Gender Dynamics in Developing Countries: Evaluation of Nollywood Depiction of Women in Rivers State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the perception of Rivers State residents regarding the depiction of women in Nollywood movies, focusing on the films Adire (2023) and Wura (2023). Using a qualitative content analysis and interviews with six key respondents, including film directors, communications experts, a community leader, and a social commentator, the study investigated how Nollywood's portrayal of women reflects and reinforces societal norms. The findings reveal that these films predominantly depict women in traditional and stereotypical roles, such as caregivers and homemakers, with limited representation in professional or leadership positions. These portrayals align with patriarchal expectations and perpetuate gender stereotypes, influencing societal attitudes and shaping women's self-perceptions. Drawing on Gerbner and Gross's (1976) cultivation theory and Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory, the study highlights how repeated media portrayals reinforce cultural norms and limit women's aspirations. Despite these limitations, there is an emerging critique among residents advocating for more progressive and empowering representations of women in Nollywood. This study underscores the need for Nollywood to diversify its portrayal of female characters to foster gender equity and challenge traditional gender norms. To address the concerns regarding stereotypical portrayals, it is recommended that Nollywood filmmakers prioritize the creation of more diverse and empowering roles for women. This includes depicting women in leadership positions, showcasing their contributions to various sectors, and emphasizing their complexities as individuals.

Keywords: Nollywood, gender depiction, gender stereotype, stereotypical portrayals

INTRODUCTION

The media plays a pivotal role in shaping societal values, perceptions, and attitudes, particularly regarding gender roles. Film, as a powerful medium of communication, reflects and influences cultural norms and social behaviors. Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry, stands as the second-largest film producer globally, with a vast audience both locally and internationally (Okome, 2007). Its portrayal of gender roles, especially those of women, has been a topic of scholarly and societal interest due to its significant impact on perceptions of femininity, empowerment, and societal expectations.

Nollywood films often mirror the socio-cultural realities of Nigerian society, frequently portraying women in traditional roles such as caregivers, homemakers, and submissive partners (Okunna, 2020). These portrayals align with patriarchal structures deeply rooted in African cultures, which reinforce gender stereotypes and limit the representation of women in professional or leadership roles (Ogunleye, 2004). According to Goffman (1979), media representations often function as "gender displays," perpetuating societal norms and expectations by emphasizing traditional attributes and roles.

The perception of women in Nollywood movies is particularly relevant in Rivers State, a region with distinct cultural dynamics and gender expectations. Research indicates that media representations significantly influence viewers' beliefs and behaviors, often shaping societal norms and individual aspirations (Bandura, 2001; Gerbner & Gross, 1976). The reinforcement of traditional gender roles in films may have profound implications for how women in Rivers State perceive themselves and how society views their contributions.

The cultivation theory posited by Gerbner and Gross (1976) suggests that consistent exposure to stereotypical portrayals in media cultivates a worldview that aligns with these depictions. For instance, women depicted predominantly in domestic roles may inadvertently reinforce the perception that their primary contributions lie within the home. Similarly, Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory highlights the role of media in modeling behavior, suggesting that Nollywood's portrayal of women could influence both men's expectations of women and women's self-perceptions.

Despite the persistence of traditional portrayals, there is a growing critique of Nollywood's gender representations. Feminist scholars, such as Mulvey (1975) and hooks (1992), have long emphasized the need for diverse and empowering representations of women in media. These critiques are echoed by audiences who demand a shift from stereotypical depictions to narratives that reflect the complexities and aspirations of modern Nigerian women.

Adire (2023) and Wura (2023), two contemporary Nollywood films, exemplify these dynamics. Both films predominantly depict women in traditional roles, reinforcing gender norms that resonate with longstanding cultural expectations. Yet, they also spark critical discussions about the limitations of these portrayals and the need for progressive storytelling. In Rivers State, where cultural expectations about gender remain significant, the interplay between media representations and societal perceptions offers an opportunity to explore how Nollywood shapes and reflects local attitudes toward women.

This study seeks to examine how residents of Rivers State perceive the depiction of women in Nollywood movies and to explore the implications of these portrayals on societal behavior and individual aspirations. By analyzing films such as Adire and Wura, and engaging with key stakeholders, the study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on media representation, gender equality, and cultural transformation. Pursuant to attaining this purpose, the objectives of the study are to:

I.   Assess the perceptions of Rivers State residents on the depiction of women in Nollywood movies.
II. Explore the connection between female characters in movies and the behaviour of women in Rivers State.

