

IGWEBUIKE AND COMMUNICATION IN NOLLYWOOD: A QUALITATIVE REVIEW

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Abstract

The current digital society has affected almost every sector of life. The Nigerian movie industry, which suffered the onslaught of colonialism, is not left out. Nollywood is tossed about by the desire to be truly African, on the one hand, and the aspiration to be at par with Hollywood and Bollywood, on the other. This qualitative review entitled "Igwebuike and Communication in Nollywood: A Qualitative Review" investigated the matter, using the Homophily Principle of communication as theoretical framework. It found undue Western influence, negative narratives and inability to explore Igwebuike as the communalistic philosophy of Igbo people in home movies. It recommended promotion of African heritage, transmission of culture and civilization, promotion of community life, decolonizing the film industry and entrenchment of a valuable digital culture as possible panacea. The study concluded that, given its place in global reckoning, Nollywood has the capacity to overtake other prominent industries in the world towards providing a classroom of entertainment and education for second generation Igbos and other Africans in the diaspora.

Keywords: Communalism, Communication, Film, Igwebuike, Nollywood, Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony.

Introduction

Culture and communication are critical elements of the Nigerian movie industry. This is because most contents of cinematic platforms are laced with African flavour. From typical village square scenes to settings of royalty in the Igwe, Emir or Oba's palace, the film industry in Africa is Africanised. This Africanisation speaks to the heart of culture and communication. While communication transmits culture, culture is handed over to unborn generations through effective and efficient communication. This brings to the fore the *Igwebuike* philosophy of the Igbos of South Eastern Nigeria, which communicates the communalistic behaviour, ethos, beliefs, culture, tradition and norms of the people. The already-vibrant movie industry in Nigeria is a handy platform for the romance between *Igwebuike* rendering and communication. As the

philosophy which encapsulates the way of life and values of the Igbos, *Igwebuike* pushes the frontiers of family system, kindred and a strong sense of fellow-feeling.

Because the movie industry in Nigeria has journeyed through an amateur screen to a golden goose on a global spotlight (Dyikuk, 2015), it serves as a vehicle for transmitting various values which are dear to the people. One of such values is *Igwebuike* which connotes communal living and peaceful existence in Igbo societies. Igbo films, which are an irresistible recipe on the Nollywood menu, are replete with scenes which express Africanism, care for one another and common solidarity. Despite the lofty place it occupies on the movie screen in Nigeria, some critics, like Johnson (2000), are of the opinion that Igbo and English movies are culturally confusing. Perhaps this is because, for instance, a film could begin with Emeka (Not real name), in the village, as a local champion who speaks using idiomatic expressions and end with him, in Lagos, as a “White Man” who appears in a suit and dazzles everyone with big grammar (British accent). Unfortunately, despite few instances where culture is infused in scenes, the film industry in Nigeria has not paid enough attention on promoting values, customs and traditions. Copying Western values has also been an albatross of the industry.

To this end, this study aims at:

1. Appraising the place of communication and culture in Nollywood, despite Western influence
2. Accounting for Nollywood through a historical sketch
3. Doing a critical review of *Igwebuike* in Nollywood
4. Assessing elements of communication in Nollywood
5. Making case for communicating an *Igwebuikenised* cinema in Nigeria

Conceptual Spadework

a. *Igwebuike*: As a composite metaphorical *Igwebuike* Igbo word, *Igwebuike* is a combination of three words - *Igwe bu ike*, which means: “*Igwe* is a noun which means number or population, usually a huge number or population. *Bu* is a verb, which means *is*. *Ike* is another verb, which means *strength* or *power*. Thus, put together, it means ‘number is strength’ or ‘number is power’, that is, when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force or strength, and at this level, no task is beyond their collective capability” (Kanu, 2017b, pp.69-70).

b. Communication: Various types of communication include: verbal, nonverbal and written communication (Go, Monachello, Baum, 1996 & Dyikuk, 2017b). Also, “Expressive or informal communication occurs when information is not directly related to role performance” (Mohamad, 2008,p.9). In this article, we would understand communication as showcasing *Igwebuike* (African values) in Nigerian films.

c. Nollywood: This is the Nigerian film industry which traces its roots to 1992, in Onitsha, when Kenneth Nnebue produced the movie *Living in Bondage 1 & 11* - an Igbo-language film with English subtitles. Experts cite this as the beginning of commercial film production in Nigeria (Mordi & Onu, 1999).

