

NIGERIAN THEATRE JOURNAL

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

Vol. 23 Issues 1 and 2, 2023

ISSN: 0189-9562 (Print)

ISSN: 2971-6748 (Online)

Editor
Osakue Stevenson Omoera

2023

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The Nigerian Theatre Journal (NTJ) (ISSN: 0189-9562 Print; ISSN: 2971-6748 Online) is published by the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists (SONTA), C/O The Editor, NTJ, Department of Theatre and Film Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Federal University Otuoke (FUO), Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

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CHANGING WITH CHANGING TIMES: A PEEP INTO NOLLYWOOD PHYSICAL FILM MARKETS IN THE ERA OF ONLINE MARKETING

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Abstract

At the early stages of Nollywood (the film industry in Nigeria), names of physical film markets were regular in thrillers and posters of films. These include the markets at Upper Iweka Onitsha, Alaba International Lagos, Idumota Lagos, Pound Road Aba and Milverton Avenue Aba. These markets handled the general marketing of the industry. In the present day Nollywood, most of the marketing in the industry are done online. Yet, the names of these physical markets still suffice on the thrillers and posters of Nollywood films. This paper attempts to take a look at the state of the physical film markets in Nigeria in contemporary times. The markets surveyed are the film markets in Electro-Mart Market Onitsha Anambra State (which is a re-location of the market at Upper Iweka Onitsha), Alaba International Market and Idumota Market both in Lagos, and Pound Road and Milverton Avenue both in Aba Abia State. The work is approached through documentary research, observation and interview sessions with the marketers in, and leaders of the markets. It is concluded that despite the fact that activities have grossly dwindled in these physical film markets, they are still very relevant to Nollywood for some other vital functions they perform for the industry. What is missing in these markets is the suitable political environment for the industry. The paper recommends the provision of the enabling economic, natural and, most importantly, political environment for the industry to thrive better in this highly digital era.

Keywords: Nollywood, Physical film markets, Online marketing, Digital era, DR.

Introduction

The word market is used to mean a place where buyers and sellers meet to facilitate transaction or exchange of products – goods and services. It is a meeting point for sellers of a particular product and buyers of such a product for transaction to take place. A market can be physical (like a retail outlet) or virtual like an electronic retail (e-retail) outlet. Every business enterprise takes place within a market. The term is derived from the Latin ‘*Marcatus*’ which means trade, commerce, merchandise, a place where businesses are transacted. The art and business essences of film are inseparable just like the software and hardware components of the computer. The artistic aspect of film is like the software while the commercial aspect could be likened to the hardware. Hence, this article aligns with Richard Maltby’s assertion that for film to be successful, just like any other product, commerce and aesthetics must embrace each other for the

consumer's delight (12). As regards the Nigerian film industry (Nollywood), the economic aspect of its evolution, survival and sustenance cannot be over-emphasized. It projects "the Nigerian culture and indeed, the African continent to the outside world" (Ayakoroma 2).

Every business venture exists in an identifiable environment. Environment does not mean only the place (state, region or country) but also includes "all operating forces that affect business transactions" (Anyanwu 77). Furthermore, marketing environment is "a set of diverse and dynamic forces which could either be controllable or uncontrollable but which contribute to affect the marketing operations and opportunities." Kotler and Armstrong divide environment into micro environment and macro environment. The micro environment includes internal environment, marketing channels, firms, market competitors and publics (62 - 91). The macro environment includes demographic environment (the human population); economic environment (factors affecting the purchasing power and spending patterns of consumers); natural environment (natural resources that make inputs and/or affect activities and are also affected by such activities including energy); technological environment (the technological needs of the market); political environment (statutes, agencies and pressure groups that have influences and limiting effects on marketing activities and considerations); and socio-cultural environment (society's values, behaviours, perceptions and preferences) (Kotler and Armstrong 62-91). Marketing environment is a strong factor for the survival of any business venture.

