested in the shift in narrative structures in Nigerian cinema as the digital multimedia space continues to proliferate. In line with the emergence of streaming services and social media, the traditional ways of crafting a narrative within the context of Nigerian films have changed to a significant extent, as they reflect the larger cultural and social landscape. A literary critique of a variety of films has been conducted—from classic Nollywood films to new-age Nigerian digital cinema—and this research aims to answer the question of how global filmmakers respond to the modernisation of the audience without losing the integrity of the culture. Gradations of the situational theme, development of the plot, depiction of characters, and selection of the themes will be underscored as the effects of increased access to the digital space. Besides that, the research considers the issue of a fusion of cultures by mixing genres in relation to filmmakers in the cinema industry. The approach of placing Nigerian films that emerged in the twenty-first century within the angle of modern society aims to aid in the understanding of intricacies in how new forms of digital cinematography have come up and evolved how filmmakers tell the stories creatively while retaining links between the narrative style, cultural essence, and the audience of Nigerian films.

Keywords: Nigerian Cinema, Digital Multimedia, Narrative Structure.

Accepted 01/4/2025 **Published 30/4/2025**

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian film industry, popularly known as Nollywood, has emerged as one of the most prolific and influential cinematic sectors in Africa and globally. Over the past four decades, Nollywood has transformed from modest home-video productions into a vibrant industry with a significant cultural and economic footprint (Uba, 2010). Central to its popularity is its unique narrative style, which often reflects socio-cultural realities, indigenous storytelling traditions, and contemporary issues pertinent to Nigerian society.

In recent years, the advent of digital multimedia technologies has precipitated a paradigm shift in film production, distribution, and consumption worldwide, with profound implications for Nollywood. The digital revolution has democratised access to filmmaking tools, enabling a proliferation of diverse narratives and innovative storytelling techniques (Ogunleye, 2015). Moreover, the advent of digital platforms such as YouTube, Netflix, and other streaming services has expanded Nollywood's reach beyond traditional theatrical and home-video markets, fostering a more interactive and multimedia-orientated narrative landscape (Osuagwu, 2020).

Understanding the narrative structures of Nigerian cinema within this digital milieu is essential to

comprehending how storytelling evolves in response to technological changes. Narrative structure, as a fundamental component of film analysis, encompasses the organisation of story elements, plot development, character arcs, and thematic articulation, all of which are influenced by technological, cultural, and social factors (Tomaščíková, 2009). The integration of digital multimedia has not only altered production techniques but also impacted narrative forms, enabling non-linear storytelling, interactivity, and multimedia integration that challenge traditional cinematic conventions.

This study aims to explore how digital multimedia technologies influence the narrative architecture of Nigerian films. By examining contemporary Nollywood productions, the research seeks to identify emerging patterns, innovations, and challenges in storytelling within this digital context. Ultimately, this investigation will contribute to a deeper understanding of the evolving nature of Nigerian cinema and its cultural implications in the digital age.

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Background to the Study

With respect to volume and impact, Nollywood now ranks among the most extensive movie industries in the world, and this transition began in the late nineties. The sector, originally characterised by its direct-to-video format and limited production budgets, has increasingly embraced modern technologies, enabling filmmakers to create more sophisticated cinematic experiences (Haynes, 2017). As mentioned by Okome (2018), newer platforms, including Netflix and domestic online providers, have improved the quality of storytelling through better production and new distribution channels.

Recent studies underscore that the introduction of technology has not only improved the technical side but also helped in the generation of diverse content. Gradually, Nollywood movies start to address themes like gender, socio-political issues, and identity issues which reflect the ongoing changes in Nigeria (Ogunyemi, 2021). This is in many cases attributed to the proliferation of social networking sites, which modified audience interaction and the expectations of the audience, thus changing the mode of storytelling (Marek, 2019).

In addition, modern Nigerian filmmakers are increasingly adopting hybrid narrative approaches that are influenced by foreign cultures but are still grounded in local settings. There's an aspect of this trend well captured by Carver (2020), who observes that the incorporation of cinematic techniques into traditional oral heritage opens greater avenues for addressing local and global issues. This development is a turning point in the history of Nigerian cinema and puts the filmmaker in between his tradition and the rest of the world.

