NIGERIAN THEATRE JOURNAL
A JOURNAL OF THE SOCIETY OF NIGERIA THEATRE ARTISTS (SONTA)

Editor
Osakue Stevenson Omoera

2023

Table of Contents

Nigerian Theatre Journal:
A Journal of the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists

Vol. 23 Issue 1 2023

THE CHANGING NARRATIVES IN NOLLYWOOD MOVIE VIEWING THROUGH ONLINE STREAMING

Solomon IDYO and **Jeremiah METHUSELAH**
National Film Institute, Jos, Nigeria
Emails: solomonidyo@gmail.com; mekau65@gmail.com
ORCIDs: https://orcid.org/0009-0004-9048-1561;
https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2364-5415

Abstract
The deployment of digital technologies for film production, distribution and marketing in the Nigerian film industry can be considered a giant stride, which has triggered drastic changes in the production values, quality and standards of the industry. This study examines the impact of these digital technologies on Nollywood film industry, howbeit, with particular focus on the changing narratives of movie viewing through online streaming. The study adopted the qualitative methodology, and the use of documents and visual media research instrument was utilized. Thus, different types of documents and other visual media like books and other publications, newspapers and the Internet were used to extract relevant data. Amongst other findings, movie viewing in Nollywood through online streaming has drastically changed the phase of the industry, as it has attracted new deals and secured production partnerships, locally and internationally; created new revenue streams for filmmakers and placed the industry on the global scale of vibrant film cultures. However, amidst these plethora of benefits, there are peculiar challenges that unless tackled, this development would not last. Consequently, this study concludes that, to sustain and maximize the gains of online movie streaming in Nollywood to deliver for the greater good, even in the long run, these loopholes in the system like issues bordering on content development, contractual agreements, cyber security, illegal downloaders etc. should be addressed. This study recommends the respective agencies of government and relevant industry stakeholders should leverage on this great advancement, and expedite action in tackling the issues that will truncate it.

Keywords: Changing narratives, Nollywood, Movie viewing, Online streaming, Film marketing.

Introduction
It is needless to say, internet connectivity and mobility is the foundation of today's new media ecosystem. Consumers can now enjoy digital content and media services anywhere anytime with the wide spread of mobile smart devices and wireless network. The emergence of online content platforms has created a paradigm shift in the media industry, from traditional broadcasting methods to internet streaming distribution (Kweon and Kweon 1). Thus, in today's digital age, we find that technology is ever changing and with that comes its difficulties, especially for the older generations that did not grow up using much of these new streaming options. Many believe that there are many consumers out there today that will not try new online

media streaming options if it is too difficult to learn. To bridge the gap, many companies have to make the use of very simplistic products in order to reach a broader audience (Lee et al. 10).

Technological advances are another important factor influencing how consumers view entertainment in their homes. Cable companies and now streaming options are providing customers an easier way to access digital content and much more of it. As technology continues to evolve, the use of hand-held media devices is seeing a drastic increase. Hand-held devices improve the viewing experience of online streaming services. Social trends are playing a huge factor in how customers are adopting online media and what they watch. Social media mixed with technology allows users to connect more easily and see what everyone is watching (Lee et al. 11). Thus, over time, there has been a drastic shift in the way people consume video content. Before now, it was most likely via a Digital Video Disc (DVD) — which is a compact disc that can store a large amount of information. With the advent of the internet, this moved slowly, but steadily, to consumption via the web. Consequently, Nollywood movies, very recently, have become quite popular. Many more platforms are now paying attention to content that comes from the Nigerian film industry popularly referred to by the appellative, Nollywood. This can be attributed to an overall increase in the quality of content, as well as the demand for them. It only makes sense to posit that these online platforms and services have completely altered and reshaped the structure of the industry—the way and manner in which the industry is operated has changed drastically.