Nollywood Film Marketing as Service Marketing

Probably the most frustrating aspect of the available literature on services is that the definition of what constitutes a service remains unclear. The fact is that no common definition and boundaries have been developed to delimit the field of services (Peter and Donnelly 216). The above view captures a major concern in the discourse of services marketing – that of definition. Many authors, however, approach the definition of services marketing from the point of view of defining what goods and services are individually. Even at that, Lovelock et al. as quoted in Ihentuge state thus: "services have traditionally been difficult to define. Complicating matters further is the fact that the way in which services are created and delivered to customers is often hard to grasp, since many inputs and outputs are intangible" (57). "Most services include added value from goods which makes it difficult to define a pure service. But to put it simply, services are intangible deeds, processes and performances to satisfy the needs and wants of consumers" (Tuohimaa 22). This article understands services as those economic activities that are usually intangible, offered by one party to another party for sale or in connection with the sale of goods. These are different from goods which are objects of value over which ownership rights are usually established and exchanged. Service marketing is the sale and marketing of intangible products instead of physical goods.

Certain characteristics have been attributed to services though scholars have not quite agreed on this. To many, intangibility, inseparability of production and consumption, heterogeneity, and perishability are the special characteristics of services.

The views of Kotler and Keller on the characteristics of services are in tandem with the above view but they used the word “variability” in place of heterogeneity (380). Again, the only difference between the views of Kotler and Keller above and that of Kumar and Meenakshi is the inclusion of “presence of other customers” as one of the characteristics of service by Kumar and Meenakshi (767). From the common threads running across all the characteristics/elements of services listed by authors as noted above, a re-production of this table expanding the characteristics/elements of services into differences between goods and services will suffice:

Ten of the most critical differences between products and services	
1. The customer owns an object.	1. The customer owns a memory. The experience cannot be sold or passed on to a third party.
2. The goal of producing a product is uni-formity – all widgets are alike.	2. The goal of service is uniqueness; each customer and each contact is “special.”
3. A product can be put into inventory; a sample can be sent in advance for the customer to review.	3. A service happens at the moment. It cannot be stockpiled or saved to be used at a later date.
4. The customer is an end user who is not involved in the production process.	4. The customer is a coproducer who is a partner in creating the service.
5. One conducts quality control by comparing output to specifications.	5. Customers conduct quality control by comparing expectations to experience.
6. If improperly produced, the product can be pulled off the line or “recalled.”	6. If improperly performed, apologies and reparations are the only means of recourse.
7. The morale of production employees is important.	7. The morale of service employees is critical.
8. Customer can determine level of quality by comparing product to other products.	8. Customer can determine level of quality throughout the delivery of the service.
9. Low level of collaboration between the buyer and the seller.	9. High level of collaboration between the buyer and the seller.
10. Greater number and variety of product brands available to customers.	10. Fewer brands of services available to customer

Source: (Peter and Donnelly 219)

This study upholds the opinion that the use of products here instead of goods is faulty. Both goods and services are products – a fact which Peter and Donnelly

acknowledged thus: the dominant form is used to classify them as either goods or services (all are products) (216). Film could be said to be a social service product and as such falls under the social needs. Those who see goods as only physical objects will attest to the fact that a film recorded on tape or disc, and sold for home consumption becomes a tangible/physical product. Those who go to cinema halls/movie theatres to watch films, or purchase such films online buy such films as services. Previously, film was categorised as service, its marketing as service marketing, and the industry as a service industry. This study posits that such categorization is faulty as it only suites the major film industries where the commercial life span of a film normally starts with a cinema release before it is released on video; then broadcast on pay-television, before it is broadcast on public television. Finally the film is released on other ancillary media (video games, cartoons, among others) and merchandising. This is the typical marketing chain of the major film industries of the world – the first and second world film industries. This categorization never anticipated the emergence of experimental and avant-garde film industries that rely mainly on the video technology and whose release pattern of films favours straight-to-tape/CD/DVD that are immediately pushed into the markets. Such film industries cannot be adequately categorized as service industries or their marketing tagged service marketing.

