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Nollywood: The Audience as Merchandise

Preamble

A few prefatory remarks are in order:

1. The audience is supreme – in two major regards. The audience that determines to what gratification to put the film; and the nature of the film to be so used. Whatever the aggregate of gratifications, entertainment is paramount – and it is the audience, NOT the content provider, that does determine the nature of the entertainment¹. Hitchcock is therefore right in his remark: I will go from experimentation to experimentation in my film – if the audience will let me'.¹
2. Film is one of those commodities that must be consumed immediately. The painter, the sculptor, the musician, the writer etc. could put away their work for a future generation. The filmmaker cannot. The film, once made, must be consumed here and now: the film audience exists in the continuous present tense – like the film image itself.
3. Free TV through its programmes which it provides freely to its audience, sells the audience to sponsors. On the other hand, pay TV sells its programmes to the audience – and sells the audience to sponsors. The filmmaker is something of a cross between free TV and pay TV; depending, of course, on his sources of funding. Where he is his own sponsor or has to pay back his sponsor, he sells entertainment directly to the audience. However, where the funding is a grant (not to be paid back) he may/may not sell entertainment to his audience; but sell the audience to the sponsor he must.

Against the background of the foregoing, in the subsequent sections, I intend to look at:

1. The nature of entertainment in Nollywood

2. The nature of the Nollywood audience; and
3. How to package the Nollywood audience for a sponsor.

Entertainment a la Nollywood

There is hardly any genre of the feature film unavailable in Nollywood. Perhaps the only type of film which has yet to be made here is the western. In terms of the varieties of the feature film, and, even more so, in terms of the sheer volume of production, this industry has been adjudged the 2nd largest in the world. However, even the most ardent supporters of the industry agree that quantity has not matched quality.

Yakubu Nasidi prefaces his paper on 'Issues on Ethics and Morality in the Nigerian Motion Picture'² with the '24 things we've learned from Nollywood':

1. Every problem you have is spiritual
2. In every romance movie, someone must die
3. It is possible to hit a person without actually touching them
4. Anyone who gets hit by a car dies immediately
5. Poisoned food always tastes better
6. The best way to make money is by visiting a *babalawo*/joining a cult/sleeping with rich men.
7. One of a pair of twins (identical or not) is born evil
8. There is never an end to your suffering, except death!
9. With a pastor, all things are possible
10. A movie can be titled anything such as:
 - *The boy is mine, the girl is yours, the child is theirs*
 - *Face me, I face you*
 - *Kill me, I kill you*
 - *Two cockroaches in Africa*
 - *Two rats*
 - *Spanner*
 - *Calculator*
 - *Computer*
 - *The driver*
 - *Igala*
 - *Ijele*
 - *Glodo*
 - *Mumu*
 - *Wawa*

- *Igodo*
 - *Igudu*
 - *Shigidi*
 - *Wakadugu*
11. A movie has not been made if at least one actor or actress has not twisted his or her lips to speak wrong phonetics.
 12. You are in love. You want to take your girl out and the best place you take her to is:
 - Mr Biggs or Tantalizers: Where you'll most probably see an ex while feeding each other.
 - The beach: Where it is imperative that you ride a donkey and carry her playfully.
 - Or the best: take her to buy some new ugly clothes.
 13. An Igbo movie has been made if
 - You visit a Babalawo
 - A fleet of cars is shown off at regular intervals for a total of half of the movie time.
 - Kanayo O Kanayi is in the movie. Pete Edochie is also there too!
 - To get rich it is mandatory you join a cult
 15. Sometimes the title has absolutely nothing to do with the movie and other times once you read the title and read the poster you know it all!!! (Also the soundtrack gives you a headache because it just narrates the whole story repeatedly- so much for suspense and intrigue!)
 16. A love story has not been produced if it does not have one or two of the following actresses:
 - Stella Damasus
 - Stephanie Okereke
 - Genevieve Nnaji
 - Omotola Jolade
 - Rita Dominic
 - Ramsey Noah or Jim Iyke
 17. The police are extremely efficient unlike their counterparts in real life.
 18. An actress can wear the same hairdo for more than a year and even in longer flashbacks.
 19. It is permissible to wear very dark shades at night!
 20. When you are shot in the chest, it really doesn't matter; your

- head will be bandaged! Same for your legs!
21. When advertising a movie, you really should shout because ... people are deaf?
 22. When you are extremely poor, you will still be able to afford very good furniture, TV but you won't be able to send your kids to school.