Streaming Platforms and Services at a Glance

A video streaming platform or service is an on-demand online entertainment source for TV shows, movies and other streaming media. These services provide an alternative to cable and satellite on-demand service, often at a lower cost. Use of streaming services often requires fees, either per view or subscription. The videos come from a network that is typically cloud-based. The availability, content and price of services may vary from one region to another (techtarget.com par.1). Some services feature wide hardware support for numerous devices such as smart TVs, streaming media receivers, computers, tablets and smartphones. Others may be more limited in the type of devices, like Hulu, or tailored to a specific brand's devices, much like iTunes for Apple devices. Other services are ad-supported, like Google video, or run on a premium model and also offer some full feature movies at a cost. Examples of pay video streaming services include Netflix, iTunes, Hulu, YouTube, Vudu, Amazon Instant, LoveFilm, Baidu, NowTV and Vimeo. Free sources include the Internet Archive, Crackle, Engage Media, Retrovision, Uncle Earl's Classic TV Channel and Shocker Internet Drive In (techtarget.com par. 1).

Streaming is an immediate and continuous method of accessing content from the internet. It has become the predominant way for people to experience music and videos. The main advantages of streaming include, but not limited to the following: Streaming is immediate—streaming content starts to play more or less instantly, regardless of how large the audio or video file is. There is no need to wait for it to

download in its entirety. Secondly, streaming does not require storage space. A user does not need a large hard drive to hold content they want to watch or listen to, unlike the way you need to download apps and have sufficient space to store them. Thirdly, most streaming apps let you choose what you want to watch or listen to freely, meaning that the user does not have to abide by a cable or radio schedule (Johnson par. 6). On the flip side, streaming has its own limitations, which include, but not limited to the following: A user needs an active internet connection to be able to stream any content. A user can only stream if s/he is connected to the internet, so as to use streaming services without cellular data, Wi-Fi, or an internet connection. Secondly, streaming is a real-time activity; if the user wants to watch the same movie again later, for instance, the user will need to have an internet connection every time to play it. This is unlike a downloaded file, which only needs to be downloaded once for indefinite playback. Thirdly, the user might be limited by the internet connection speed. The connection must be fast (and reliable) enough or streaming playback will fail, with audio or video playback that starts, stops, stutters, and buffers (Johnson par. 7).

An Avalanche of Streaming Platforms Globally and Locally

Regarding development in digital technology for film marketing and distribution, there has been an overwhelming rush or accumulation of online streaming platforms and services globally and locally. These platforms and services are readily available at the disposal of filmmakers to utilize in showcasing their movies to a global audience. This development, to say the least, has taken the business of film marketing and distribution far beyond the boundaries of space and time. The writers of this paper were able to compile a list of at least twenty (20) of the top streaming platforms and services (as at the time of writing this paper) with a brief highlight on each one of them. They include the following:

Iroko TV is a platform that provides paid-for Nigerian films on-demand. It is one of the first movie streaming platforms in Africa. Iroko TV is owned by the business tycoon Jason Njoku. He is married to Nollywood actress, Mary Remy Njoku. On Iroko TV, you can have access to up to 5000 Nollywood films and TV series (Omega 207).

Netflix has been the pioneer and market leader of the OTT industry. The firm began its streaming services in 2007 and started original content productions in 2013, successfully debuting its first series *House of Cards*. As of 2019, Netflix has over 61 million subscribers in the US. Netflix first acquired *Lionheart* by Genevieve Nnaji and has gone on to acquire more Nigerian movies such as *King of Boys*, *Up North*, *Mums at War*, *Chief Daddy*, among others.

Showmax is an online subscription video-on-demand platform. It was launched in South Africa and it contains diverse categories of video content. Showmax has oodles of Nollywood content.

YouTube is a popular video streaming platform. It has many channels that share Nollywood movies. All one needs to do to watch movies via YouTube is to search or identify these channels and subscribe to them. With Nollywood movies going mainstream; one can access them from anywhere and watch them anytime.

Ibaka TV platform has over 15,000 hours of movies and TV content which one can stream or download whenever one wants. Its mobile app is available on IOS and Android.

My Nollywood movies are fully dedicated to Nigerian movies. It also contains Nigerian and Ghanaian movies from popular actors and actresses in the industry.

Libra TV is a one-stop entertainment point that not only brings good and quality African movies, but also facilitates their production. It remains one of the best platforms to watch Nollywood movies in Nigeria.