Applying the above discussion on Nollywood and other experimental film cultures that favour the straight-to-tape/CD/DVD experience, reveals that marketing in such film cultures cannot quite fit into services marketing. Peter and Donnelly had foreseen this almost two decades ago and stated thus: “however, most products are partly tangible and partly intangible... These common, hybrid forms, whatever they are called... may not have the attributes just given for totally intangible services” (220). The products of Nollywood (the video films) are marketed as tangibles through the physical film markets or as intangibles through the online/internet markets and other content delivery platforms. Scholars have mostly adopted the name ‘service products’ for such hybrids of tangible and intangible business ventures. The emphasis of this study is on the consumption of film as tangibles and intangibles. This is so adopted because of the conviction that the content delivery platforms and online marketing have not completely taken over the traditional mode of film marketing/distribution in Nigeria and may not do so in the nearest future. State of technological development in the country, literacy level, technological know-how, power outage issues, and poverty are such issues that has continued to bar a larger part of Nollywood audience from patronizing the content delivery and online film marketing/distribution platforms (Omoera and Ojieson 131).

It should be borne in mind that the Nigerian, and indeed African audience prefers to consume popular arts as a public which displays the sense of coming together. The per viewer type of screening, which some of the content delivery and online distribution platforms favour, is a disruption of the group viewing experience and the communicative interaction that film consumption induces among viewing Nigerian and African audience members. This favours the preference of the more orthodox spaces of consumption and is the same reason why people who have access to sports channels still patronize the sports viewing centres. Hence, the emphasis here on both the

orthodox marketing patterns and online marketing which favour the marketing of Nollywood films as tangible service products. Also, this study adopts Kerrigan's position that film marketing "begins at the new product development stage and continues throughout the formation of the project ideas, through production and into distribution and exhibition" (10). This adoption of Kerrigan's position is because the author believes it is necessary to "continue the film marketing journey unto the realm of film consumption" as consumers "may wish to extend their consumption through visiting online review sites, discussing the films with friends or progressing with their film consumption to consumer related films" (10).

Nollywood and Online Film Marketing

Online film marketing does not rely on theatrical success or sales returns, but instead on micropayments, subscriptions or advertising-driven business models. Online film marketing came with problems which the filmmakers had hitherto not experienced nor envisaged. The issue of non-theatrical marketing of Nollywood films is a contemporary issue that is not adequately addressed by the Copyright Act 2022. This is likely because it may not have been considered prominent as at the time of the last amendment of the act. By this, we mean buying and consuming Nollywood products as services – the consumers here buy the content or soft copies of the films. Ancillary marketing/ synergy involves a wide range of areas and activities. Such areas and activities include television screening, theme parks, consumer products, sound tracks, books, video games, interactive entertainment, pay per view (PPV), premium cable services, cable television, network television, television syndication, airlines and internet streaming. Yet, the most commonly used ancillary markets for film in Nigeria are terrestrial television, cable television, video clubs, and most recently, internet streaming. These new media delivery platforms have done both good and bad to the industry with their content delivery and online distribution.

This distribution platform has been pointed at as a signal to the death of Nollywood by a certain school of thought. Tony Abulu of the Filmmakers Association of Nigeria (FAN), USA paints a picture of the destructive nature of this system of distribution thus: let me break down the ... issue so that everyone can understand how it can destroy every positive attempt by Nigerian artists to succeed. Currently, there are over sixty internet websites dedicated to presenting any African entertainment product to millions of people all over the world for free! ... A film or music is released in Nigeria today and it will be on the internet the same evening streaming (showing) to millions of people for free! ... The hidden truth, however, is that websites charge advertising rent for banners that are placed on websites mainly from big ... companies (46). Very many other stakeholders have also voiced out such concerns. Clarion Chukwura did not mince words in declaring that "African Magic ruined Nollywood marketing" (1). Fred Iwenjora contributes to the discourse by saying this:

While Nigeria movies and its stakeholders are enjoying a road show... to celebrate its growth and escapades, strong indications are that this current celebration of Nollywood... as the third largest and fastest growing movie industry in the world after Hollywood and Bollywood will soon be a thing of

the past considering the latest discovery that a website operated by a certain Devace Nigeria... and indeed several other websites show the latest Nollywood films free of charge even before their release in Nigeria to those who want to watch them. All you need to get into any film of your choice is just a click away. And it is on a full TV window which could be dubbed by anyone who cares. (1)

To the veteran actor, Emeka Ike, the content delivery distribution platform has already done the dreaded harm on Nollywood. To him, Nollywood is dead already as a result of the distribution of Nollywood films by the content delivery platforms with impunity free of charge. There are other angles and issue to the online distribution/content delivery platform. Olusola Isola pinpoints such angles and issues: the threat, however, is that this technology has expanded the scope of piracy, which is the bane of the home video industry in particular and the creative ventures in general. Since the laws governing the activities of operators of the internet are still evolving, even in the global environment, this imposes new challenges on drivers of the Nigerian home video industry to monitor illegal offering of the industry's products on the internet. Even after tracking and detecting piracy of works on the internet, the mode of arresting and prosecution, and where the prosecution would take place, is bound to pose a big challenge. In the process, much funds, energy and goodwill may be lost and home video investors will be the loser for it. Therefore, the responsibility now falls on the industry to evolve creative and dynamic ways of tackling this challenge, which is bound to continue into the future (247).