Different researchers argue that narrative forms are one of the emerging areas in this area and help explain how relevant Nollywood is to its audience and its changing nature. Uwujaren & Egbokhare, 2018, argue that narrative structure in contemporary Nigerian cinema is useful in understanding the finer particulars of how cultures are represented in the 21st-century digitised world.

In the able quest to bridge the gap between the previously known literature and the current status of Nigerian cinema, this study proposes a thesis to answer the question while disentangling the sociocultural impact of Nollywood, considering the level of growth and development witnessed in the 21st century by the cinema industry.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this work is that of literary criticism since the authors will use specific Nollywood movies and texts pertinent to them in order to elaborate on cultural issues and technology. The researcher interprets narrative structures and develops characters and other audiovisual elements as the films are analysed, complemented by close reading and textual analysis. It was usefully complemented by the investigation of academic materials and reports and articles from the market to situate Nollywood's development in relation to the trends of digital multimedia. Such an approach intends to dwell on broader aspects of the socio-cultural aspects of Nigerian cinema today.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The narrative structures of Nigerian cinema, particularly Nollywood films, have undergone significant evolution, especially with the advent of digital multimedia technologies. Traditionally, Nollywood films were characterized by straightforward, linear storytelling that adhered to cause-and-effect sequences, often emphasizing moral lessons and cultural values. These narratives typically followed a clear beginning, middle, and end, reflecting indigenous storytelling traditions and theatrical influences aimed at broad audiences within Nigeria and the diaspora (Haynes, 2016). Such conventional narratives prioritized moral didacticism and simplicity, making them accessible and easily digestible.

However, recent scholarly work highlights a noticeable shift towards more complex, layered, and innovative narrative forms. Just (2019) notes that contemporary Nollywood filmmakers increasingly experiment with genre blending, non-linear timelines, and multi-perspective narratives, reflecting global cinematic trends while also addressing Nigeria's social realities more intricately. These approaches move away from the traditional cause-and-effect structure, allowing for fragmented storytelling, flashbacks, and interwoven

plotlines that enrich the storytelling experience. This shift signifies an industry that is expanding its artistic scope and narrative sophistication to better depict contemporary Nigerian society's multifaceted nature (Adekitan, 2020).

The role of digital multimedia in facilitating this transformation cannot be overstated. Digital tools and platforms have democratized film production, enabling a wider range of voices and more experimental storytelling techniques. Ogunleye (2015) argues that digital technologies have lowered production barriers and fostered innovation, leading to narratives that are more interactive, multimedia-rich, and tailored to the digital consumption habits of modern audiences. Streaming services like YouTube, Netflix, and other online platforms have broadened distribution channels, allowing Nigerian films to reach a global audience and encouraging filmmakers to adopt more diverse, non-linear, and multimedia-enhanced storytelling methods (Osuagwu, 2020). These technological advancements have also enabled the integration of animation, visual effects, and interactive elements into Nigerian films, further pushing the boundaries of traditional narrative forms (Balogun, 2021).

Scholars also emphasize that Nollywood's evolving narratives serve as vital tools for social commentary and cultural expression. Many films explore pressing societal issues such as corruption, gender inequality, poverty, and national identity through layered storytelling and symbolic representations (Adedeji, 2021). Ogunyemi and Washington (2021) highlight that these complex narratives foster social dialogue by engaging audiences emotionally and intellectually, prompting reflection on Nigeria's socio-political landscape. The increased narrative sophistication allows filmmakers to depict societal challenges with greater depth, often employing metaphors, allegory, and multiple narrative layers that resonate with viewers' lived experiences. This evolution in storytelling aligns with Nollywood's broader role as a mirror and critique of Nigerian society, especially within the context of rapid digital transformation and globalization.

Overall, the literature indicates that Nigerian cinema is experiencing a profound transformation in its narrative practices, driven largely by digital multimedia technologies. While traditional Nollywood films relied on linear, moralistic storytelling, contemporary productions are characterized by layered, non-linear, and multimedia-infused narratives that reflect Nigeria's social complexities. This shift not only enhances artistic expression but also deepens the industry's capacity to engage audiences on social, political, and cultural levels, reaffirming Nollywood's position as a vital cultural force in Africa and beyond.