Based on the above objectives, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do the residents of Rivers State perceive the depiction of women in Nollywood movies?
2. In what ways do the representation of female characters in Nollywood movies relate to the behaviour of women in Rivers State?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminist theory

The concept of feminist theory has deep historical roots, originating with Irish activist Frances Power Cobbe in 1884. Cobbe likened social movements to the tides of the ocean, asserting that each wave follows a unified impetus, carrying societal progress onward and upward along the shore (Hewitt, 2010). Early feminist thought emerged even earlier, with publications like A Vindication of the Rights of Woman by Mary Wollstonecraft in 1794, which laid the groundwork for subsequent feminist advocacy. Feminist theory, historically spearheaded by women, seeks to eradicate sexism and its manifestations by addressing the social, political, and economic inequalities that sustain gender-based oppression (Tong, 2018).

Feminist theory is a framework for understanding the roles that genders play within societal structures, advocating for the integration of women's interests into social institutions. It examines individuals' diverse experiences through a gender-based political lens, which underscores the systemic constraints and limitations imposed on both women and men (Huilman, 2013). Central to feminist theoretical analyses is the idea that societal and structural factors, rooted in sex and gender, contribute significantly to the difficulties women face. These factors often intersect with other personal and societal constraints, compounding the challenges faced by women.

In media, feminist theory critiques the patriarchal systems that perpetuate stereotypes and marginalize women, providing a critical lens for analyzing gender portrayals. In the context of Nollywood, Nigeria's vibrant film industry, feminist theory becomes particularly valuable for understanding how women are depicted and how these portrayals shape societal perceptions, especially among residents of Rivers State. Nollywood's cultural narratives often reinforce traditional gender roles, portraying women in subservient or victimized positions. Studies have found that these portrayals frequently depict women as dependent, weak, or overly emotional, reinforcing stereotypes that limit women's roles within families and communities (Ekeanyanwu & Jokodola, 2019).

The societal impact of these portrayals is significant. In the words of Ebunuwele and Dike (2022), although, feminism is regarded by fraction of our society as a contrast to our cultural orientation, others also see parts of feminism as necessity for the protection and empowerment of women and the development of our country. Residents of Rivers State, like audiences elsewhere, are influenced by the repeated imagery and narratives in Nollywood films. Such portrayals shape social norms, either by perpetuating gender inequalities or challenging them. Feminist scholars argue that films portraying women as empowered, independent, and multifaceted challenge patriarchal norms and inspire audiences to envision more equitable gender dynamics (Adichie, 2017). Conversely, the persistence of stereotypical portrayals undermines gender equality efforts and may negatively influence perceptions of women's capabilities in leadership, business, and other spheres in Rivers State.

To address these negative perceptions, feminist theorists advocate for a deliberate shift in Nollywood's storytelling approach. They call for narratives that highlight women's agency, resilience, and contributions to society. Such portrayals, scholars argue, can reshape public attitudes and foster a more equitable perception of women's roles and capabilities (Nwosu, 2021). Feminist theory thus serves as an essential analytical tool for residents of Rivers State, enabling them to critically assess gender representation in Nollywood and promote a more inclusive and balanced portrayal of women in media.

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory, developed by George Gerbner and later expanded by Gerbner and Gross (1976), examines the long-term effects of media, particularly television, on viewers' perceptions of reality. The theory argues that individuals who consume media content frequently are more likely to internalize the messages conveyed, perceiving them as reflective of real-world norms and values. Originally focused on the influence of violent television content, cultivation theory introduced the concept of the "Mean World Syndrome," where heavy viewers develop a distorted view of the world as more dangerous and hostile than it truly is (Gerbner et al., 2002). This theory underscores the impact of repeated media exposure on shaping attitudes rather than immediate behaviors.

In the context of Nollywood, Nigeria's vibrant film industry, cultivation theory provides a critical lens for understanding how residents of Rivers State perceive women. Nollywood movies often portray women in stereotypical roles, such as submissive wives, caregivers, or emotionally dependent individuals. These depictions reinforce traditional gender norms and societal beliefs about women's subservience to men (Okunna, 2020). Cultivation theory suggests that repeated exposure to such portrayals can lead to "mainstreaming," a process where audiences adopt these media-driven stereotypes as universal truths, thereby influencing their attitudes and behaviors (Morgan et al., 2017).