On the other side of the divide are scholars and film experts who ardently believe that content delivery/online distribution has come to revolutionize Nollywood for good. Discussing the emergence and activities of Multichoice (DSTV) through its African Magic Channel which shows mostly Nigerian movies to its multi million subscribers in Africa, Europe and the Middle East, Nwandiko is cited in Evuleocha as noting that "with time this exposure of the Nollywood film industry can only serve to improve the quality of movies produced" (410). Also, in a discussion of the threats and opportunities of the internet, Olusola Isola asserts thus:

The opportunity this internet video streaming is offering home video is that it removes the boundaries for expansion of the marketing of Nigerian home videos into the whole world. Already, some marketers have developed websites dedicated to marketing and promotion of Nigerian home videos where they make previews of such videos possible. Some are making it possible for the audience to subscribe to watch the videos only or to purchase a copy of such home videos online. This enhances the contribution of the Nigerian art industry into the global popular culture and bolsters the struggle against cultural imperialism with such contribution from the indigenous folk culture into the evolving global culture. Apart from this, it has the potential of expanding the financial base of artistes, producers and marketers, including all participants in the home video industry if well managed. (246–247)

In a similar vein, Aliyu Daku, the founder of African Magic, an African TV content delivery platform, reacted to the threat by the Film, Video Producers and Marketers Association of Nigeria (FVPMAN) to close down all content distribution platforms by asserting that banning Africa Magic channel from showing Nigerian movies will not revive selling of CDs in Nollywood. He is of the view that one way to solve the problem is to make quality content to ever evolving tech savvy audience and adapting movies to the web and the new lifestyle of viewers (quoted in Njoku 1). Toeing this line of argument, Nollywood female director, Amaka Igwe, affirms that the internet will be very important in the future of the film industry in Nigeria but that having strong legal backing that stipulates strong rules of engagement for online distribution in Nollywood is apt (8). Also, Idachaba believes that:

In this era of globalization, the Nigerian film industry must find a place in the global market, if it is to actualize its commercial viability. The content industry is without doubt a huge market globally . . . They are essentially a market for co-producing, buying, selling, financing and distributing contents. It provides for people involved in . . . content production and distribution industry, a conference and networking forum for discovering trends, and trade content rights on a global level. It is indeed a potential market for Nigerian video film to find buyer and platforms that can enrich their viability. (168)

To Andy Amenechi, this digital distribution platform... implies a world where information and content is digitized, personalized and accessible ‘on-demand’ via multiple fixed and mobile platforms and devices. It is a world where the user is actively engaged, contributing to and interacting with services rather than passively consuming them. This has resulted in a fundamental shift in the way that users consume, perceive and value content and services. Ironically, this challenge also offers the most outstanding opportunity and prospect that has ever presented itself to Nollywood (25). The list is truly endless. Online distribution and content delivery platforms are here to stay. This is one truth that Nollywood filmmakers should accept and brace up to because “the existing traditional distribution system has been stretched to its limit, unable to satisfy the every growing audience Nollywood has generated, all over the world” (25). Amenechi further advises that Nollywood filmmakers should really take cognizance of, and brace up to the digital revolution to stimulate alternate distribution channels and generate new revenue streams. The only issue to tackle about this is how to fashion out workable rules of engagement that will benefit the industry and the stake holders.

Most importantly, New Media may be our God-sent answer against piracy of intellectual property in the Nigerian Film Industry. It is now evident that the so-called war against piracy in Nigeria is an inside joke, the punch line of which nobody has whispered to the filmmakers... With that reality, it behooves on content producers to become more creative in areas of finding solution to this quagmire. It is time for a radical idea shift; from giving possession right to audience (to own the DVDs) to giving just rental or viewing rights on platforms that are mostly virtual i.e. internet, mobile devices etc., on a pay-per-view basis.