23. Most especially in Yoruba movies, your gateman must be inefficient and comical. He must dress like a freak, be rude to all your visitors and never minds his business.

24. The bad guy always dies or gets caught by none other than the police!

Prof. Nasidi's concern is unarguably thematic – that must account for his leaving on the last points:

25. At the end of a three hour movie you'll be reminded that THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING ... WATCH OUT FOR PART 2!

26. No matter the type of movie ... TO GOD BE THE GLORY ... If we move from here to aesthetics/production values, a broader picture begins to emerge. For instance, I have noted elsewhere³ how from a host of Nollywood films I was shortlisting for some awards, I was able to distill the following codes or 10 commandments which seem to be binding on Nollywood directors:

- (1) There is nothing like a redundant action; so always shoot the whole of an action: only an amateur uses only part of the action to represent the whole. How else can you tell in 180 minutes a story that can be told in less than 45 minutes?
- (2) The duration of a shot on the screen is determined by the interest it creates - nothing could be further from the truth.
- (3) Make your shot sequencing as chaotic as possible; with all abandon, go from one extreme shot to another.
- (4) Totally disregard the value of the (re)establishing shot.
- (5) Always emphasize the two-dimensionality of the screen: avoid shooting at an angle of 45° to your subject.
- (6) Camera movement should have no bearing on the logic of the story; the more you can employ the zoom, the better.

- (7) The story is the important thing: why bother with the artistic use of sound?
- (8) The story is the important thing: pay no attention to structuring the lighting field.
- (9) Under no circumstances let your mode of transition be determined by your story construction.
- (10) Suspense being totally unnecessary, reaction close ups or cut in shots are impediments to any good story.

The bottom line in all this is that entertainment in the Nollywood film is seriously compromised. In other words, except in the very narrow sense of the production tie-in, the Nigerian film cannot be used to sell/package the audience to/for a sponsor.

The principal reasons for this include:

1. The industry's very high rate of debutantism makes for a very limited reservoir of creativity. The effect of this is that the re-cycling syndrome degenerates into a cliché.
2. Nollywood stories are theme-driven. The theme, we know, does NOT make the artist. The TECHNIQUE that makes the artist.
3. The shift in the paradigms of power - thus privileging the (Executive producer) EP/Marketer over the director, in matters of creativity. The lesson from Nollywood seems to be: **The rise and rise of the EP, the fall and fall of the director** - with dire consequences, of course, on the creative/entertainment value of the film.

The Nollywood Audience

The Nollywood audience is not one large homogenous bloc. It is, in fact, a composite of at least four blocks: Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and English.

Explicably, these four have vastly differing antecedents, for: the Hausa audience has been weaned on the Indian film; the Yoruba on the performances of the Yoruba traveling theatre; and the Igbo/English essentially on American films. I should think that my characterization of the films meant for each of these blocks is germane here. The Hausa film I have characterized as 'The call of the Muezzin'⁴; the Yoruba as 'The Universe of the Yoruba mind'⁵. And the Igbo/English as 'The Cult of the Individual'⁶. The reasons

for this characterization, I think, are obvious – and they do comment, abundantly, on the nature of the audience.