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the Homophily Principle of communication as theoretical framework. This principle, which speaks to the heart of the degree of difference on any attribute or group of attributes between a sender and a receiver, holds that for any change agent, such as films makers, cinematographers, videographers, communication scholars, journalists, teachers and other professionals, to succeed in influencing a receiver of communication, namely audiences and viewers, both the agent and the receiver must have the same attributes. These attributes could mean the same culture, norms, education, socialization process and socio-cultural, religious and political values (Mgbejeme, 2009).

The choice of the Homophily Principle of communication as theoretical framework for the study is informed by Pan-Africanism, which seeks a decolonization of the cinematic platform towards raising African scholars and films makers who are in touch with their roots and share the same vision, passion, values and norms with their people. The principle argues that it is when films makers, cinematographers, videographers, communication scholars, journalists, teachers and other experts in the Nigerian film industry Africanise the screen that their audiences would better appreciate watching Nollywood. A Nollywood inspired by *Igwebuike*, especially African communalism, is key to effective education and entertainment which the movie industry desires to achieve.

Literature Review and Discussion

***Igwebuike* Rendering: An Overview**

Igwebuike is an Igbo-African philosophy of complementarity. *Igwebuike* explains how the ethic of reciprocity is at the heart of African philosophy and religion (Kanu, 2017d). *Igwebuike* philosophy aligns with its inner principles of inclusiveness, complementarity and solidarity (Kanu, 2017b). The Igbos believe that “No people can rise to an influential position in the community of nations without a distinct and efficient nationality” (Kanu, 2017e,p.36). This is because of the high sense of community over the individual. “*Igwebuike* rests on the African principles of solidarity and complementarity. It argues that ‘to be’ is to live in solidarity and complementarity, and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation” (Kanu, 2016, p.110-111).

Explaining this further, Kanu opines that the African worldview:

is ruled by the spirit of complementarity which seeks the conglomeration, the unification, the summation of fragmented thoughts, opinions and other individualized and fragmented thoughts and ideas. It believes essentially that the whole is greater than the corresponding parts. It is also a view that maintains that by the coming together of the individual or parts, a viable and sustainable whole will emerge, and by this, the parts will get to the brim purpose of their existence (2017c, p.14).

The extended family system is tied to faith in the Supreme Being and the deities, as well as in ethos of the people. “Because their existence and action, in the midst of communication, are limited by time, place, perception and knowledge, their being is existentially complimentary. Hence they are naturally candidates for company and co-operations” (Kanu, 2018, pp.18-19). In Africa, the individual is connected to the divine through interaction with the deities and ancestors who are believed to intercede for the living. This reveals a collegiality that is tied to faith and morals which further provide “dos” and “don’ts” as ethical codes that guide personal and interpersonal communication.

Nollywood: A Historical Sketch

The first Nigerian films by two filmmakers, Ola Balogun and Hubert Ogunde were produced in the 1960s, but the high cost of production put them out of market (Adesokan, 2006). By this time, the stage had been set for television broadcasting in the country. The 1970s saw the emergence of the first Nigerian feature, *Kongi’s Harvest*, written by Wole Soyinka and directed by Ossie Davis. When state-owned stations began broadcasting in the 1980s, theatre productions

which were circulated in video format took centre stage in Lagos. Through his NEK Video Links, Kenneth Nnebue produced two Yoruba movies namely *Aje Ni IyaMi* (1989) and *Ina Ote* (1990). From that time on, an amateur video trade production (Cinema of Nigeria) began. However, it was his movie, *Living in Bondage 1 & 11* - an Igbo-language film with English subtitles which was produced in Onitsha in 1992 (Mordi & Onu, 1999) that experts hold as the beginning of Nollywood and commercial film production in Nigeria.

