IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities Vol 9 No.2, 2023 www.igwebuikeresearchinstitute.org/igwebuikejournals.php

NOLLYWOOD RITUAL REPRESENTATION AND THE AWKA YOUTHS: AN EXAMINATION OF THE PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES

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DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.31621.83688

Abstract

Youths are influenced habitually from what they see or hear through the internet, television, over the radio, reading books, or watching movies. In recent times Nollywood film industry and the new media have become the major sources of entertainment, inspirations and aspirations for the youths and even adults alike. This study, however, focuses on ritual representation and quick money syndrome themes in Nollywood films and thus applies Stuart Hall's Media Reception theory as a theoretical framework to evaluate how the receiver of media messages behaves. A survey design of a quantitative research method is employed to carry out the analysis of the numerical data generated for the study. The research findings reveal that there are changes in the behaviours of most of the Nigeria youths living in Awka metropolis as a result of seeing Nollywood movies on ritual killings and financial crimes which most of the respondents agreed is one of the reasons behind the get-rich-at-all-cost syndrome among today's youths. The researchers therefore recommend that the government of Anambra State/Nigeria should organize conferences, workshops and symposia for the filmmakers to ensure that film productions are being built on proper storylines different from ritual killings and the bastardization of the people's cultural practices. The script writers must be encouraged and sponsored to write scripts worthy of changing the prevalent narratives of money rituals and get-it-atall-cost syndrome that is dominating more content in the Nollywood film industry.

Keywords: Ritual Representation, Nollywood, Quick Money Syndrome, Youths

Introduction

The ritual representation in Nollywood films is viewed and seen on the groundwork of suggestive realism. Technically speaking, the ritual scenes are created to enhance the storyline and heighten the aesthetic spectacles of the movies as the case may be. However, the sacrificing of human beings for ritual purposes has become worrisome in Nigeria society in recent times. This study is set out to evaluate the perspectives of parents living in Awka metropolis on the subject matter stated above. Awka is an Igbo society as well as the capital city of Anambra State, Nigeria. The city hosts one of the federal universities in Nigeria with most of its populace educated and enlightened. Over the years some scholars have pointed Igbo films as films riddled with ritual practices as could be found in some Igbo traditional practices. Teddy T Hanmakyugh posits that:

The ritual phenomenon in Igbo culture has taken a different dimension as life is no longer regarded sacred but a necessary tool for ritual sacrifices to become wealthy. The successful urban Igbo person likes to enjoy a good life. He/she may not necessarily own a building in the city but he/she is proud to put up an edifice of comparable standards in his/her village. This, no doubt, is a big challenge to age groups domiciled in the village who believe that the rural urban drift is the ultimate way to make their dreams come true. This belief finds its roots in the various video films depicting the lifestyles of affluence the Igbo enjoy in the cities by employing any diabolic means to become wealthy (377)

Inasmuch as the above opinion may have some elements of believability in it, most Igbos are not ritualists, the ritual representation in the films does not represent the foundation and lifestyles of the Igbos. Again and again ritual representation could be found in almost all genres of Nigerian movies, whether it is a Yoruba Film like Adebayo Tijani and Tope Adebayo's *King of Thieves*, (2022) or any other films from other quarters of the Nigerian society. When it comes to ritual visible representation proven in Nollywood films, all the tribes in Nigeria have one ritual or the other, as such, most filmmakers as exposed in the later section of this study produce movies and garnish them with glimpses of ritual sacrifices to enhance the aesthetic spectacles. Quoting Asiegbu Bature-Uzor, Nkechi:

The ritual scenes in Nollywood films constitute what Nico's Hadjinicolaon terms" Visual ideology". Visual ideology according to him is "the way in which the formal and thematic element of particular pictures is combined on each specific occasion. This combination is a particular form of overall ideology of a social class". (229)

One of the cruxes of this study is the composition of this social ideology of ritual killings for quick-money enterprise, as constantly projected to the Nigerian film audiences which could be argued are encouraging maladjusted behaviours among the youthful populations.