RealNolly TV is one of the smoothest platforms to download Nigerian movies. Although there is a registration process before you can access everything. After registration, you can have access to all varieties of Nigerian movies both the latest and the old in the industry.

Yoruba Play, with this, one can access the world's best Yoruba movies, thousands of Yoruba films on your device anytime.

Waploaded is a pure site packed full of Nigerian movies, mostly latest Yoruba movies.

Amon Point TV, as the name implies, the Yoruba movies on the website are arranged in order of update.

You can also search for the latest movies to watch. It is one of the simplest sites to use for Yoruba movies.

9ja Rocks is the latest on the list of top websites. It is a simple and easy to use website that commands a series of other entertainment. It has a collection of Yoruba movies that allow fans to choose from.

Avo TV, the app enables viewers to stream and watch Avo TV content anytime and anywhere. Once downloaded, viewers are free to watch different movies.

Afrinolly app is one of the most popular options for watching comedy series, full-length African videos, Nollywood movies and popular shows.

Video Moja is a simple and unique app that allows one to watch latest African movies. With this app, one can easily toggle to the category of movies one is searching for. It can be action, comedy, drama, romance and others.

Okiki is among the very top apps that can be used to stream and watch different African movies.

Nigeria movie now, this amazing app from Essences Entertainment can be used to watch current African movies, drama, comedy and entertainment.

Yoruba movies, with this app, one can watch all movies acted in Yoruba language and showing their rich cultural values.

igodo.tv, the app allows one to watch Benin language films and other Nollywood films.

Nollywood Movies Hub, this app allows one to watch tons of Nollywood and Ghallywood movies. With this app, it will feel like one is watching cinema while at home.

Indeed, the number of cable and streaming options available to any individual today can be almost overwhelming. However, most consumers do not have the option of paying for all of them so they must choose which services they are willing to pay for, which in turn directly impact the channels/shows they are able to view. Online streaming subscriptions have gained popularity around the world because they are

offered at a much lower price with the many other extra features as compared to cable television. Many people are shying away from cable providers to use streaming media options, since the latter provide the flexibility to purchase only the services you wish to use and the versatility of accessing them from anywhere. Research has found that as prices continue to increase for cable TV, consumers are switching to the more affordable streaming options (Cox qtd. in Lee et al. 12).

Nollywood in the Digital Era: The Impact of Streaming Platforms and Services on the Industry

A quick preview of the historical trajectory of the Nigerian film industry reveals that, a few years back, Nollywood movies were distributed globally through digital video disc (DVD). The level of piracy was high and many filmmakers lost millions after producing movies. With the advent of the internet, everything now seems easy for film producers. Immediately after working on their movies, film producers submit them to an online platform, while they still promote and monitor the views. The influx of a myriad of online streaming platforms and the aggressive adoption thereof by filmmakers for the distribution and marketing of their movies is perhaps the 'biggest thing' that has happened to the Nollywood industry since 2021. This new development is currently redefining how movies are being marketed and distributed.

Prior to the emergence of online streaming platforms and services in Nigeria, the Nigerian film industry survived under teeth and skin with a traditional film distribution system that was plagued with countless problems that made the system dysfunctional. Ebekue provides a perfect description of this traditional system of film distribution and marketing that was in place in the Nigerian film space thus:

> The traditional film distribution network in Nigeria is basically domiciled in the different electronic markets located in different parts of Nigeria. These markets serve mostly as distribution centres from where the films are accessed by local vendors and rental shop operators. Basically, there are four major distribution centres in the country which are located within the western and eastern Nigeria geo-zones. There is the Alaba and Idumota distribution centres all located in Lagos State and the Onitsha and Aba distribution centres located in Anambra and Abia States respectively. These four cardinal locations serve as the film distribution anchors from where these films are distributed and made available to local consumers. The Northern Nigeria is serviced by the Kano film market which serves as the hub for film distribution in the area. These distribution centres are usually run by a number of business men known as marketers. These marketers are also producers who make and market their movies in addition to marketing others that are produced by non-marketer producers. (95–96)