Interestingly, more and more studies⁷ are being done on this audience, and the findings are quite revealing. I will restrict myself here to only a few:

- 75% of the audience fall between age bracket 15-35.
- Women and children take up some 81% of this population
- The more educated (degree equivalent) (35%) tend to
- watch less except, where such films are controversial/topical (47%).
- Over 85% agree that film information is from the Younger ones/children – but the decision as to which film to watch or not watch comes from the adult - usually the father (figure).
- 25% watch on TV; 32% buy/borrow from friends; 43% rent.
- 38% say that if the films are not realistic it doesn't matter, for it's just a film.
- 63% know more of the Eps/Marketers than of the directors
- over 65% are drawn to the films because of the stars
- 69% would rather see the original American film than the Nollywood version.
- Over 70% see no reason for the part- II of any film because: it hardly advances the story (35%); it can all be contained in Part 1 (65%).

The findings of these studies are quite revealing. But given the ever-widening gap between industry and academe, these studies will end up like many others: gathering dust on library shelves.

At any rate, if these studies do reveal anything, it is that the Nollywood content creator knows very little of his audience. The Nollywood audience has always been taken for granted. I see two consequences here:

1. Our population base of well over 120ml remains incapable of absorbing more than 60,000⁹ of any single Nollywood film; and
2. The Nollywood content creator still finds it difficult/impossible to sell the audience to a sponsor.

Selling the Nollywood Audience to a Sponsor

My reading of all the available studies on the Nollywood audience is that this audience can very conveniently be sold to a sponsor. This is, of course, to the extent that the content creator applies the right methodology.

To my mind, the Sabido methodology⁸, properly adapted, fits the bill.

This methodology is an approach to behaviour change communication. It uses serial dramas to sell social change. The serial dramas are woven around engaging characters who are used as vicarious change models. The methodology is theory based: its systemic design is grounded on the following five theories:

- Shannon and weaver's communication model: which 'provides a model for the communication process through which distinct sources, messages, receivers and response are linked'⁸
- Bently's dramatic theory: which 'provides a model for characters, their interrelationships and construction';⁸
- Jung's archetypes and stereotypes: which 'provides a model for characters that embody universal human psychological and physiological energies'⁸;
- Bandura's learning theory: which 'provides a model in which learning from soap opera characters can take place'; and
- Concept of the Triune Brain and Theory of the Tone: which 'provide a model for sending complete messages that communicate with various centers of perception.'⁸

So, unlike entertainment education, the Sabido methodology is not message driven; rather, it is social science and audience driven.

In adapting the Salido methodology, I have had to compact its eight steps into the following six:

Step 1: Formative Research

Anatomy/Demographics of the target audience: their characteristics, needs, preferences, etc. The two primary reasons for anatomizing the audience are:

- 'To develop understandable, high-quality, culturally appropriate characters; and above all, to reproduce the lifestyles of the target audience and
- The orientation of the film/programme, i.e., the issues that

will be featured, are determined by the characteristics of the target audience.

Research methods here include: literature review, media analysis, health behaviour analysis, quantitative research (FGD) and qualitative research (baseline survey).

Step 2: Issues list, Moral Framework and Values Grid

These three crucial documents emerge here:

- Issues List – a description of the key issues to be discussed is developed from the formative research.
- The Moral Framework – which synthesis all leagal/policy documents relevant to the issues (already listed in the Issues List)
- The Value gird – uses the Moral Framework to list the positive and negative values to be promoted in the film. This consists of statements like:

It is good that ...

It is bad that ...

The following is the values Grid on HIV/AIDS⁸ and on Gender⁸.

HIV/AIDS	
It is good that individuals within the community recognize that HIV/AIDS exists and is a threat to the society	It is bad that individuals within the community do not recognize that HIV/AIDS exists and is a threat to the society.
It is good that individuals within the society know that everyone who is sexually active stands a risk of contracting HIV/AIDS.	It is bad that individuals within the society do not know that everyone who is sexually active stands a risk of contracting HIV/AIDS.
It is good that individuals know the various modes of HIV/AIDS transmission.	It is bad that individuals do not know the various modes of HIV/AIDS transmission.
It is good that individuals go for counseling and testing in order to know their HIV/AIDS status.	It is bad that individuals do not go for counseling and testing in order to know their HIV/AIDS status.