Cinema Studies without Borders: Nollywood Film Narratives

Historically, the narrative structures of Nollywood films have predominantly adhered to a linear and dramatic framework, characterised by straightforward storytelling that emphasises clear cause-and-effect relationships and familiar plot progressions (Haynes, 2016). This conventional approach, often rooted in traditional storytelling techniques, allowed for accessible and easily digestible narratives that resonated with broad audiences across Nigeria and the diaspora. However, recent developments within the industry indicate a significant shift toward more complex and innovative storytelling methods. Evidence suggests that contemporary Nollywood films are increasingly blending genres, overlapping narrative styles, and employing non-linear storytelling techniques that challenge traditional formats (Just, 2019). These innovations reflect a move towards embracing multiplicity and complexity in narrative construction, aligning with global cinematic trends while also responding to Nigeria's dynamic social realities.

According to Adekitan (2020), the new generation of Nigerian filmmakers is leveraging diverse narrative strategies to depict the multifaceted nature of contemporary Nigerian society. These filmmakers are using techniques such as flashbacks, multiple perspectives, and fragmented timelines to create layered stories that better capture social, political, and cultural complexities. This evolution signifies an industry that is expanding its storytelling repertoire, moving beyond mere entertainment to engage more critically with societal issues. The implication is that Nollywood is experiencing growth not only in production volume but also in narrative sophistication, enabling it to address more nuanced themes and reach audiences with more intricate storytelling.

Research evidence supports the notion that contemporary Nollywood films are actively engaging with pressing societal concerns through their narratives—both explicitly and implicitly (Adedeji, 2021). Many films confront critical issues such as corruption, gender inequality, women's rights, and national identity, thereby fostering dialogue and reflection among viewers (Ogunyemi & Washington, 2021). These films serve as cultural texts that mirror societal realities, encouraging audiences to contemplate and discuss these challenges. The shift towards more complex storytelling forms allows filmmakers to explore these themes with greater depth, employing artistic strategies that respond to evolving social and geographical contexts. Consequently, Nollywood's narrative innovation enhances its artistic

expression and amplifies its capacity to influence social discourse and contribute to national identity formation.

Aesthetics and Technology

Nigerian cinema has also benefitted from the improvements made in technology, and as a result, remastered production techniques and film-making peripherals were adopted to upgrade the production quality. Thanks to the introduction of these latest technologies, filmmakers are now able to explore new boundaries of creative potential (Nwankwo, 2021). Moreover, according to Dibua (2019), these digital technologies not only enhanced the visual outputs but also eased the process of making a film which aspirant filmmakers were able to access.

Adee Adebayo noticed that the WAHD has made it possible for Nigerians to create eye-catching films that attract foreign audiences which are new and expansive; this might require a new way of sustaining and capturing viewer engagement inside the theatre. The rise of new viewing habits is the result of making information more accessible, which films have the potential to do, as streaming services do. Brad Asuquo also asserts that social media is important in the context of promotion and engagement with a film because it makes it possible to facilitate collective watching experiences.

Cultural Representation and Identity

Identity in the cultural representation of Nollywood movies has become one of the significant issues that need critical attention due to the effect of the globalisation process. The perspectives of international interests in the Nigerian narrative and character in the movies are equally Okome (2018) depicts. In Nigeria today, as Ademola & Okoro (2021) note, film directors are grappling with issues of the hybrid post-colonial narrative, integrating traditional narratives with contemporary ones to give a picture of the existing culturally rich nation.

Moreover, studies indicate that modern Nollywood movies are increasingly diversifying their take on gender roles as well as societal expectations (Ijeoma, 2020). Nnadi (2022) argues that the filmmakers have started to use their voices and challenge stereotypes, depicting women in a complex manner which sparks debates for gender equity in Nigeria.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Nigerian cinema is analysed through the lens of a polysemic set of theories that include postcolonial theory, digital media theory, and cultural studies.