Some of the films have shown how one can quickly become a billionaire through ritual and other dubious means without having to follow the right path, or engage in hard work, perseverance, integrity, competence, and credible endeavours.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Reception media theory. The theory could be traced back to the work of a British Sociologist Stuart Hall and his communication model first reviewed in an essay titled "Encoding/Decoding" (Hall,198) Reception media theory takes a closer look at what is actually going on when an audience encounters media text. It provides an analysis of how audiences perceive a certain media message, what meanings they drive, how they associate it, and what effect that message or text has on their psychological, personal and social make-up (Jones, 113). In line with this, Nigeria audiences expose themselves to Nollywood films on ritual, murder and financial crimes may do this by ascribing meanings and having their own perspectives from the content they are viewing. According to George Rodman, Ronald B. Adler Athena du Pré "Mass media are powerful forces in society. Interestingly enough, the average person will say that society is certainly affected by the media but that he or she, personally, is not. This is known as the thirdperson effect. 1 Still, most people remain extremely interested in media effects and equally confused about them (5)" It is in this light that this study therefore contributes to existing literature on Ritual Representation and Quick Money Syndrome among Nigerian youths as it sought to establish the effects of Nollywood films on Nigerian youths.

Ritual Representation in Nollywood Films

An examination of Nigerian society, discloses the challenges which the country's cultural system faces in recent times. Daily, the nation's moral rectitude and cultural values are being attacked by some ideologies centred on Money rituals, and quick money syndrome projected to the Nigerian audience through the film medium. The advent of television has become an inescapable part of modern culture which could be found in virtually every home and recreation centre. Therefore, youths are exposed to the world of television at a very tender age. With a variety of channels available for viewing, the young Nigerian audience now have a plethora of both positive and inappropriate film/television content which may include the display of violence, inappropriate behaviour, and sexual immorality and ritual killings. It may be argued that these illicit contents are viewed by a good number of youths in the society. This is because most Nigerians, especially youths have been exposed to a high range of film/television/internet programmes and communications which have in turn tended to mould their thoughts, behavioural pattern,

belief system and actions. Film showcasing people's culture is an integral part of any society and stands for the sum total of existence of a particular group of people dealing with their past, their present and projected insight into their immediate and distant future. Children/youths are frequently referred to as the most important resources of a society. A lot has been written on the themes of the movies produced in Nollywood. The emphasis on ritual killings, get-rich-at-all-cost syndrome, and financial crime has emerged as ordinary themes and subthemes in most Nollywood films. Moreover, over the years, one can argue that the Nigeria Film industry seems to have implanted in the minds of Nigerian film audiences the inkling that one can only reap success in life if he or she engages in money rituals, as adversarial to good character formation, credibility, ability and dedication to hard work. Some of the Nollywood videos that interrogated ritual and quick money syndrome themes are as follows: Chris Obi Rapu's Living in Bondage (1992) a movie believed to have laid the groundwork of what is today known as Nollywood, Zeb Ejiro's Nneka the Pretty Serpent, (1993), Amaka Igwe's Rattle Snake 1&,2, (1995), Christian Onu's Karishika 1 and 2 (1996) Chico Ejiro's Blood Money, (1997), Andy Amenechi's Rituals (1997), Tade Ogidan's Diamond Ring Parts 1 & 2 (1998), Kenneth Nnebue's Died Wretched (1998), Zeb Ejiro's Sakobi: The Snake Girl 1 & 2 (1998), Fred Amata, and Sunny Collins' Witches (1998), Fidelis Duker's King of Money (1999), Andy Amenechi, and Don Padro Obaseki's Igodo (1999), Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen's Issakaba 1 and 2 (2000), Andy Amenechi's Oracle 1 and 2 (2002), Afam Okereke's Billionaires Club 1, 2 &3 (1999/2003), Michael Jaja's Desperate Billionaire1 & 2 (2005), Sunday Nnajiude's Last Confession 1 and 2 (2005), Obi Emelonye's The Mirror Boy (2011), Ernest Obi's Idemili (2014), Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen's Invasion 1897 (2014), Philips Amayo's Miracle Workers (2015), Reginald Ebere's Living with a Ghost (2015), Kemi Adetiba's King of Boys (2018), Don Single Ndubuisi's The Billionaires and The Return of the Billionaires (2019/2021), Niyi Akinmolayan's My Village People, (2021), Adebayo Tijani and Tope Adebayo's King of Thieves, (2022), Ezeugo U. Ezeugo's The Mad Billionaire (2022), among others. The aforementioned films had in one way or the other explored ritual sacrifices interwoven in magic and sorcery, which are not restricted to human and animal sacrifices offered to the gods in order to gain powers (Which could be political, spiritual and manipulation powers), money making ritual, escaping impending dooms, saving the villagers from their enemies, upholding some cultural practices, (Which could be obnoxious practices) enhancing religious beliefs and so on and so forth. Some of the films mentioned above are synonymous with money rituals. Perpetual Nigerian film audiences may be getting the wrong message of what the films posit as the 'gains' in most cases outweighs the loss. (Most of the antagonists and protagonists enjoy their ill-gotten wealth while scruffy punishment is served towards the end of the movie). Reports of ritual killings, and yahoo-yahoo boys engaging in ritual practices to dupe their