For residents of Rivers State, the pervasive influence of Nollywood films can shape societal expectations of women's roles within families, communities, and workplaces. The theory's concept of "resonance" further explains how media representations that align with viewers' lived experiences amplify the impact of these portrayals (Shrum, 2017). In a society with deeply rooted patriarchal structures, Nollywood's stereotypical depictions of women may reinforce existing biases, limiting women's opportunities in leadership, business, and other domains.

Despite these challenges, Nollywood holds the potential to challenge gender stereotypes and reshape societal perceptions. Cultivation theory implies that consistent exposure to alternative narratives featuring women as

empowered, independent, and capable can gradually influence audiences toward more egalitarian views on gender roles (Gerbner et al., 2002). Positive portrayals of women in leadership, business, and other nontraditional roles can inspire viewers to question and dismantle patriarchal norms, fostering greater gender equity (Adichie, 2017). Cultivation theory offers a valuable framework for analyzing how Nollywood's depiction of women shapes societal perceptions in Rivers State. By leveraging this understanding, filmmakers and stakeholders in the Nigerian film industry can adopt storytelling strategies that promote gender equality and challenge harmful stereotypes. Such efforts are essential for fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

Conceptual Review

Nollywood

The term Nollywood refers to the film industry in Nigeria, which, as of 2014, was valued at $5 billion, making it the third-largest and most valuable film industry in the world after Hollywood and Bollywood (Tolchinsky, 2015). Nollywood's rise to prominence began in the 1990s and has since gained global recognition, despite challenges such as piracy and the absence of well-structured regulatory and distribution systems. The industry owes its origins to Kenneth Nnebue, a merchant who inadvertently launched the sector by recording a film titled Living in Bondage to sell his tapes faster (Abah, 2008). Since its inception, Nollywood has become a response to Nigeria's high unemployment rate, offering numerous opportunities to creative and talented individuals.

One of the key distinctions between Nollywood and Hollywood lies in their production and distribution processes. In Nollywood, films are typically produced within ten to fourteen days on budgets ranging from $15,000 to $25,000 (Osifo-Dawodu, 2007). Additionally, Nollywood films often adopt the African storytelling tradition of releasing films in multiple parts (Abah, 2008). This stands in stark contrast to the high costs and extended production timelines associated with Hollywood. Approximately 65% of Nollywood films are produced in English, with the remaining 35% in indigenous languages, many of which are subtitled in English to reach a broader audience (Osifo-Dawodu, 2007). Thematically, Nollywood films explore a range of subjects, from religion and witchcraft to romance and thrillers.

Nollywood has become a powerful cultural force in Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa, producing melodramatic films that often convey moral lessons, emphasizing the triumph of virtue over vice. The question however is whether producers and directors take time to check whether their films perform as planned or veer off from time to time. According to Dike and Harcourt-Whyte (2019), Evaluation of one form or another is a regular activity in organizations all over the world. It is done in different ways from organization to organization. Some organizations refer to it as benchmarking, assessing, auditing, reviewing, while others just refer to it as performance appraisal.

Majority of Nollywood audience consists of African women, who also play significant roles in the industry as actors and crew members (Abah, 2008). Despite celebrating African women by depicting them in diverse roles, Nollywood films frequently reinforce traditional gender norms. Abah (2008) observed that these films issue dire warnings to women who defy cultural expectations or fail to fulfill domestic roles such as caregiving, nurturing, and homemaking. Success is often portrayed as contingent upon fulfilling these responsibilities, alongside early marriage and marrying a wealthy man. As a result, Nigerian women face societal pressure to conform to these traditional roles.

From a gender perspective, Nollywood often incorporates the "occult economy" as a narrative hallmark. Okome (2012) argues that while this motif may appear uniform, its use by filmmakers serves diverse purposes and outcomes. For instance, in Living in Bondage (1992), the occult theme highlights and critiques the pervasive greed for wealth in Nigeria's "lottery economy." In contrast, Domitilla: The Story of a Prostitute (1997), directed by Zeb Ejiro, explores the economic and social challenges faced by women in urban spaces like Lagos. The film portrays women drawn into prostitution and the shadowy underbelly of the city in their quest for financial security. According to Okome (2012), Domitilla uses its narrative to underscore the political, economic, and social barriers faced by women, whereas Living in Bondage serves as a moral

cautionary tale against unchecked materialism. Nollywood's storytelling tradition reflects the complexities of Nigerian society, highlighting cultural values, gender dynamics, and economic struggles. By blending traditional narratives with contemporary themes, the industry not only entertains but also sparks critical reflection on societal norms and challenges.