With the dawn of the internet system and digital media technologies in Nigeria, more avenues have begun to spring up through which films are distributed. Unarguably, the growth in streaming services has taken the Nigerian film industry to the universal stage to say the least. It has placed Nollywood on the global scale of film

cultures. In contrast with previous years, one can boldly claim that technology has made Nollywood a lot bigger in 2021 going forward. The industry has become more technologically inclined as compared to the previous years. Ebelebe, however, sees a synergy between the new innovative approaches to film distribution and the traditional system. He avers that in Nollywood, current trends suggest that these innovative approaches to screen content distribution are gradually establishing themselves alongside the traditional Nollywood system. The emergence of Nigerian owned internet-based distribution platforms such as irokotv, Ibaka TV, TV Nolly, Nollyland, igodo.tv, Afrinolly, among others, seem to have ushered in a new phase in the circulation of Nigerian screen content both locally and internationally. Apart from the online distribution platforms earlier highlighted, there are other internet-driven developments that have offered new forms of content acquisition. These innovations have direct consequences on screen content distribution and exhibition (49).

There are other remarkable effects of this new development on the Nigerian film industry. There is a general improvement in the technical quality of Nollywood films in the digital era. This is largely driven by the desire to meet up with the technical specifications of the online streaming service providers. Thus, there is great emphasis on the quality of equipment and the output, audio and video format, colour grading, etc., unlike in previously when the quality of equipment deployed for productions and other technical elements were not duly considered. Most filmmakers are now able to recoup the capital invested in the production of their movies. This is very much unlike what was obtainable in the industry, where filmmakers invested millions producing movies and would barely have half of the capital they invested in production return to them. *The Guardian* (Nigeria) corroborates that: the success of the movie production industry worldwide can be partly attributed to the increase in digital platforms. irokotv, often referred to as the Netflix of Africa and other popular platforms like ShowMax and Kwese have helped in the distribution and provision of streaming video-on-demand services. Irokotv pays filmmakers approximately ₦3.6 to 9 million for the exclusive right to stream their movies for a certain period of time. Its role as an effective distribution channel for movies cannot be underestimated as it has a global audience of over 5 million people in 150 countries and a catalogue of over 5,000 Nollywood films (*The Guardian* n.p).

Digital media has greatly expanded the ways in which stories could be told. The internet offers content producers access to a vast audience, and Nigerian content producers are not missing out on this global trend. Emerging and established Nigerian filmmakers operate in a world where social media and networking tools such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter are connecting filmmakers directly with audiences that are willing to pay for content (Ebelebe 62–63). Similarly, the internet and other social networking tools have also offered opportunities to Nigerian screen content producers in the area of marketing and promotion. Currently, many Nigerian filmmakers are like a one-person army that can create their own posters, package their own films and are able to sit at a laptop and move their content across the world to anywhere that it needs to go. As Obi Emelonye points out, "now you can release your films in Nigeria from London without coming back. All you have to do is upload it and

upload all the trailers on the portals of the distribution company or the cinema company and they would pay" (qtd. in Ebelebe 75).

Another area that the digital era has impacted Nollywood great is that of the ease of promotional activities. Before the introduction of social networking sites like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter, most Nollywood promotion activities were carried out using print and electronic media such as television, radio, newspapers, posters and so forth. The cost involved in the promotion of finished creative work was prohibitive, and also the options available for audiences to access these promotion materials whenever and wherever they wanted was limited. However, currently, the Internet is providing access to a vast audience at a fraction of the cost of traditional methods, and also promotion materials could be accessed using mobile devices, whenever or wherever; that makes the consumer think about the film and want to go pay and watch it (Ebelebe 75).

