

NOLLYWOOD MISREPRESENTATION OF THE IGBO CULTURE: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT ON YOUNG ADULTS

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Abstract

Cultural misrepresentation in films could be in the form of; exaggeration, generalisation, spreading of false information or the selective representation of a culture in films, leading to the simplification of culture and the perpetuation of prejudices and stereotypes which eventually contributes to the escalation of discriminatory acts and worse still violence in the society. Apart from entertaining people, films play a vital role in influencing public perceptions of individuals and groups. By imitating successful filmmakers and/or in a bid to make huge profit from sales, it is no longer news that most filmmakers in the Nollywood industry often rely on stereotypes, exaggeration and generalization in representing people and their cultures in their films and the Igbo people and their culture are not exempted. This they do with no clue as to how this could negatively affect the younger generation and to this end this article examines the misrepresentation of the Igbo culture in Nollywood films and the impact on young adults. The research data for the study include thirteen semi-structured interviews with some youths of the Igbo origin which were analyzed using a thematic approach. The findings reveal that cultural misrepresentation of Igbo culture in films impacts negatively on the personal development, identity formation, inter-personal relationship, mental health and overall well-being of individuals, in this case, the young adults who consume the media more often than others. Findings also reveal the negative impact of cultural misrepresentation on economic growth highlighting therefore the importance of film and cultural literacy for a better understanding of film and film making and a better understanding people and their culture towards combating cultural misrepresentation in films. This research is valuable in offering the in-depth perspectives of Igbo young adults, highlighting their experiences and suggestions towards challenging the status-quo in this regard.

Key words: Film, Culture, Cultural Misrepresentation...

Introduction

The Nollywood industry, originally known as the Nigerian film industry following the UNESCO rating of 2009 as the second largest film industry in the world as cited in Emejulu and Amadi (2014) has been heavily criticized by many from inception till date for attaining such height owing to its mass production of movies and not for producing quality movies that portray the real and obtainable social reality. Apart from being criticized for not always portraying what makes sense or what is obtainable in the real world, the industry largely has been criticized for misrepresenting the indigenous cultures of the host country and the culture of the Igbo people is not left out. This remains a thorn on the flesh and effort have been geared towards finding a lasting solution. A lot of studies have been carried on the issue of media (e.g., television, film, advertisements, news articles, etc.) misrepresentation of culture but because this situation continues to linger, it can never be over emphasized. Previous researches focused mostly on media misrepresentation of other cultures, but little attention has been given to the area of the film misrepresentation of the Igbo culture and the possible impact on those who actually patronise these filmmakers; the researcher believes that what these people must have observed and experienced over the years will go a very long way in revealing what perhaps these film makers do not know that they actually do.

To put this study in sharp relief it is imperative to explain the film as it concerns not just communication and entertainment but most importantly as a medium for reflecting culture. Film is an evolving art form that continues to be shaped by the factors of social dynamics and especially culture. Film reflects culture by capturing the societal norms, beliefs and values of a people. A film set on any cultural context provide insights into the components of that culture such as their clothing, language, food, rituals, symbols etc. The film also reinforces cultural identity by influencing how the people perceive

themselves in their community, in celebrating the greatness and achievements of a people of a particular culture and by capturing historical events, traditional practices and folklore of a people on the screen, the film instils a sense of pride and cultural acceptance on the people. The film serves as a medium for the preservation and transmission of the cultural heritage of the people, ensuring the transmission of knowledge and experience as well as providing a sense of continuity of the roots that holds firm the cultural identity.

As a medium for cultural exchange, the film is one very popular media form that offers people the opportunity to view other people and their world differently from theirs; opportunity to see how others do what they also do, opportunity to see to what extent other people hold what they hold dear, opportunity to see what other people do with what they think is not useful, and so on. This allows people to view, experience, understand and accept other people the way they are and this underscores the significance of films in contributing to cultural trends and even societal values. Audiences can be influenced by other people's advancement or better way of doing things, it could be as regards technological advancement, fashion, social justice, social security etc. The sum total of it all is that the film is a medium for spreading culture globally and there are implications to this end.