Nollywood Depiction of Women

In Nollywood films, especially those produced before 2016, women have consistently been depicted along traditional lines, emphasizing male dominance and patriarchy. Aromona (2016) observed that despite the growth of the industry, the portrayal of women in Nollywood has not deviated from these conventional patterns. Through a study spanning five years, Aromona (2016) revealed that the industry continues to perpetuate stereotypical representations of women. Similarly, Onyenankeya, Onyenankeya, and Osunkunle (2019) conducted a longitudinal analysis of Nollywood films from 1997 to 2016 and found that these portrayals remained largely unchanged. Women were often depicted as sexual objects, evident in how their clothing and interactions were designed to appeal to male desires.

According to the Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media (2015), women in Nollywood films were more frequently cast as prostitutes compared to men and were commonly dressed in revealing attire. This overt sexualization and objectification persisted in films produced during this period (Ogunranti, 1981; Brock, 2009; Onyenankeya, Onyenankeya, & Osunkunle, 2019). Beyond sexual objectification, Nigerian women were primarily cast in domestic roles, such as wives and homemakers, with little room for alternate portrayals. Onyenankeya et al. (2019) noted that these domestic roles often depicted women as content and fulfilled only when caring for children or serving their families. Women who adhered to these traditional roles were portrayed as virtuous and responsible, while those who pursued careers or independence were seen as detrimental and reckless.

This dichotomy is vividly illustrated in the film End of the Wicked, where Okuyade (2011) described a female character, whose happiness was tied solely to finding a husband. Women were frequently portrayed as fragile and dependent, reliant on men for protection and guidance. Olupohunda (2013) emphasized that in Nollywood films, women were often depicted as victims of violence, including slapping, kicking, and even rape, highlighting their vulnerability in a male-dominated society.

Even when films showcased women's achievements in politics or business, these accomplishments were often undermined by societal expectations of what constituted a "good woman" in their personal lives (Abbah, 2008). Duru (2013) and Onyenankeya et al. (2019) found that independent or feminist women were typically portrayed as self-centered and materialistic, in contrast to male characters, who were depicted as community heroes. These "liberated" women were often silenced or relegated to the background, with their actions and inactions frequently questioned by male counterparts.

Furthermore, women in positions of power were depicted as manipulative and dangerous. Haynes and Okome (1998), Ukata (2010), and Duru (2013) argued that dominant female characters were often vilified, portrayed as dishonest and cruel, and subjected to retaliation by male characters. Ukata (2010) highlighted that woman who gained power in Nollywood films often faced severe consequences, such as losing their beauty, family relationships, or even their lives. This portrayal reinforced the notion that power in the hands of a woman was unacceptable and had dire consequences. Nollywood films, particularly those produced before 2016, perpetuate gender stereotypes that reinforce patriarchal norms. Women are largely depicted as sexual objects, homemakers, or villains, while their ambitions and independence are frequently punished. These portrayals contrast sharply with the idealized representations of male characters as strong, courageous, and heroic, reflecting deep-seated gender biases within the industry.

Nollywood and Gender Stereotypes

The argument above posits that women in African societies, including those depicted in Nollywood films, are not always subjugated by patriarchal norms. In some instances, women enjoy visibility and prominence, particularly in matters of welfare and communal relations. However, the skewed portrayal of women in

Nollywood as thieves, murderers, prostitutes, wicked mothers-in-law, and housemaids reinforces negative societal perceptions of women (Oyebade, 2018). Kord and Krimmer (2005) argue that films reflect societal realities, aspirations, and fears, stating: "Films show us what we are, what we were, and what we could, should, or (do not) want to be. At their best, they give birth to new visions of female strength and freedom. At their worst, they ridicule, denigrate, and deny what real women have long achieved, replacing it with spectres from the past" (Ibbi, 2017, p. 15).

Stereotypes in Nollywood are often shaped by the filmmaker's selective perceptions rather than an accurate societal consensus on women's roles. According to Stewart and Kowaltzke (2007), representation is based on assumptions that may differ from reality. For example, the notion that a woman's place is in the kitchen stems from a popular yet limited belief among some men, perpetuating a socially constructed opinion. When these views dominate films, they validate cultural norms and reinforce stereotypes.