While new technologies offer innovative ways to connect storytellers with audiences, advances in digital distribution and exhibition seem to have drastically changed the landscape of movie piracy in Nigeria. Unlike the last decade, the use of VCDs and DVDs as distribution channels are increasingly declining. Many Nollywood filmmakers are experimenting with new circulation models and it appears the industry's straight-to-video (STV) distribution model is radically being undermined by new technologies. Today, a number of Nollywood films are released across platforms—from theatrical release to video-on-demand (VOD), subscription-video-on-demand (SVOD), television, then to digital video disc (DVD) and so forth – and the process has somewhat 'minimized' the activities of pirate networks in the distribution chain (Ebelebe 74). Corroborating the foregoing, Odugbemi observes that, "we are witnessing a reduction in the effects of piracy on our creative work, because we found new channels to sell our films" (qtd. in Ebelebe 74). The drive for theatrical exhibition by Nigerian producers is prompting a paradigm shift in the industry. The Nigerian filmmaker Akinmolayan points out that: without digital cinema Nollywood would not be where it is right now, we would still be at loggerheads with pirates. It is the DVD pirate marketers that would still be running the industry but right now that is not happening; producers are earning additional revenue by putting their films in the over thirty cinemas that we have in the country today (qtd. in Ebelebe 74). Digital technology may have crippled the activities of piracy, but the system itself is not piracy-free. Contrary to Akinmolayan's position Mauyakufa and Pradhan are of the view that the advancement in digital technology has rather exacerbated the menace of piracy. According to them:

> Whilst Nigeria has developed its film industry and managed to create its own identity by exhibiting its culture to the world, the technological advancement has also facilitated piracy in the distribution phase which has disrupted the traditional distribution forms. The availability of internet has exacerbated piracy through illegal websites that release films to audience at low cost or even free. Internet has empowered unauthorized persons to access and stream films illegally through online platforms. This has increased the number of pirates in Nollywood who have taken advantage of the disorganized

distribution and marketing spheres. The piracy has resulted in the loss of revenues, even though it operates on a low-budget for as little as ten days to produce a film, unlike in Hollywood or Bollywood. (815)

It, thus, means that both the traditional and digital systems of film distribution are all faced with the challenge of piracy. One may argue that, somehow, in spite of the magnitude of piracy that is experienced with content distributed online, the digital distribution system is still a formidable alternative to the traditional system. While the online distribution system made possible by digital technology might be a better alternative to the traditional system of distribution, it is, however, not without a plethora of hiccups of its own that unless addressed, the lifespan of this great innovation will be short-lived, especially within the Nigerian context. We must first establish that, online streaming is not an easy task. Sadly, there are many individuals and/or groups in the Nigerian motion picture industry that are illegally making money out of the venture. Illegal downloading (also known as piracy) is when a user downloads a copy of paid content for free without permission from the owner. According to Nwokedi and Okonkwo, "while a person/company is making money from unauthorized online streaming services, another person/company is losing money accruable from copyright" (1). Contents like films/motion pictures are cinematography and are subject to copyright. In Nigeria, certain legal considerations are imminent before exploring the business of online streaming. Nwokedi and Okonkwo further highlight what the provisions of the Nigerian legal framework for content copyright and infringement and related issues that are necessary in addressing copyright issues.

The answer to the above situation appears to be simple only if there is the political will on the part of the respective government regulatory agencies. The Nigerian Copyright Act should be amended to reflect the realities of the internet-based intellectual property, including film. This is one way of encouraging filmmakers to utilize the internet for distribution of their products. This should be closely followed by an aggressive sensitization of the masses. There should be continuous sensitization of the audience towards growing the culture of online film consumption. This sensitization should include the need for verifying the authorization status of the sites from which films are downloaded. Aside from the foregoing, critics and practitioners also see the absence of a formalized distribution structure as having a devastating effect on screen content creators and their ability to earn revenue. This development has led to various attempts by the government and practitioners to formalize the distribution system in Nollywood. Even the National Distribution Framework (NDF), introduced by National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) in 2007 to regulate the structure of distribution of films, and to make it auditable, has failed to achieve the desired result. However, with the changes occurring globally in the way screen content is produced and consumed by audiences, a new generation of Nollywood practitioners has deployed innovative strategies to get their creative work to the platforms that will provide their audience access (Ebelebe 73).