The relationship between the film and culture can be said to be symbiotic in the sense that the film impacts on culture and culture on the other hand influences film. Culture determines to a large extent the contents and components of films; the visual elements that convey meaning in films, the thematic content which has to do with the narrative structure and character development, the performance of actors, the sound elements that enhance viewing experience including the film's visual environment which creates the expected atmosphere such as the costumes, props and sets are always influenced by culture.

The film however incorporates various aspects of culture such as language, artifacts, religion, ethics, food, symbols etc. i.e reflecting culture in its totality and this bestows on it the ability to influence the socio-political and economic aspects of a society by sparking conversations, actions and even movements, that can promote or demote a culture.

Referring to the implications of the global spread of culture through films; the important and useful roles played by films in representing cultures could turn out to be the reverse when specific cultures are not represented in actuality in films. The question that comes to mind now is how are specific cultures not represented as they actually are in films? Stuart Hall and the colleagues in the book titled *Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices* (1997) cited in Glotov (2023) defines representation as production and circulation of meanings through language, which enables us to refer to real or fictional objects, people, or events. With this definition of representation as regards culture, one can easily deduce misrepresentation as regards culture as being the circulation of what is false about an object, people or events. However, the explanation in Glotov (2023) throws more light on misrepresentation as regards culture and the consequences that ensue and according to him, "Cultural misrepresentation through audio-visual media simplifies cultures and their minorities, promotes racism, nationalism and eventually weakens democracies by spreading false information". Apart from these noted by Glotov, there are some other implications of false representation of a people in audio visual-media owing to its capability of spreading culture globally due to its popularity and the creation of a lasting impression on the minds of audiences due to the parasocial bond between audiences and actors and according to Shakunthala (2023):

Media representations and stereotypes extend beyond national boundaries. They shape perceptions and attitudes towards different cultures, ethnicities, and countries. Biased or misinformed portrayals can perpetuate stereotypes and reinforce cultural prejudices, hindering global understanding and cooperation.

According to him, the effects of media representation transcend borders and in order to promote intercultural collaboration therefore respectful representations should be encouraged. Haven noted these

demerits of misrepresentation of cultures in the media according to Shakunthala, it is worthwhile to expose the different ways a culture can be misrepresented in an audio-visual media in order to gain more knowledge about the concept.

The spread of false information as noted above is the most common way of misrepresenting culture on the audio-visual media, film makers often fall for this by intentionally or unintentionally presenting to their audience false information about a particular people or their culture. Most times it takes the form of generalisation i.e categorising members of the same culture as having similar characteristics whereas this is seldom so, or the replacement of cultural context or material by that of another culture which creates a false impression.

Another very common way that cultures are being misrepresented is by exaggeration, this way, filmmakers make what they are representing look more important, more dramatic or more extreme than it is. In a bid to convince audiences or make what they see visually appealing, filmmakers often exaggerate what they are representing even though it could be unintentional but this is capable of giving audiences the impression that what they see about other people are facts.

Partial presentation or omission of information or context about a particular people and their culture in a discriminatory manner intentionally or otherwise is another form of misrepresentation. Most times filmmakers tend to present just that which would spark controversy and attract more audiences without detailing the background of the situation. This is misleading and could distort comprehensive understanding. If you must tell people that the tortoise has a cracked back, you must tell them why it is so, if not people will make up their own stories especially from their individual experiences tell.

At this age of digital media, audio-visual manipulation is possible, images or videos are being altered and manipulated to represent what is fake or false. Some filmmakers crop and present images especially that of wild-animals that they cannot easily work with alive or even a supernatural being most of which are not even in existence in the environment of the particular culture that they are representing in their films, they make use of these images to showcase things that are not obtainable in the real world and attribute it to the culture that they are representing.

Looking at these ways by which cultures are being misrepresented in audio-visual media, it is clear that cultures can be; mis-represented, under-represented or even over-represented in an audio-visual media and either ways or put together are all capable of perpetuating stereotypes. Shakunthala (2013) has this to say:

Media representations and stereotypes can reinforce cultural hegemony and power imbalances. When dominant groups control the production and dissemination of media content, their perspectives and narratives tend to be prioritized, while marginalized groups are often misrepresented or excluded. This perpetuates unequal power dynamics and limits the opportunities for diverse voices to be heard.