A critical examination reveals that Nollywood remains a male-dominated industry, with men holding key positions such as directors, production managers, and screenwriters. These roles allow them to shape narratives through a patriarchal lens. While women are present in the industry, they often serve in supporting roles both on-screen and behind the scenes. Even when women assume roles as producers, major production decisions are frequently delegated to male colleagues (Stewart, 2007). This dynamic sustains a phallocentric worldview in which male dominance persists, and stories of female heroism are often repressed.

Olaniyan and Bade-Afuye (2018) observe a similar trend in early Nigerian dramatic literature, where female characters were portrayed as witches, housewives, or submissive figures entirely dependent on male counterparts. These portrayals mirrored the larger societal narrative of women's subservience. However, as women entered the literary scene, they began to challenge these stereotypes and offer a more balanced gender perspective.

Hollywood's evolution provides a parallel case. Initially dominated by male directors, Hollywood films used female characters primarily to advance male-centric narratives. Kolker (2006) notes that even progressive films, such as Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore (1974), ultimately reinforced traditional narratives by concluding with heterosexual unions. The emergence of women filmmakers like Susan Seidelman, Donna Deitch, and Barbra Streisand introduced new female-centered narratives. These directors explored diverse themes, from lesbianism in Desert Heart to female strength and autonomy in Yentl (1983).

Similarly, Nollywood must empower women to reshape their representation. Women need to create narratives that challenge outdated stereotypes and reflect the contemporary woman who thrives in an era of gender equality. By doing so, they can offer audiences a more authentic and empowering vision of women's lives and achievements.

Stereotypical Portrayals of Women

Women not only have a low representation as media professionals, but they are also depicted in traditional roles that strengthen gender stereotypes (Okunna, 2020). Extensive research has demonstrated that media representations frequently mirror cultural stereotypes that depict women as feeble, submissive, and reliant (Nigeria, 2013). Additionally, Amobi (2013) elucidates that women's narratives are rarely given prominence in the media, and when they are, they are often portrayed in stereotypical manners as domesticated, victims, and powerless. This research will analyse the portrayal of women in stereotypical manners, which reflects the culturally assigned gender roles in media. In both television and patriarchal countries, men are commonly depicted as robust, assertive, authoritative, capable, self-assured, and occupying positions of high social standing. According to Wood (1994), popular films frequently featured male actors who exhibited assertive, resilient, and fearless qualities.

The media perpetuate the notions of masculinity through these films, promoting the notion that males should exhibit emotional control, resilience, and dominance. Seldom do we observe men depicted in domestic environments or engaged in household tasks. In contrast, women are shown as submissive, youthful, respectful, composed, and primarily concerned with their children (Okunna, 2020; Wood, 1994). These

depictions reinforce the conventional perception of women as ornamental and reliant on men. Studies indicate that women are depicted as subordinate, reliant, and suitable for domestic positions rather than professional and occupational positions. Okunna (2020) conducted a study on three Nigerian films: Confidence, Gone Forever, and Tears and Sorrow. The study revealed that the main female characters in these films were depicted as powerless, especially when they were not in the presence of a man. Additionally, they were seen as cruel, submissive, and without self-assurance.

Empirical Review

Taylor & Francis (2022) Nollywood: Female agency and value in selected Nigerian movies.

The researchers evaluate the Nigerian film industry's contribution to women's rights. Kenneth (2009) established that Nigerian films have contributed modestly in the campaign against girl child abuse. Films could serve the purpose of child rights advancement when properly designed as exemplified by the five films in focus. For one, the films were able to project the characteristic rights abuses suffered by the Nigerian girl child and made a case for a new cultural attitude.

The study reviews women's portrayal in Nigerian movies, citing Ibbi (2017), Onyenankeya et al. (2019) the authors established that central female characters were portrayed as single, helpless, vicious, and subordinate but did not capture how dominant narratives strategically manipulate structures of representation. The study further describes Nigerian movies as powerful tools of transmitting social values and beliefs does not fully delineate how portrayals of complex female characters reflect their centrality in contemporary society or diminish patriarchal power. The theoretical framework for the study focused on Feminist Film Theory to illustrate how the male gaze perpetuates abuse through the male primacy institution. Critical Discourse Analysis was used in this research as a relevant research method providing adequate definition for the problem of the study.