When Nnebue's two movies *Glamour Girls 1 & 2* (1994) and *True Confession* (1995) hit the new movie industry (Shaka, 2003), lack of equipment, piracy and harsh economic policies by International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) frustrated the industry (Haynes, 1995). In his submission, Uchenna (2009) explains that what we know today as Nollywood passed through four periods of development, namely; the colonial period (1903-1960), independence period (1960-1972), Indigenization Decree period (1972-1992) and Nollywood period (1992 till date). He further maintained that the history of film in Nigeria from 1903 to 1992 is related to the crucial stages of Nigeria's history. As it stands today, the Nigerian film industry (Nollywood) ranks among the top three filmmaking industries in the world, in terms of the quantity of productions, popularity amongst Nigerians and the transnational audiences (Hanmakyugh, 2019).

***Igwebuike* and Communication in Nollywood: An Investigation**

Identities based on religion, ethnicity, regionalism and communalism, which are essentially "given" rather than "chosen" have existed since the creation of Nigeria (Jega, 2001). For the Igbos of Eastern Nigeria, *Igwebuike* explains their identity. This identity further reveals who they are and their ultimate destiny. Their identity is communal in nature. Accordingly, "These common history, culture, and customs are what this thesis describes as 'communalism' in terms of the nature of the Igbo and African cultures. It embodies the substance of the beingness of Africans or the Africanness of Africans as a matter of fact, their existence and the quiditas of their characteristics" (Uwah, 2009, p.11). This is where *Igwebuike* comes in.

Igwebuike captures the communalistic nature of Igbo societies. The anthropological depictions of Africans, especially Igbo philosophy and thought, are seen in their communalism which buttresses, more or less, the aesthetic cultural elements of these films (Uwah, 2009). Experts on African film think that

“Communalism captures the eco-system that operates in African cosmology which serves as a core attribute of most Nollywood filmic story lines” (Uwah, 2009,p.54). It is essential to understand that the notion of being in existence is founded on communalism, whereby, every being is considered to be related to one another (Uwah, 2009). To this end, the concept of God in African communalism is revealed by the names given to Him in African languages (Uwah, 2011).

For Moemeka (1997, p.181), “Just as the communalistic culture demands that the younger generation must respect, listen to, and learn from the elders, so it demands from the elders appropriate action to provide conducive learning experiences for the younger generation.” Communication is always a question of attitude towards one’s neighbour closely tied to communication rules designed to ensure communal social order. He contends that in both verbal and non-verbal, communalistic acts are engaged in in order to confirm, solidify and promote social order (Moemeka, 1998).

Igwebuike is conveyed through effective communication. Perhaps, this is why to maintain cohesion in African communalistic societies, there is a “belief in a kind of power communication [vital force] between the ‘spirit world’ and the ‘human world’, whereby activities in one realm affects those in the other realm” (Uwah, 2011,p.94). The Igbo communication style is learned within the primary socialization process of the Igbo ethnic group. They also use their communication styles for code switching, engaging in conversations with their co-ethnic membership as well as interacting with family members in their ancestral home (Onuzulike, 2018).

That second generation Igbos are able to learn Igbo traditional culture directly from their home-land through Nollywood (Onuzulike, 2018) demonstrates the relevance of *Igwebuike* to the cinematic platform. Movies such as *My Best Friend* (2003), *Oil Village* (2001), *Widow* (2007), *Last Ofala* (2002), *Fool at 40* (2006) showcase the concept of communalism (Uwah, 2009). Film as a means of communication is a potent tool for image making, cultural diplomacy, propaganda, education, information and entertainment (Hanmakyugh, 2019). Today, “One impressive aspect of Nollywood in all of these is in the representation of religio-cultural rituals as a major aspect of communalism” (Uwah, 2011,p.86). Culture is the bedrock of Nollywood’s thematic film expositions. One can, therefore, conclude that Nollywood is Nigeria’s cultural

ambassador. Although Nollywood films are quite potent in celebrating and promoting Nigerian cultures, some of these films have come under thematic criticisms as they glamourize negative ritual themes in the name of culture (Hanmakyugh, 2019).