This points to the fact that in a film industry where a specific group of people are at the helm of affairs, they tend to represent themselves and their culture more in their productions and exclude others making it impossible for the culture, experiences and perspectives of other people to spread.

Methodology

This research is based on qualitative data. Text messages were sent to the participants inviting them for the study, the text contained an explanation of the research and its aims, methods and information on how the data will be stored and reported and that there would be no direct benefit for participating in the study. The participants were twenty-five young people of the Igbo origin some of who were randomly selected by the researcher and others who were recommended for the research. Among the twenty-five young people selected for the research, twenty- two are young women and most of who are house wives who spend most of their leisure glued to the screen, and then three young men in their early thirties. The participants all received and replied their texts and out of the twenty-five, only 12 females

and one male accepted to participate in the study, others giving reasons such as having tight schedule and not being Nollywood audiences but preferred watching foreign movies instead. A few of them gave no reason for not wanting to participate in the study. However, the small size of the turnout can be also explained by the absence of any compensation for participation.

Interviews were conducted online using WhatsApp video calls and Zoom meetings as suggested by the participants. The youths were interviewed individually. The interviews lasted 40 minutes on average and were recorded with each participant’s permission. Each interview started with a description of the purpose of the research, the research method, data collection, analysis and usage. Participation in the research was voluntary; the participants were made to understand that participation was not mandatory and that they can opt out at any time.

The interviewees were asked to provide instances of Nollywood misrepresentation of Igbo culture in films, to share their own experiences on the negative impacts of such misrepresentations and give suggestions on the best ways to tackle the issues.

Table 1. Individual background information

S/N	Gender	Age Range	Occupation	State of Origin
1	Male	26-30(undisclosed)		Anambra
2	Female	31-35	Trader	Anambra
3	Female	31-35	Trader	Enugu
4	Female	26-30	Fashion Designer	Enugu
5	Female	26-30	Shopkeeper	Ebonyi
6	Female	20-25	Housewife	Enugu
7	Female	31-35	Shopkeeper	Abia
8	Female	26-30	Housewife	Anambra
9	Female	31-35	Officer	Anambra
10	Female	26-30	Housewife	Abia
11	Female	20-25	Baker	Anambra
12	Female	26-30	Hairstylist	Anambra
13	Female	26-30	Waitress	Enugu

The table (Table 1) provides background information on each of the interviewees. A random number was assigned to each of them to protect their privacy.

As seen from the table, out of the thirteen respondents, there are twelve females and one male, between the ages 26-35 though only four of them are above thirty; this is the age range of vibrant young people who consume the media more and looking at their states of origin, six respondents are from Anambra State, four from Enugu state, two from Abia State and one from Ebonyi state indicating that they are all of the Igbo origin qualifying them for this interview.

Analysis of The Data

This is a type of qualitative research and so it adopts thematic analysis for analysing the data. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and, eventually, interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2018) cited in Glotov (2023) There are six steps involved into thematic analysis: 1) familiarising yourself with the data, 2) generating initial codes that focus on specific characteristics in the data, 3) generating initial for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) writing a report (Nowell et al., 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2021) cited in Glotov (2023). Once all the interviews were transcribed, the researcher followed each of these steps.

In analysing the data, it was necessary to code twice taking a break between each session, to give the analysis time to develop. Following the analysis of data, four themes were produced:

- Fear of the unknown
- Stigmatization and low self-esteem
- Hunted by prejudices
- Loss of cultural identity.

Before discussing the findings, it is important to note the limitations of this study. Firstly, the small size of the dataset means that the analysis is not extensive and represents the opinions of just thirteen Igbo youths and these youths are residing in the country.

The findings present in detail each of the four patterns decoded from the thematic analysis: Fear of the unknown, stigmatization and low self-esteem, haunted by prejudices, and loss of cultural identity. Pronouns are assigned based on each respondent's gender identity (see Table 1). The identity of each respondent is hidden behind the pseudonyms Youth 1, Youth 2, Youth 3... Youth 13.

Fear of the Unknown

Each of the thirteen participants mentioned that the Nollywood industry to a large extent has portrayed Igbo people as evil people and that this has in many ways affected relationships at the family level, community level and even in dealing with foreigners. Some of them made tangible contributions in this regard.