The study of feminine portrayals in Nigerian films by Okunna (2020) found that central female characters are most often portrayed as single, invisible, helpless, vicious, and subordinate. Feminists argue vehemently that the image of women has been consistently exploited, abused and trivialized in the media particularly in the spheres of advertising and motion pictures (Nsereka & Enyindah, 2018). The researcher found out that women are usually represented as wayward, of low moral standing, materialistic, lazy, subservient to and dependent on men, causes of family problems, fit for domestic rather than professional and career roles. Although female characters are present in higher number than males, over the last 20 years Nollywood narratives have continued to portray women less frequently in central roles than men. The study reveals that most films depict women in traditional female occupations, most often as subordinates to men without status or power. The study recommends that Nigerian movie should serve as vehicle for child rights advocacy as evinced in the reviewed movies which highlighted women abuse and advocated new cultural attitudes. The connection between both studies was gender but the previous study focused on campaign for women rights while the present study focuses on movie depiction of women and how such depictions affect gender perceptions in Rivers State.

Abiodun, O. (2023) Gendered Nollywood: The crisis of femininity in contemporary Nigerian films.

The position of the researcher is simply that until women begin to write their own stories, it will be almost impossible to see a gender balanced representation in Nigerian cinema. The researcher further stated that best men can do is to be sympathetic with the cause of women as they recreate their phallocentric world that sees man as a colossus bestriding the human entities. For instance, writing about women's position in literary drama, Olaniyan and Bade-Afuye (2018) explain that at the early stage of Nigerian dramatic literature which was dominated by male writers, female characters were portrayed as witches, housewives, fearful and effeminate, who "are often juxtaposed along these titanic heroes as just plain wives at the beck and call of their husbands. The study reveals the early playwrights objectified women as weak, choiceless, invisible or incestuous". But as women negotiated their way into the writing scene, the tide shifted to a feminine perspective of the world, creating a viable landscape for a more gender balanced narratology. Study on the construction of women in Nollywood films have majorly focused on the subjugation of women by the

phallocentric African men and the need for socio-economic liberation. Most of these films perceive women as a socially constituted homogenous group on the basis of shared oppression.

However, the study interrogated gender relations in terms of the way cultural and development policies are currently regulating the balance of power between men and women in a rapidly mutating African society. Through a reading of select Nigerian films, the study examines how Nollywood films construct the heterogeneous roles performed by men and women in Modern Nigeria. The researcher submits that the dynamics of modernity is changing the depiction of perception of the female gender in contemporary Nigerian cinema. The researcher found out that shifting socio-economic dynamics of the Nigerian society is no doubt changing the perception and representation of sex relation in Nigerian movies. Issues that typically reflect the position of women and their relationship with male gender are being interrogated in contemporary Nigerian movies. Certainly, the Nigerian society, which Nollywood tries to reflect or refract, is gradually moving away from a monolithic phallocentric conception of the society, making greater space for a more gender sensitive interactivity. In politics, health, education, economy and other spheres of life, more women are assuming critical leadership positions and, thus, redefining the traditional perception of women as weak, inferior or merely domestic.

This study also reflected how contemporary indigenous films represent women. In the same way, as more women take up leadership positions in the growing Nigerian film industry, the face and stories of Nollywood begin to shift from being male driven to a more balanced gender representation. The study revealed that it is common to see films from feminist, gay and liberal perspectives where multi-gender orientations are freely expressed. In the final analysis, one is prone to submit that contemporary Nigerian cinema is becoming more intellectually stimulating as it interrogates biting social issues relating to gender, culture and politics. The study suggest improvement on its production quality but has transcended the elemental bourgeoning issues that made critics of its early days to describe it as a pedantic art form that lacked the luster and glamour of true cinema.

The gap to be filled in the current study is to explore the qualities, abilities, characteristics and efforts by female film characters based on their roles in a male dominated industry, especially in Rivers State.

Emwinromwankhoe, O. (2021) Portrayal of Women in Contemporary Nollywood Films: Isoken and King of Boys in Focus.

This study investigated the portrayal of women in contemporary Nollywood films, using Isoken (2017) and King of Boys (2018) as case studies. The objective was to highlight the various ways in which women in the films are portrayed to viewers and ascertain whether contemporary Nollywood movies are an improvement on the issues of gender stereotypes and sexism which are hitherto prevalent in the industry.