unsuspecting victims are currently spreading throughout different media platforms in Nigeria. Slaying of innocent children, youths and helpless Nigerians at different locations have been attributed to ritual killings. Jonathan Haynes opines that "Nollywood films don't fit naturally into the international film festival circuit—they aren't made to be art films. (4)" In this age of technological advancement, most of the youths have access to the films mentioned above, as greater number of the films are available on YouTube and other online streaming platforms, and in most cases no one is saddled with the responsibility of educating the film audience the latent sublime messages enshrined in the plot of the story.

Research Design of the Study

In this research, the study design is cross-sectional in nature, being designed to find out from a cross-section of parents on their opinions about ritual representation in Nollywood films and the effects it may have on the Nigerian youths. The participants were purposively selected based on some variables such as having internet accessibility, education, internet facilities, being a parent, or living with a youth, and having access to Nollywood films. (For the youths between the ages of 18 to 45). As such, some parents who own internet facilities at home or provided their youths with phones connected to the internet and living in Awka metropolis, Anambra State, Nigeria constitute the study population. The respondents are literate and semi-literate and understand the English language. A sample size of 150 parents and youths formed the study population with the sampling strategy of working class parents and youths. Furthermore, the researchers adopted the purposive/judgmental sampling method in the non-probability sampling. Due to the nature of this study, the researchers used questionnaires. The respondents supply their answers without being constrained by a fixed set of possible responses. The closeended and open-ended questionnaire format is employed in order to elicit adequate information from the respondents. Prior to implementation, consents of the respondents were obtained individually and they were adequately informed of the survey objectives and the rights of the respondents, upon which an individual has the right to participate or opt out without any fear of intimidation. To test the reliability of the instrument, a sample of ten questionnaires were distributed by the researchers and answers were provided by the respondents and approved to be reliable for carrying out the study. In administering the instrument of data collection for this study, over 150 copies of questionnaires were distributed among the respondents. Thus, data from the questionnaire was statistically analysed and the results are displayed using tables and pie charts. The research questions were analysed using simple Percentage as follows:

The following research data derived from the questionnaire are further presented and analysed below. Over 150 questionnaires were administered, 150 copies were retrieved, 4 copies were void for inconsistency in response and for noncompliance to the instructions given. This leaves the researchers with 146 copies. The following research findings derived from the questionnaire are further presented and analysed below.

Section A Demographic Data of the Respondents

Table 1: Gender of respondents

Respondent	Frequency	Percentage
Male	88	58.7%
Female	58	38.7%
Invalid questionnaires	4	2.7%
Total questionnaires retrieved	150	100%

The table shows that greater number of the respondents are males with 58.7% while female population constitutes 38%, and 2.7% did not provide answer to the question in the above table

Table 2: Marital Status

Respondent	Frequency	Percentage
Single	18	12%
Married	124	82.7%
Divorced	4	2.7%
Others	0	0%
Invalid questionnaires	4	2.7%
Total questionnaires retrieved	150	100%

The table shows that most of the respondents are married with 82.7% out the total 100% which makes their replies more reliable because they have had enough experience with youthful lifestyles

Table 3: Highest Educational Qualification of the respondents

Respondent	Frequency	Percentage
Primary	9	6%
WAEC certificate	10	6.7%
Pre-university level	7	4.7%
B.sc/B.A	100	66.8%
Postgraduate	20	13.3%
Others	0	0%
Invalid questionnaires	4	2.7%
Total questionnaires retrieved	150	100%

The table shows that 66.8% of the respondents are graduates which means that most of the respondents are learned enough to give valid information and replies.