Youth 1 speaks about the Nollywood reflection of Igbo people as being ritualists, according to him, it astonishes him how almost everyone digests such money ritual films hook-line-and-sinker including himself. He points out that Nollywood represents the Igbo people who live in villages as being evil and how it has affected him as a person, that he does all sorts of things including taking bitter-kola with him in his pockets each time he travels to his home town just to ensure that he is protected from the villagers who have been stereotyped as a menace.

Youth 3 who is a trader stresses on the issue of Nollywood misrepresentation of Igbo people as money-ritualists in most of their movies and according to her even in the market place where she does her business, this has a negative impact in business as some wealthy men and women who God has blessed are being suspected to be money-ritualists and this has affected trade in the sense that it can only take reasonable people, strangers and prayerful Christians to associate with and transact business with such people who have been stereotyped as ritualists because of their wealth while other people fear to approach them.

Youth 5 who is a shopkeeper points out that the issue of Nollywood misrepresentation of Igbo people as fetish people who seize any opportunity to take people's lives by poisoning their edibles in some of their films and that as it stands, almost everyone is afraid of the unknown especially in social gatherings where people are meant to relax and enjoy the moment, you would rather notice insecurity in the eyes of everyone; some people securing their foods, some people securing their drinks even among her customers who come to eat and drink.

Youth 6 talks about her personal experience of buying baby items for a woman that put to bed and later-on finding out from the woman's neighbour that woman she gave the gifts trashed them with the fear of losing her new born the same way a woman in the movies lost hers by welcoming an evil person into her home. She expresses her doubts if it is actually film-makers of the Igbo origin that produce such films in the name of portraying Igbo culture or if filmmakers from other tribes also join them in the production. She adds that the people in the villages are facing similar issues just like she did with this woman; that people see the people in the villages as wicked people who are enemies of progress because of how the Nollywood industry has presented them as fetish men and women who wait for people to come back for new yam festivals or Ofala festivals and the likes so as to get the opportunity to kill them with their 'ogwū'(charms) and 'arusi' (deity).

Youth 7 who is a young widow narrates her ordeals in the hands of some of her friends and the friends of her late husband who suddenly disconnected from her after her husband's burial and according to her, the Nollywood industry has mostly presented Igbo women who are widows as being responsible for their husband's death and also as husband snatchers, she adds that she has taken the decision to make new friends who do not know her story and who cannot judge her in order for her to stay sane and move on with her life.

Youth 9, who has been married for ten years before she recently conceived and had her set of twins talks about her experiences both at her place of work and even in the church; how people criticized and avoided her and do not even allow her to touch their babies believing that she must have committed a lot of atrocities in the past to be passing through such a situation and according to her, this has a lot to do with the way Nollywood has fondly presented women seeking for the fruit of the womb to the society often as women who spent their past committing abortions and prostituting and are therefore leaping what they sowed. She further suggests that the Nigerian film industry should do better to also showcase some other things that can actually leave a woman in such situation rather than always presenting such women as being the architects of their misfortune.

Youth 13 acknowledges the fact that evil is in existence but that Igbo film makers have given evil more popularity than it should have and especially among the Igbo people and that she feels that it has to do with the first Igbo film 'Living in Bondage' which showcased money-rituals and yielded fortunes for the producers, according to her this must have made lazy film-makers who just wants to copy someone else and make money same way to follow similar pattern and it has finally become a norm. She suggests that Igbo filmmakers should imitate the filmmakers of 'The Lion Heart' produced by Genevieve Nnaji and the likes, that they portrayed the Igbo people and their nobility in all ramification and sold massively to the extent of being the first Nigerian film on Netflix.

Youth 5 went further to ask if there will ever be a remedy given the extent to which the Nollywood industry has portrayed Igbo people as people who can even go to the extent of killing their loved ones just to make money. She suggests that the earlier people become sensitized that there is nothing like money-rituals the better for everyone.

Stigmatization and Low Self-Esteem

Some of the participants mentioned some cases that suggests 'low self-esteem' as a result of the marginalization and misrepresentation of Igbo people in films.