The theoretical focus of this study was the cultivation theory, the study adopted the qualitative content analysis method. The researcher adopts the qualitative content analysis to study the selected films Isoken and King of Boys. Both films were purposively selected because they stand out in various ways. Findings showed that women in the studied films are negatively portrayed in various ways and that these portrayals are, at best, parallel to the stereotypical ways in which women were portrayed in previous Nollywood movies.

Researcher reveals women were often depicted as weak and dependent folks. Olupohunda, (2013) argued that women in Nollywood films were typically at the mercy of the men who dominated the society in such films. As such, these women could be slapped, kicked, raped and maimed. On the contrary, in instances where the films promoted the progress made by women either in the political or economic arena, they were constantly reminded that their success was nothing unless they conformed to the social construct of good women in their domestic lives (Abbah 2008). Taking cognizance of the fact that both films are directed by women, the researcher recommends that Nollywood female directors should look beyond the lenses of financial gains and set a pace with regards to changing the narrative and portraying Nigerian women in a positive light. The researcher strongly recommends that directors should, through their movies, tell the Nigerian audience that there are good things about the female gender, not the sexist junk they have been served over time.

The gap here is the review of the social implication of gender representations in movies which this study seeks to fill. A further step to understand how movie portrayals affect perception is the missing link that desire filling.

METHODOLOGY

the study adopted the qualitative content analysis and the interview method. Content analysis is a way of summarizing and analyzing messages being communicated in films, books, songs speeches or advertisements (Neuendorf, 2010). The study population comprised of six experts which includes two directors, two communications experts, a community leader and a social commentator. For the second stream of population, the study analyzed Nollywood contemporary films Adire (2023) and Wura (2023). The sample size for this study was determined using purposive sampling technique, hence the sample size was small. The first sample size is six individuals of relevance to the study purposively selected for interview. The second stream of sample size for this study were two purposively selected films. The films are Adire (2023) and Wura (2023). The instruments for data collection in a qualitative content analysis study are coding guide and the interview guide. These instruments generated different categories of data for the study. The coding guide aided the researcher a standard framework for organizing, categorizing, interpreting and drawing meaningful conclusions on the research questions. The instruments were validated through peer debriefings. Hence, the researcher made the entire work's progress, the code sheet and other resource materials were taken for review and input by the supervisors. The study was a qualitative content analysis of select Nollywood contemporary films, which means that the method of data collection was primary. The primary source of data collection was the analyzed films: Adire and Wura. Data were also collected from secondary sources such as: journals, dissertations, articles, blogs, textbooks and other relevant materials centered on Nollywood films. Data presented was done descriptively and in an interpretive manner descriptively, data were presented in numbers, images and words.

DISCUSSION OF MAJOR FINDINGS

Research Question 1: How do the residents of Rivers State perceive the depiction of women in Nollywood movies?

The residents of Rivers State perceive the depiction of women in Nollywood movies, as exemplified by Adire (2023) and Wura (2023), as largely reinforcing traditional and stereotypical roles, with limited representations of professional and empowered women. This perception is substantiated by thematic analyses of interviews conducted with film directors, a community leader, communications experts, and a social commentator. These interviews reveal that Nollywood's portrayals reflect and reinforce societal attitudes toward women's roles in Nigeria, which aligns with scholarly insights on the impact of media representations on gender perceptions (Gerbner, 1998; Goffman, 1979).

In both Adire and Wura, female characters are commonly confined to stereotypical roles such as caregivers, homemakers, or romantic interests. Interviewed film directors explained that these portrayals align with longstanding audience expectations and Nollywood's adherence to traditional storytelling formats. Such reliance on well-worn tropes perpetuates conventional views of women. According to Goffman (1979), this form of "gender display" reflects how media representations reinforce societal norms by frequently depicting women in subordinate or passive roles.

Furthermore, these films exhibit a conspicuous absence of female characters in professional or leadership positions, thus perpetuating the narrative that women's primary contributions are domestic rather than societal or professional. Communications experts in the study argued that this gap in representation may limit societal expectations of women's capabilities. Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory supports this assertion, suggesting that repeated media portrayals shape viewers' beliefs about their own potential. The community leader interviewed reinforced this view, emphasizing that young women in Rivers State lack media role models who embody professional aspirations, which may discourage them from pursuing leadership or career ambitions.