To this end, the Film policy in Nigeria should be broadened to capture the imperative of online distribution of films. Such policy thrusts should be targeted at

creating the institutional framework and removing all glitches towards an efficient online distribution culture in Nigeria's film industry. It should provide a background for a film market built to suit the new media forms that will serve as a viable alternative to the traditional system of film marketing and distribution long in existence in Nigeria. Nevertheless, this cannot be viable as long as the challenges of copyright infringements inherent in the Internet space are not adequately resolved as suggested earlier. This requires that, relevant government agencies like the Nigerian Film Corporation (NFC) and the NFVCB must be strengthened to provide the framework and establish the structure needed to uphold the growing digital film market. Apart from the challenges of copyright infringements and the absence of a formalized structure for the new film market, other issues include expensive internet access, and slow data speeds that have continued to pose problems for content consumers in most sub-Sahara African countries like Nigeria. Other issues border on content development, contractual agreements, cyber security, etc. It bears mentioning that, online streaming platforms and services are truly a breakthrough for Nollywood in the digital era. However, to sustain and maximize it to deliver for the greater good even in the long run, these issues in the system must be addressed. The respective government and relevant industry stakeholders must leverage on this great advancement, and expedite action in tackling the issues that will truncate it.

Conclusion

The advancement of technology has created new opportunities for all industries even as the film industry across the globe is a major beneficiary. The technological innovation is continuously transforming the film industry, thus enabling the application of different digital technological methods and systems in the production, distribution and exhibition of films. Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry, is not left out in this trend, as it is being impacted by the technological advancement as it subscribes to this revolution in digital technology. Consequently, it is evident that emerging trends in Nollywood show that, content producers are now inventing new approaches to screen content distribution and exhibition as discussed in this study. The new generation of filmmakers in Nollywood is now attracted to big budget film projects, innovative internet-based distribution models, mainstream theatrical releases, film festival circles and they have unhindered access to the global film audiences. This development has made it possible for Nollywood filmmakers to move from solely earning a substantial fee for their creative content to establishing multiple revenue streams in the highly global competitive marketplace.

Works Cited

Ebekue, Emmanuel O. "The New Media as a Viable Alternative to Traditional Film Marketing in Nigeria." *UJAH: Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities* 19 (2018): 88-111.

Ebelebe, Ugo. "The Impact of Digital Technology on Emerging Film Industries (Lessons from Nigeria)." *School of Humanities, Languages & Social Science*. Queensland: Griffith University, 2017.

"Definition of Video Streaming Service." Tech Target. 25 August 2022. <http:/www. techtarget.com/>.

Kweon, Heaji J. and Sang Hee K. "Pricing Strategy within the US Streaming Services Market: A Focus on Netflix's Price Plans." *International Journal of Contents* 17 (2021): 1-8.

Lee, Christopher et al. 2018. "Factors Affecting Online Streaming Subscriptions." *Communications of the IIMA* 16. http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/ciima/vol16 /iss1/2/.

Lobato, Roman. "Creative Industries and Informal Economies: Lessons from Nollywood." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13 (2010): 337-354.

Johnson, Dave. "The Beginner's Guide to Streaming, Including How it Works, the Pros and Cons, and More." *Business Insider*. 25 August 2022 <http://www.business insider.com/>.

Mauyakufa, Fortunate and Anup Pradhan. "The Role of Technological Advancement in African Cinema: A Case Study of Nollywood." *Proceedings of the International Conference on Industrial Engineering and Operations Management,* Pretoria/ Johannesburg, South Africa, 2018. 814-821.

Nwokedi, Afamefuna and Ifeanyi E. Okonkwo. "Online Streaming Services in Nigeria: The Gold, the Legal Considerations." 25 August 2022 <https://unzikedu.acade mia.edu/>.

Omega, Tori. "The Performative Digital Africa: iROKOtv, Nollywood Televisuals, and Community Building in the African Digital Diaspora." *The SAGE Handbook of Media and Migration*, 2020. 207-219.

Omoera, Osakue S. and Silver A. Ojieson. "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Implications of Netflix's Venture into Nollywood seen from a Local Audience Perspective." *Studies in World Cinema: A Critical Journal* 2.1-2 (2022): 128-141. doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/26659891-bja10020

"The Nigerian Film Industry." 29 November 2019. Guardian Life: *The Guardian*. 25 August 2022 <https://guardian.ng/life/the-nigerian-film-industry/>