Youth 3 who had earlier highlighted the negative impact that the misrepresentation of the Igbo culture has on trade states that some businesses are really suffering because of this fear of the unknown and as some people refuse to lend money to their fellow traders or allow them touch their goods or even come near their shops, some other people are withdrawing from associating with others because of not being able to get the help that they need in business from the right people.

Youth 6 expresses doubts if she can ever summon the courage to visit so as to congratulate and be happy with any woman who puts to bed again talk more of getting them gifts. She added that some people in

the villages may actually be finding it difficult to approach city dwellers who come home to the village from time to time because of what they people take them to be.

Youth 7 decides to withdraw totally from her old friends that see her as the Nollywood type of widow and make entirely new friends to stay sane as she raises her children alone.

Youth 9 recalls how a church member posted on their church's WhatsApp group chat that one of their members who put to bed needed help at the hospital but because of how she perceives herself amongst the other women in the church, that she actually had the time to go and help the woman in the hospital but because she is avoiding being stigmatized, and in a bid to protect her mental health she decided not to go and assist the woman.

Youth 4 shares her experience of offering money to a particular family in her home-town who are financially incapacitated and how they turned down her offer, giving her the looks that the money is not genuine. According to her, she regrets giving a hand and that the incident always play on her mind each time she feels like helping someone financially and that it often discourages her.

Perpetuation of Stereotypes and Prejudices

Most of the participants had one thing or the other to talk about the preconceived opinions about the Igbo people especially that of the 'Igbo people and their love for money' which is very common not just among the Igbo people but also between the Igbo people and the people from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds as a result of the misrepresentation of the Igbo people and their culture especially in films.

Youth 1 recalls an incident that devastates him, how some money got missing in the organisation where he worked before and then the security man mockingly suggested that the Igbo people amongst them be searched thoroughly because of their love for money. He believes that this has to do with the false representation of the Igbo people everywhere. And according to him, if he were a violent person, he would have pounced on that security man for making such statement.

Youth 13 recalls how a Benue man whom she met and fell in love with in the restaurant where she works almost proposed to her but did not go further, giving her the excuse that people say that the Igbo people hardly respect their in-laws who do not have a lot of money and according to her, this has a lot to do with the way the Nollywood film makers portray Igbo people as people who would always prefer a very wealthy man even though may be old enough to be their daughter's father, to marry their daughter instead of a young man with prospects.

Youth 11 similarly points out that a number of times, the film makers have represented the Igbo people falsely by generalising that bride price everywhere in Igbo land is outrageous and this according to her has affected Igbo young women in the sense that men from other tribes feel that the Igbo people sell their daughters and because of this they hardly ask for their hands in marriage. She suggests that the film makers should go deeper in studying the Igbo people's culture so that some aspects that are only obtainable at just one part will not be generalised and represented in the films.

Youth 2 points out that in actual sense Igbo traditional titles like the 'Nze' and 'Ozo' are being bestowed on men who have helped their communities in their own ways unlike the Nollywood filmmaker's own narrative of the Igbo people giving titles to wealthy men that they might even not know the sources of their wealth.

Loss of Cultural Identity

Most of the participants mention that the Nollywood industry is not portraying the Igbo language as it should that this has given other people a negative perception that the Igbo people do not value their language.

Youth 1 highlights on generalization and suggests that filmmakers ought not to generalise specific Igbo people's cultures as being practiced all over the Igbo lands. According to him, an instance is the Idemmili people's python as a totem and how the Nollywood industry has to a large extent projected it as a god in the Igbo land whereas some other Igbo people actually kill it and feast on it.

Youth 2 suggests that making more films in the Igbo language which will reflect the richness of the Igbo culture will go a long way in educating the younger generations about the Igbo people's way of life, norms and values and also teach them the language, giving them an identity and putting an end to the rumour that the Igbo language is gradually going extinct.

Youth 4 expresses her dissatisfaction that the Igbo language is often abnormally mixed with the English language in some Igbo films that this should not be encouraged because it is with Igbo films that most parents in diaspora teach their children the Igbo language.

Youth 8 points out that the Igbo film makers should do better by ensuring that their films are shot using the Igbo language and especially by filmmakers, directors and actors of the Igbo origin, that this cannot stop the film from selling fast, she remembers that the film 'Nkọlịka Nwa Nsuka' shot with the Igbo language was all over the country and beyond.