Despite these limitations, the findings indicate a growing awareness among residents and a demand for more progressive portrayals of women in Nollywood films. While Adire and Wura reflect traditional gender norms that resonate with longstanding cultural expectations, the rising critique of these portrayals signals an opportunity for Nollywood to evolve. By diversifying its female characters and portraying the complexities of modern Nigerian women, Nollywood has the potential to reshape societal perceptions and contribute to a media landscape that fosters gender equity. Scholars such as Mulvey (1975) and Hooks (1992) have long advocated for such transformations in media, emphasizing the role of film in challenging patriarchal norms and promoting inclusivity. This shift could have a profound impact on advancing gender equality and inspiring young women in Rivers State and beyond.

Research Question 2: In what ways do the representation of female characters in movies relate to the behaviour of women in Rivers State?

The findings on the relationship between the representation of female characters in movies like Adire (2023) and Wura (2023) and the behavior of women in Rivers State reveal a significant interplay between on-screen portrayals and social behaviors. The thematic analysis of interview data from film directors, a community leader, communications experts, and a social commentator highlights how Nollywood's portrayals of women influence behavioral expectations and self-perceptions among women in Rivers State, reinforcing and shaping social norms.

Both Adire and Wura showcase female characters who are primarily defined by traditional roles, such as caregivers, homemakers, or submissive partners, reinforcing cultural expectations about women's behavior. Interviewees, particularly the community leader, noted that such portrayals resonate with longstanding gender norms in Rivers State, where women are often expected to prioritize family and domestic responsibilities. According to Gerbner and Gross's (1976) cultivation theory, repeated exposure to such portrayals can lead viewers to accept these roles as normative, shaping their perceptions of appropriate behavior. This pattern is further supported by Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory, which suggests that media representations serve as behavioral models that audiences internalize and imitate.

The study's interview data suggest that the portrayal of women in movies like Adire and Wura creates a form of social reinforcement, wherein women feel pressured to conform to on-screen behaviors to gain societal acceptance. The social commentator pointed out that Nollywood movies often reflect societal values, which can reinforce community expectations and norms. This is consistent with Goffman's (1979) theory of "gender display," wherein media images influence societal expectations and create implicit pressures for individuals to conform to depicted norms. In the case of Rivers State, the community leader noted that women who deviate from these traditional portrayals often face social scrutiny, which can discourage them from pursuing independent or non-traditional behaviors. This reinforces a cultural cycle where media representations not only reflect but actively reinforce the values of their society.

Overall, the thematic analysis suggests that Nollywood's portrayal of women acts as a "double-edged sword," both reinforcing traditional norms and inspiring critical reflection among viewers. While movies like Adire and Wura contribute to traditional expectations, they also inadvertently spark discussions that may motivate women to question these norms. According to Sink and Mastro (2017), media portrayals serve as reference points that shape audience beliefs, but they also allow space for reinterpretation and resistance. The communications experts observed that women in Rivers State, especially those with access to social media, are increasingly critiquing the narrow roles depicted in Nollywood, advocating for broader portrayals that reflect the realities and aspirations of modern Nigerian women.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the perceptions of Rivers State residents regarding the depiction of women in Nollywood movies. The analysis revealed that residents, while recognizing Nollywood as a major cultural influence, expressed mixed views about the portrayal of women in films. Some respondents noted that women

were depicted in stereotypical roles, which reinforced traditional gender norms and limited their social mobility and empowerment. On the other hand, others highlighted instances of positive representation, where women were shown as strong, independent, and influential figures in society. The findings underscore the critical role of Nollywood in shaping public perceptions of gender roles and the importance of more nuanced and diversified portrayals of women. While progress has been made, there remains a need for further efforts in transforming the narrative to reflect women's complexities and contributions in society more authentically. Addressing these concerns can not only enhance the quality of Nollywood films but also contribute to the broader social discourse on gender equality and empowerment in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To address the concerns regarding stereotypical portrayals, it is recommended that Nollywood filmmakers prioritize the creation of more diverse and empowering roles for women. This includes depicting women in leadership positions, showcasing their contributions to various sectors, and emphasizing their complexities as individuals.
2. To ensure more balanced and accurate depictions of women, Nollywood studios and content creators should collaborate with gender experts, sociologists, and advocacy groups. These partnerships can help provide valuable insights into the impact of media representation on societal attitudes toward gender roles.

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