Table 4: Religion of respondent

Respondent	Frequency	Percentage
Hindu	0	0%
Islam	16	10.7%
Christianity	84	56%
Traditionalist	38	25.3%
Others	8	5.3%
Invalid questionnaires	4	2.7%
Total questionnaires retrieved	150	100%

Most of the respondents were Christians with 56% out of the total 100% of the respondents. This is because Awka South is in the Eastern part of the country, which is mostly Christians.

Table 5: Occupation

Respondent	Frequency	Percentage
Private sector	22	14.7%
Government service	106	70.7%
Self employed	12	8%
House work	6	4%
Invalid questionnaires	4	2.7%
Total questionnaires retrieved	150	100%

The greater number of the respondents were government workers with 70.7% out of the 100% of the total respondents.

Section B: Research Questions

Table 6Do you have someone who could be considered a youth at home?

Respondent	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	143	95.3%
No	3	2%
Invalid questionnaires	4	2.7%
Total questionnaires retrieved	150	100%

The greater numbers of the respondents of 95.3% out of the 100% respondent have youths therefore their answers are reliable as they have youths which they observe closely.

Table 7:What are their age brackets?

Respondent	Frequency	Percentage
18-25	40	26.7%
26-30	65	43.3%
31-35	17	11.3
36-40	24	16
Invalid questionnaires	4	2.7%
Total questionnaires retrieved	150	100%

The youths within the age bracket of 26-30 have the greatest percentage of 43.3% out of the total 100%.

Table 8: Does your youth have access to television or own personal phones? If yes, what kind

Respondent	Frequency	Percentage
Smart phone	142	94.7%
Small phone	4	2.7%
Invalid questionnaires	4	2.7%
Total questionnaires retrieved	150	100%

Greater Percentage of the youths have access to television and Smart phones with 94.7% out of the total 100%

Table 9: What is the level of your youth exposure to internet contents or films?

Respondent F	Frequency	Percentage
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10-30%	2	1.3%
31-50%	11	7.3%
51-70%	27	18
70-100%	106	70.7
Invalid questionnaires	4	2.7%
Total questionnaires retrieved	150	100%

Most of the youths are exposed to internet contents and films with 70.7% out of the total hundred percent.

Table 10: Do you have easy access to Nollywood films?

Respondent	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	140	93.3%
No	6	4%
Invalid questionnaires	4	2.7
Total questionnaires retrieved	150	100%

Most of the respondents have access to Nollywood films, 140 of the respondents with 93.3% out of the 100% which constitute the greater number of the respondents.

Table 11: Does your youth like seeing Nollywood movies?

Respondent	Frequency	Percentage	
Yes	130	86.7%	
No	16	10.7	
Invalid questionnaires	4	2.7%	
Total questionnaires retrieved	150	100%	

The greater number of the Nigerian youths like seeing Nollywood movies, 130 in number with 86.7% of the total 100% of the respondents.

Table 12: What is/are their purpose of seeing the films either online or on the screen

Respondent	Frequency	Percentage	
To learn skills	6	4%	
Just for entertainment	140	93.3%	
Others	0	0%	
Invalid questionnaires	4	2.7%	
Total questionnaires retrieved	150	100%	

The table shows that most of the respondents' youths see Nollywood movies just for entertainment purposes only with 93.3% of the total 100%.

Table 13: How much time does your youth (s) spend seeing Nollywood films a day?

Respondent	Frequency	Percentage
Less than one hour	2	1.3%
1-3 hours	6	4%
4-7 hours	128	85.3%
8-12 hours	8	5.3%
More than 12 hours	2	1.3%
Invalid questionnaires	4	2.7%
Total questionnaires retrieved	150	100%
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The greater number of Nigerian youths of 85.3% spend 4-7 hours watching Nollywood movies on a daily basis and this constitutes the greater Percentage of the respondents.

Ritual killings, financial crimes, using human beings for money rituals which encourage quick money syndrome are themes, concepts and plots of most films produced in the Nollywood Film Industry. Nevertheless, when youths are engaged grossly into seeing such uncensored movies, this may pose threats to their social behaviour and overall development.

Table 14: Do you agree with the above statement?

Respondent	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	141	94%
No	5	3.3%
Invalid questionnaires	4	2.7%
Total questionnaires retrieved	150	100%

Greater Percentage of the respondents, 94% agreed that when youths engage in seeing Nollywood films on ritual murder and financial crimes, it poses threat to their social behaviour and overall development.