Youth 10 insists that the Igbo filmmakers are never concerned with portraying the Igbo people's mode of dressing especially among the men. He suggests that they should portray the Igbo men with the Igbo 'isi agu' and the traditional red cap and not with the Yoruba 'agbada' or the Hausa 'tangaran' caps and that the filmmakers in the Nollywood industry should do well to show other people the many beautiful things that the Igbo people have.

Youth 13 talks about the continuous replacement of the Igbo foods with that of unknown people in Igbo films and the reflection of our young women as being immoral in both their dressing and actions that these does not tell well of us and are not our culture.

Discussion of Findings

Nollywood misrepresentation of Igbo culture can affect educational opportunities especially when they fail to reflect or when they reflect partially the culture of the Igbo people. The younger generations miss out on a whole lot and may never get the opportunity to know more about their culture or even learn their language. This leads to the loss of cultural identity. As pointed out by Youth 1, Youth 2, Youth 4, Youth 8, Youth 10, Youth 13, under the sub-heading 'Loss of cultural Identity'.

Many people continue to live in perpetual fear of their relatives, neighbours and even friends who they ought to associate freely with and harness the potentials of having people to talk to when the need arises, people to share their burden with, a shoulder to cry on, etc. This impacts negatively on inter-personal relationships. In the words of Shakunthala (2013) "Stereotypes can create barriers and hinder authentic connections between individuals, perpetuating prejudice and discrimination".

Media use can influence one's overall sense of who they are and where they fit in society (Erikson, 1968) cited in (Bosana et al 2019). The discrimination following the misrepresentation of the Igbo people brings about stigmatization and have made it impossible for some people to associate freely with others or even help people who are in one need or the other, as such, the mental state of people who are being stigmatized are at stake and this can bring about some other underlying issues like substance abuse and even violence as seen in the case of Youth 3, Youth 6, Youth 7, Youth 9, Youth 4, under the sub-heading of 'Stigmatization and low self-esteem' who because of what they feel others perceived them to be, decided to withdraw from doing what had or what could hurt them, in a bid to protect their mental health. Youth 1 also, who had wanted to beat a security man that made mockery of his tribe because of his pre-conceived opinion about the Igbo people as people who could do anything to get money.

Businesses suffer as Youth 3 pointed out, owing to the outcome of the exaggerated misrepresentation of the Igbo people, as people from other linguistic and cultural background including fellow Igbo people

see some Igbo businessmen and women as fetish or desperate people who can do anything to take the money they did not work for or halt other people's progress in business as portrayed in some Igbo films.

Recommendations

- Film and cultural literacy education should be promoted in communities and especially in schools to empower individuals with the knowledge that they need for identity formation and to challenge the status quo as regards the misrepresentation of cultures in films.
- Films should rather be used in challenging stereotypes and in promoting harmonious and respectful interactions among individuals and communities.
- Filmmakers should promote authentic portrayal of people and their culture so as to protect the mental health and well-being of individuals.
- "Accurate and respectful representations can foster cultural exchange, appreciation, and mutual respect, promoting intercultural dialogue and collaboration". (Shakunthala, 2023). This will in turn empower individuals economically and financially.

Conclusion

This study showcases Nollywood misrepresentation of Igbo culture and its impact on young adults. Thirteen young people of the Igbo origin who especially spend their leisure watching films were interviewed to capture their individual experiences on how the film misrepresentation of their culture has affected them. Analysis revealed that the perpetuation of prejudices and stereotypes and other issues that stem from film misrepresentation of the Igbo people and their culture affects the Igbo young adults psychologically, physically, socially and even economically. This underscores the need for the promotion of diverse, respectful and accurate representation of cultures in films, which will in turn foster **identity development**, strengthen relationships, stabilize mental health and empower the young adults economically. Additional research is needed to understand the impact of **Nollywood misrepresentation of Igbo culture on Igbo teenagers who in recent times and to a greater extent consume the media so as to make recommendations for a better tomorrow. Additional research is also** needed with an increased number of participants or with the Igbo people in diaspora who associate more with foreigners so as to gather more insights.

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