1. Postcolonial Theory: This aspect helps in understanding the relationship between colonial history and present power relations and how Nollywood actors cope with those relations. As Okome (2018) notes, it focuses on the need to regain the cultural narrative and representation in the cosmos. This outlook is critical because it provides insight on how contemporary narratives depict social problems and identity.

2. **Digital Media Theory:** Finally, as Nollywood embraces the new age of digital multimedia, Digital Media Theory explains the impact that technology has on film production and distribution. This theory emphasises the importance of digital platforms in modifying how and what audiences want and expect, according to Adebayo (2020). It sets the stage for ways in which existing filmmaking methods intersect with new media.

3. Cultural Studies: This study adopts a cultural studies approach and seeks to understand how societal issues are reflected and tackled through the notion of Nollywood films. This theoretical perspective comes in handy in understanding the cultural impact of various narratives and how films can be used as tools in addressing issues such as globalisation, nationalism and identity (Nnadi, 2022).

In combining such theoretical perspectives, the study seeks to explain how digital multimedia affects the narrative structures and the cultural manifestations in the context of the modern Nigerian cinema.

Gemes (2017) titled his resource ECHOES OF THE SCREEN and, as the readers can easily guess, tackles the screen monitoring of children and young audiences.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS: ECHOES OF THE SCREEN

The narrative structures of Nigerian cinema have also been subject to considerable transformation during the… era of digital… In this analysis, it is sought to explain how all these factors combine and influence the plots of the modern Nigerian movies.

1. Alien Narrative Framework

Traditionally Nollywood movies focused on simple narrative frameworks with a clear beginning, middle and end, along with dramatic elements suitable for the domestic audience. However, the latest turn in filmmaking suggests that the inclination is now towards intricate narratives that have various dimensions. In the words of Haynes (2016), now the directors are combining many narrative strands that deal with societal problems and hopes, which shows the change, of course, in the cultural conversation.

Films such as The Wedding Party (2016) and Lionheart (2018) follow this new trend as they combine comedy, drama, and romance with social issues prevailing in the society. These films portray greater narrative complexity with the employment of subplots and

character arcs that are a departure from the paradigm of earlier works in this genre, such as Okome (2018).

2. The Impact of Multimedia Factors

The advent of the digital age has certainly transformed Nollywood, providing both opportunities and obstacles. Digital filming and editing equipment has improved the quality of visual storytelling and promoted creativity. Omojola (2020) argues that the rise of cheap and easily obtainable digital technologies and the internet makes it unnecessary for producers in Africa to have deep pockets in order to create global content.

In addition, the emergence of internet service providers, including Netflix, has built new structures for the distribution of Nigerian movies, which now have access to a larger market. These changes opened up more opportunities for Nollywood cinema, which forced the filmmakers to embrace different narrative practices, compatible with international audiences (Kehinde, 2021). Since digital platforms encourage audience participation, they also compel filmmakers to develop stories that are applicable to many people domestically or globally.

3. **Culture and Representation**

Nigerian films are more than narratives but 'stories' of cultural heritage, watchwords in explaining community issues and norms. There has been a movement in contemporary storylines that appear to adequately depict sophisticated roles and roles that are less knee-jerk movements towards stereotypical ones. "The Figurine" (2009) depicts superstitious beliefs and cultural history while at the same time blending modernity with tradition (Obi, 2016).

Moreover, within Nollywood films, gender representation has been changing. There always have been films with more active female leads defying societal standards and portraying how women can triumph. This transformation is evident in "Isoken" (2017) and "Queening" (2018) insomuch as the heroines of the films are concerned with their relationships, self-seeking, and being independent from a man rather than being quiet (Onyeka, 2019).