Recommendations: Towards Communicating an *Igwebuikenised* Nollywood

1. Promotion of African Heritage: Even as it seeks to mirror society, Nollywood should promote local content, which includes rich artifacts, customs/cultural images and idioms. By the same token, African drama and cinema should be at the forefront of promoting African (Nigerian) identity (Dyikuk, 2015) to the world through *Igwebuike* and all it encapsulates. That way, Nigerians abroad and successive generations would be able to remember their rich heritage.

2. Transmission of Culture and Civilization: This study argues that *Igwebuike* should promote an African civilization through culture. Lovers of sports, movies, documentaries and other genres of television in the country should take advantage of what digital television offers to not only have a good time in terms of recreation but also learn new cultures and civilization (Dyikuk & Chinda, 2017) which are capable of building bridges of peace amongst various people across the country and the African continent.

3. Promotion of Community Life: *Igwebuike* stands for community life and sharing. As such, Nigerian films should be “deeply rooted in Nigerian cultural traditions and social texts, which focus on Nigerian community life” (Onuzulike, 2009,p.176). This is in agreement with the submission of another film scholar who explained that “One impressive aspect of Nollywood in all of these is in the representation of cultural rituals as a major aspect of communalism” (Uwah, 2009, p.25). Interestingly, the works of experts on communication and African communalism, like Moemeka (1997), lend credence to Igbo style of communication which promotes community life, sharing and a strong sense of fellow-feeling.

4. Decolonizing the Film Industry: Because Africa has been misunderstood and misrepresented by the West, it behooves scholars and film experts to use Nollywood as a platform for decolonisation. “By understanding the interactivity between Africans and their environment as communalistic people, one discovers the errors of the colonialists who rejected what they did not understand of the people’s cultures and [mis]represented them as

barbaric and paganistic” (Uwah, 2009, p.25). Promoting *Igwebiuke* worldwide may serve as the desired recipe that would checkmate the incursion of Western values in the local film industry.

5. Entrenching a Valuable Digital Culture: Because “the world has evolved a fascinating digital culture” (Dyikuk & Chinda, 2017,p.41), it is crucial for film makers to seize the opportunity to promote good homegrown movies which teach morals and values from an African perspective. For example, the criticism that the ongoing Big Brother Naija which seems to showcase Western values is receiving could be addressed by using the platform to entrench African values. Besides, Nollywood can help the diaspora community or second generation Igbos to be in touch with their roots.

Conclusion

We saw that although culture and communication are important elements of the Nigerian movie industry, the *Igwebuike* philosophy, which aligns with the principles of inclusiveness, complementarity and solidarity, has not been given a pride of place on the screen. This is why the author employed the Homophily Principle of communication as theoretical framework to demonstrate that film makers, cinematographers, videographers, communication scholars and journalists in Nigeria have the capacity to change the narrative towards giving *Igwebuike* philosophy, with its ingredients of culture, norms, education, socialization process and socio-cultural, religious and political values, its rightful place in home movies.

Given its place in global reckoning, Nollywood could overtake Hollywood and Bollywood if experts insist on infusing African values, like *Igwebuike*, into film production. This way, Africans in the diaspora, particularly second generation Igbos, will benefit more. In conclusion, to effectively and efficiently communicate an *Igwebuikenised* Nollywood, promotion of African heritage, transmission of culture and civilization, promotion of community life, decolonizing the film industry and entrenchment of valuable digital culture must be given high premium.

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