It is good that people practice safer sex.	It is bad that people do not practice safer sex.
It is good that people are aware of the link between STI and HIV/AIDS.	It is bad that people are not aware of the link between STI and HIV/AIDS.
It is good that people go for treatment as soon as they get infected with STIs.	It is bad that people do not go for treatment as soon as they get infected with STIs.
It is good that people accept and give care to people living with HIV/AIDS.	It is bad that people do not accept and do not give care to people living with HIV/AIDS.
It is good that society accepts and takes care of AIDS orphans.	It is bad that society does not accept and does not take care of AIDS orphans.
It is good that HIV positive people do not lose their jobs because of their status.	It is bad that HIV positive people lose their jobs because of their status.
It is good that society understands the basic needs of people living with HIV/AIDS.	It is bad that society does not understand the basic needs of people living with HIV/AIDS.
It is good that HIV positive pregnant women are provided with anti-retroviral therapy.	It is bad that HIV positive pregnant women are not provided with anti-retroviral therapy.
It is good that people know the HIV- positive mothers can transmit HIV to their children during pregnancy, delivery and breast feeding.	It is bad that people do not know that HIV-positive mothers can transmit HIV to their children during pregnancy, delivery and breast feeding.
It is good that individuals understand that mosquitoes do not spread HIV/AIDS.	It is bad that individuals do not understand that mosquitoes do not spread HIV/AIDS.
It is good that individuals understand that getting infected with HIV/AIDS is not a curse from God – it is a disease like any other.	It is bad that individuals do not understand that getting infected with HIV/AIDS is not a curse from God – it is a disease like any other.

Gender	
It is good that individuals are aware of important gender issues.	It is bad that individuals are not aware of important gender issues.
It is good that parents provide education equally to both girls and boys.	It is bad that parents do not provide education equally to both girls and boys.
It is good that parents give equal value to both girl and boy children	It is bad that parents do not give equal value to both girl and boy children.
It is good that men understand that women deserves equal job opportunities and pay.	It is bad that women do not deserve equal job opportunities and pay.
It is good that women have a bigger role in all aspects of life.	It is bad that women do not have a bigger role in all aspects of life.
It is good that men understand that female human beings are as intelligent as their male counterparts.	It is bad that men do not understand that female human beings are as intelligent as their male counterparts.

The values grid is used in developing three sets of characters: positive, negative and transitional.

Step 3: Writing & Production

All the nuances of visual story telling come into play here. The name of the game is still **motion pictures**. The characters will move, the camera will move; the characters and the camera will move. Audio and video (including design) will combine to create an impactful **visual** story at the shortest possible time.

Step 4: Preview

The film is exposed to a select audience representative of the target audience. The preview audience is questioned on issues relating to: entertainment, main ideas, likes/dislikes, suggestions/recommendations.

Step 5: Reworking

Based on the outcome of step 4, the film is reworked - if need be.

Step 6: Evaluative/Summative Research

This is a kind of post mortem - in the sense that the findings are factored into a new work.

I have recommended the Sabido methodology for two crucial reasons:

1. The tendency for Nollywood films to be packaged in parts (I, II – even up to IV – as in Mount Zion's *One Careless Night*) – making them look not unlike a mini-mini-serial. The point is that this allows room enough for transitional characters to develop.
2. By and large, the Nollywood audience has been weaned on TV serials – *Cockcrow at Dawn*, *Mirror in the Sun*, *Magana Jarice*, etc. We are, therefore, dealing with an audience already favourably disposed to the serial drama approach that is intrinsic to the Sabido methodology.

Conclusion

Some 60% of Nigeria's 120ml population figure is Nollywood's latent audience. This is a huge marketing advantage - from whatever way one may choose to look at it. The challenge for the content provider is to work out a creatively empirical way to package this audience for sale to a sponsor. This is because any motion picture industry that relies solely on selling entertainment to the audience seriously restricts the sources of its production recourses.

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