4. Impact of Globalisation

Impact of Globalisation Today, we will examine the 4th impact, which is the consequence of globalisation. However, it is interesting to note that globalisation first directly catalysed Nollywood's aesthetic, turning it into a totally polluted cinematic industry before changing its storytellers' capabilities. As equals, they are rooting for an industry that is beset by multiple difficulties, which such cinematographers continue to perpetually edge, leading to a fusion of genres and themes that some critics believe will result in local narratives eroding or being lost altogether, but other supporters of the argument claim it simply encourages depth of originality (Fakayode, 2020). Nollywood's status within the international film community is only improved by the actions of international cinematographers and the international festivals that highlight its advantages. Such films as Lionheart, the first Nigerian movie to reach the Academy Awards, have globally improved the image of Igbo storytelling along with other forms intertwining Igbo culture (Nwabueze, 2019).

To conclude, the examination of the narrative frameworks in the Nigerian film industry within the context of the digital multimedia global era marks a significant change typified by increased complexity, diversity and enhanced culture. Due to the rapidly evolving world owing to modern technology, globalisation, and cultural discourses, the filmmakers are situated in a space where an amalgamation of stories is being constructed. The growth of digital channels not only improves the standard and the scope of distribution of Nigerian movies but also provides an impetus to self-reflection on cultural and gender issues. In addition, Nollywood's practices are set to enhance further and remain relevant on the international cinema scene owing to the complexity of Nigerian society and the evolving nature of its stories and narratives.

THE ERA OF DIGITAL MULTIMEDIA

1. Industry Trends and Challenges

• Influence of Streaming Services: Streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video have begun financing Nollywood film productions, thus remodelling the distribution networks. Such a change gives filmmakers more access to a wider market and better funding but also creates new challenges, including competition and higher standards because of foreign expectations.

• Film Marketing and Social Media Promotion: Instagram, Twitter and TikTok are also vital in the promotion of Nollywood movies. Filmmakers use the platforms to showcase trailers or behind-the-scenes activities of movies and even target their audience directly. This helps create a series of dynamic, interactive promotional activities.

Funding and Collaboration Challenges: Many filmmakers still find it difficult to obtain funds for their projects. It would be interesting to know how filmmakers overcome this concern by looking into different funding options such as crowdfunding and grants.

2. Cultural Representation and Diversity

Marginalised Communities: The representation of the different ethnic groups which characterises Nollywood films can also help in understanding the structure of the Nigerian society and the stories that it fails to tell and instead chooses to caricature.

LGBTQ+ Representation: In Nigeria, the negative perception of the LGBTQ+ population has been a censoring factor; still, the silenced or even subverbal representation in some movies remains to be the subject of the evolving narrative space.

Language and Culture Preservation: The same aim of reaching a wider base of audience offers a good reason why storytellers rarely rely on the use of local languages, which still are important. Films which seek to support the use not only of local dialects but also indigenous tongues serve as an example of protecting the culture.

3. Technological Innovations

VR and AR in Storytelling: It would be worthwhile to examine the use of new technology in Nollywood; this may reveal some futuristic aspects of how stories are told, providing audiences with a more engaging experience.

AI in Production: The use of AI tools in scriptwriting, budgeting and during post-production decisions can shed light on the growing predilection of the directing industry to adopt more data-driven strategies.

• Blockchain Technology: This section considers how blockchain technology can assist in the protection of intellectual property and fair remuneration to artists.

4. Global Collaboration and Influence

• International Collaborations: To showcase such a collaboration between Nollywood and filmmakers in the West may point to a flow of creativity, techniques and styles that add to the local and international stories.

• Global Trends: This category examines the adoption of international genres (such as thrillers and romcoms) by Nollywood filmmakers, raising questions about how these filmmakers rework global movements for a Nigerian setting.

• Impact on Global Cinema: This category interrogates the advancement of Nollywood on the global platform and its advocacy for African stories and the globalisation of the film sector.

5. **Economic and Social Impact**

• Economic Contributions: This analysis supports Nollywood as an important cultural industry by estimating its contribution to the Nigerian economy in terms of jobs created, export earnings and tourism.

• Social Influence: This study on Nollywood emphasises the ability of cinema to act as a medium for social awareness and change by exploring the themes such as gender issues, corrupt practices, and health-related topics that feature in movies produced by the industry.

• Social Causes Films: Some selected films concerning particular social issues have the potential to illustrate how the use of visual storytelling can instigate discussion and effect a paradigm shift on certain issues in Nigeria.

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