Researches have shown that most youths are influenced by what they see and hear, whether modelling parents or peers' behaviour, reading books or viewing movies online or offline

Table 15

Table 15: Do you believe there have been any changes in your youths' behaviour because of their constant viewing of Nollywood movies on ritual killings and financial crimes?

Respondent	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	143	95.3%
No	3	2%
Invalid questionnaires	4	2.7%
Total questionnaires retrieved	150	100%

Larger number of the respondents believed there were changes in their youths' behaviours because of their constant watching of Nollywood films on ritual murder and financial crimes 95.3% of the total 100%.

Table 16: Can you mark any of these as the changes you are witnessing or witnessed?

Respondent	Frequency	Percentage
Language (Vulgarity)	12	8%
Violent conducts	16	10.61%
Mixing up with unfamiliar friends	18	12%
Speaks more about making money	88	58.7%
Others	12	8%
Invalid questionnaires	4	2.7%
Total questionnaires retrieved	150	100%

The table indicates that 8% is recorded for changes in Language and others that did not indicate the changes they witness, 12% see the youths mixing up with unfamiliar friends, 10% recorded violent conducts, and the greater percentage of 58.7% exchange the ideas of making money more often.

Chart 1: Do you know what a film rating is?

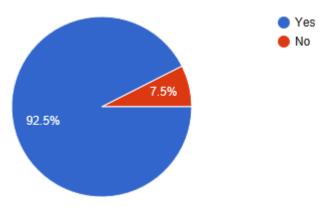
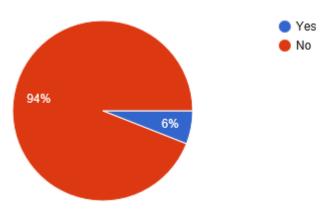


Chart 2: Do you think Nigerian parents abide by film rating?



The response in the above chart is alarming, 94% of the respondents think that Nigerian parents do not abide by film rating, only 6% do so.

Table 17: How do you grade uncensored online and Nollywood movies in recent times?

Respondent	Frequency	Percentage
Good	6	4%
Best	2	1.3%
Better	4	2.7%
Bad	6	4%
Worse	18	12%
Worst	110	73.3%
Invalid questionnaires	4	2.7%
Total questionnaires retrieved	150	100%

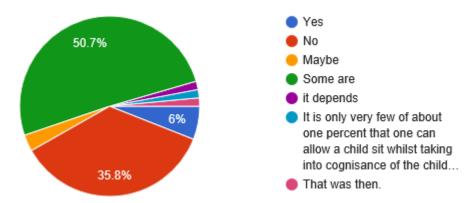
The uncensored movies were graded worst with the highest percentage of 73.3% of the total 100% which means that the uncensored movies in Nigeria presently are in the worst state

Table 18: Thus, how impactful do you think that movie contents are in the lives of the youths

Respondent	Frequency	Percentage
Positively impacted	8	5.3%
Negatively impacted	138	92%
Invalid questionnaires	4	2.7%
Total questionnaires retrieved	150	100%

The table shows that the youths were negatively impacted as a result of seeing Nollywood movies with 92% out of the 100% of the total respondents.

Chart 3: Honestly speaking, do you think Nollywood film contents are suitable for Nigerian youths/children?



The Chart shows that a greater number of the respondents (50.7%) agreed that some of the films are suitable for the youths while 35.8% disagreed, 6% believed that it is only a few about 1 % that is suitable for a youth/child audience.

Discussion

A critical examination of Table 8 shows that 142 of the respondents agreed that their youths have access to smartphones, that is about 94.7%, while 4 of 2.7% have small phones. This implies that their youths have the gadgets that will make it possible for them to have easy access to Nollywood films. As such, access to YouTube, Netflix and other online films streaming platforms are inevitable. Most of the films produced today in the Nollywood Film Industry are hosted by these online platforms. The Nigeria Video and Film Censors Board does not control these online platforms. Therefore, it is difficult for them to regulate the films or rate them for a particular audience. As could be seen in Chart 3, 94% of the respondents believe that Nigerian parents do not abide by film rating, it is even worrisome when the films are not rated at all and the audience have access to them. To support the above analysis, Table 9 indicates that a greater percentage of the respondents are exposed to internet contents and films with 70.7% out of the total hundred percent having access to internet facilities and use the same to access films online. In Table 10, most of the respondents have access to Nollywood films, 140 respondents representing 93.3% out of the 100% which constitute the greater number of the respondents with access to Nollywood films. This validates the data shown in table 13, which indicates that the greater number of youths in Awka metropolis consisting 85.3% spend 4-7 hours seeing Nollywood movies on daily basis, this aids the researchers as most of the respondents have knowledge and experience of what Nollywood films on ritual murder and financial crimes is all about. In Table 14, greater Percentage of the