This kind of thinking helps to bypass the pirates to a large extent. Since at no point will video Discs exchange hands, they will have no platform to ply their evil trade, yet, contents get to the target audience. (6)

Yet, it should be borne in mind that the content will not take over the tradition mode of distribution in Nigeria in the nearest future. State of technological development in the country, literature levels, technological know-how, power outage issues and poverty are such issues that has continued to bar a longer part of Nollywood audience from the content delivery and online distribution platform. Also, the mode of consumption of popular art in Nigeria should be noted here. Per view type of screening, which some of the content delivery and online distribution platforms favour, is a disruption of the group viewing experience and the communicative interaction it induces among viewers. This is a distinct part of viewing culture in Nigeria. This viewing culture is not peculiar to Nollywood but has been part of the cinema tradition in Nigeria. Ekwuazi had emphasized this viewing tradition even before *Living in Bondage* that kick started Nollywood was produced. In his words, “part of the total meaning of any film derives significantly from the viewing circumstances, from the communicative interaction among the audience, a triadic relationship involving each member of the audience with the others, and, of course, with the screen” (25).

The foregoing favours the preference of the more orthodox spaces of consumption. This is the same reason why people who have access to sports channels still patronize the sports viewing centre. Hence, there is still need for the marketers to improve on the orthodox marketing patterns. But to cue into this trend that has somewhat come to stay, the Film and Video Producers and Marketers Association of Nigeria (FVPMAN) is working out modalities of setting up their own content delivery platform tentatively tagged “Nollyland.” In an oral interview, Mr Patrick Ugwu, the CEO of PAGLOBAL International Company Idumota Lagos, who is also the chairman FVPMAN in Idumota, and the Vice Chairman of FVPMAN Lagos State branch, explained that: back to the issue of content delivery platforms, new ones are coming up every now and then. Some are now as cheap as 1000 for monthly subscription. To tackle this menace, FVPMAN is setting up our own delivery platform. This one will not allow viewers to dub; it will be strictly on pay per view bases.



**Plate 1: Flier of the Content Delivery Platform Proposed by the FVPMAN
(Photo Credit: FVPMAN)**

The Physical Film Markets in Nigeria

Several components make up place in McCarthy’s 4p framework. They include channels, coverage, assortment, location, inventory, and transport. In Nollywood, the physical markets are topmost on the list of distribution channels. Even at that, emphasis of the leader marketers is on the major film markets in Onitsha Anambra State, Idumota and Alaba International both in Lagos, Pound Road Aba Abia State, and a little of Kano in Kano State. Yet there are film markets scattered all over the country. The market nichers and the market followers serve these markets. The industry produces a single product, video films, using generic classification as a form of assortment. What follows is a gloss into some of the physical film markets in Nigeria.

Alaba International Market Ojo, Lagos

The Alaba International Market located along the Lagos-Badagry Expressway is said to be the biggest Electronics Market in the West African sub-region. The market was founded in the 1970s. It is located in Ojo Lagos State – the reason why the market is also known as Ojo Alaba International Market. Thousands of people besiege this market on daily basis even from as far as such African countries like Ghana, Togo, Benin Republic and East Africa. Apart from the sales of a wide range of electronics and electrical accessories, the market offers the repair of faulty home appliances.

Its macro environment has helped to sustain this market. In demographic environment around the market, especially the human population is one factor as Lagos is densely populated. The economic environment (factors affecting the purchasing

power and spending patterns of consumers) has also worked well for the market as the poverty level around the market is averagely middle class. When it comes to the natural environment, there exist natural resources that make inputs and/or affect activities and are also affected by such activities. These including the seaports around and the energy supply. In terms of technological environment, the market meets up with its own technological needs and supplies same to other cities within and outside Lagos. As the importation base of electronics, electrical and allied products, the technological environment of Alaba International is favourable. The market also benefits from the political environment around it (statutes, agencies and pressure groups that have influences and limiting effects on marketing activities and considerations. The socio-cultural environment of the market (society's values, behaviours, perceptions and preferences) also works well for the market.



Plate 2: Views of the Film Market in Alaba International Market Ojo, Lagos. This market is also controlled by the market leaders of Nollywood (Photo Credit: the researcher)

The Alaba International Market is very popular with film marketing. The film market in Alaba is located around the popular plazas that also house the music market. They include the popular Ubakason Plaza, and Zebros Plaza. Such big names in Nollywood film industry as Great Favour Production Limited, Rich Rock Productions, Pressing Forward Productions Ltd, Prosineki Merchandise Limited, P-J Movies Production Limited, Global Update Movies Ltd, and Onyii Best Bright Industries Ltd. This big Nollywood film market is also unpopular with the activities of film piracy.

Electro-Mart Film Market Onitsha Anambra State

This market is located along the Onitsha/Asaba Expressway in the ancient city of Onitsha, Anambra State. It film market started at Iweka Road Onitsha at the inception of Nollywood but was later moved to its present location by the state government when Iweka Road became too congested. The market which is directly opposite the Premier Breweries Onitsha is now more popularly known as Electro-Mart Onitsha. The macro environment that sustains the market includes demographic atmosphere exemplified by the human population in Onitsha and other cities it serves such as Asaba in Delta State, Benin in Edo State, Awka and Nnewi both in Anambra

State, Enugu in Enugu State, Owerri in Imo State, Aba in Abia State, Port Harcourt in Rivers State and others. The inhabitants of Onitsha and the visitors are mainly business executives. Hence, the economic environment (factors affecting the purchasing power and spending patterns of consumers) around the market is above average.



Plate 3: Front View of the Electro-Mart Film Market Opposite Premier Brewery, Onitsha Anambra State (Photo Credit: the researcher)

The various markets in Onitsha, the nearby River Niger and the adjoining Niger Bridge 1 and 2 have also added to the natural environment to make up the natural resources that make inputs and/or affect activities and are also affected by such activities including energy. The market supplies its technological environment, especially the technological needs of the market. The political environment (statutes, agencies and pressure groups that have influences and limiting effects on marketing activities and considerations is one major factor in the market, especially in this era of insecurity and the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) instituted sit-at-home on every Monday. The socio-cultural environment (society's values, behaviours, perceptions and preferences) around the Electro-Mart has not placed the market on a disadvantaged position. As regards the socio-cultural environment, Onitsha is the commercial nerve centre of the Igbo ethnic nationality – an indispensable player in Nollywood. Hence, the cultural background of the video films is one they are very familiar with.



Plate 4: Views of the Electro-Mart Film Market Onitsha Bubbling with Activities. This market is controlled by the market leaders of Nollywood (Photo Credit: the researcher)

Idumota Lagos Film Market



Plate 5: Views of the Film Market in Idumota Lagos. Though many EP marketers have left this market, it is still a semi active Nollywood market (Photo Credit: the researcher)

Just like the film markets in Onitsha and Alaba International, the Idumota Lagos Film Market is also favoured by environmental influences. In demographic milieu, the market has the human population for its sustenance. The economic environment around the said market is such that does not limit the purchasing power and spending patterns of the customers. The average person putting in conscious legal efforts in this area is sure of some daily income. The natural environment in Nigeria, especially as it relates to cost of energy is generally poor and affects the market. Most persons have learned to live on other alternatives. The market meets its own technological demands. As regards the socio-cultural environment, Lagos has become a metropolitan city that every cultural background fits into. This accounts for why the consideration of storyline/narrative techniques, language and casting are effective marketing stunts in the market. Such film production companies as Overcomers Films

and Marketing, Royal Film Marketing, Lake View Productions, and PAGLOBAL International Company are located in this market.

Conclusion

Several components make up place in marketing framework which includes channels, coverage, assortment, location, inventory, and transport. Both the physical markets and the online distribution platforms make up place in film marketing. In Nollywood, the physical markets used to be topmost on the list of distribution channels using posters, flexes, film jackets and trailers as their promotional strategies. The online distribution and content delivery platforms are here to stay. It has also done both good and bad to the industry with its good contributions to the industry outweighing the bad aspect. What is missing in these markets is the suitable political environment for the industry. The best government can do now to assist Nollywood marketing and industry performance is to provide the enabling economic, natural and, most importantly, political environment.

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