respondents, 94% agreed that when youths engage in seeing Nollywood films on ritual killings and financial crimes, it poses threat to their social behaviour and overall development. Just as could be seen in Table 15, Larger number of the respondents' witness changes in their youths' behaviours because of their constant viewing of Nollywood films on ritual murder and financial crimes, this represents 95.3% of the total 100%. Table 16 shows that 8% is recorded for changes in Language and others that did not indicate the changes they witness, 12% see the youths mixing up with unfamiliar friends, 10% recorded violent conducts, and the greater percentage of 58.7% exchange the ideas of making money more often. One can argue that it is the resolute of many youths or adults in Nigeria society to make quick money but the rate at which the young adults pay less attention to character, capacity and competence developments is becoming worrisome. It is thus deductible that considering the prevalent situations in Nigeria, what most youths see in films may prompt them into thinking toward money ritual, and get-itat-all-cost syndrome characterised by youths' engagement in money fraud (Yahooyahoo). Table 17, indicates that the uncensored online movies were graded worst with the highest percentage of 73.3% of the total 100% which means that the uncensored movies in Nigeria presently is at the worst state. Yet most of the youths have access to them through cable networks, DVDs, and online streaming platforms. In Table 18, the table shows that the respondents believe that youths are negatively impacted as a result of seeing Nollywood movies with 92% out of the 100% of the total respondents. Chart 3 shows that a greater number of the respondents (50.7%) agreed that some of the Nollywood films are suitable for the youths while 35.8% disagreed, 6% believed that it is only a few about 1 % that is suitable for a youth/child audience. No doubt, some of the films especially films on romance, family circle, comedy, drama and many others are suitable to the Nigerian youths, just like Table 12, indicates that most of the youths see Nollywood films for various reasons, however, greater percentage sees Nollywood movies just for entertainment purposes with 93.3% of the total 100%.

Conclusion

The analysis and discussion of the generated data have shown that Nollywood films on ritual killings and financial crimes themes contribute tremendously overtime to some social vices experienced in Nigeria that are perpetuated by some youths. The study has examined the parents' opinions about Nollywood themes on ritual killings and financial crimes and their possible socio-cultural implications posed to the viewers, especially the youths. Paying attention to Stuart Hall's theory of Reception of the media, most parents agreed that they experience changes in behaviours of their youths after seeing films on the above themes as evaluated in this study. Hence one can conclude that from the analysis

thus far, Nollywood films have had an impact on the social behaviour of some youths living in Awka metropolis, Anambra State. This study reveals that most youths who watch these Nollywood films' content have minimal parental guidance and control. This raises questions in regards to some interpretations and lifestyles that may emerge when youths watch such films from different online film streaming platforms and cable television networks with no proper guidance.

Recommendations

- The government should organize conferences, workshops and symposia for the filmmakers. The script writers must be encouraged and sponsored to write scripts worthy of changing the prevalent narratives of money rituals and get-it-at-all-cost syndrome surfacing in the Nollywood film industry.
- Nollywood films that portray Igbos as money ritualists and fraudsters should be discouraged.
- Further studies of this nature should be encouraged especially in most urban cities in Nigeria. One can argue that today's Nigerian parents are more engaged with work while the youths in most cases are left with no directions. This has prompted many of them into engaging with the internet and other new media content, while some are looking for inspirations, others are seeking self-discoveries. Further research in the major Nigerian cities may also reveal more findings, give credibility to the findings of this research or even discredit its findings hence, it is wrong to assume that Nollywood films impact negatively on every Nigerian youth.
- The Nigeria Film and Video Censors Board should expand its scope to include the censorship of online film streaming platforms and television cable networks that most often did not abide by the censorship procedures laid down by the board. Emphasis must be placed on good representation of the Nigeria cultures in relation to the visual images constructed around money ritual and quick money syndrome

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