PERCEPTION OF POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS ON THE INFLUENCE OF NOLLYWOOD FILMS IN SUSTAINING SOCIAL STABILITY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *Communication scholars have argued in favour of Nollywood as an industry that has produced films that serve as a cultural repository, preserving and disseminating Nigerian heritage to both local and international audiences by showcasing the inherent diverse cultures. Social stability in any given society is no doubt a big step for national development, and the media has a role to play in forestalling it. Hence, this study sets out to examine the perception of postgraduate students drawn from Anambra State, Nigeria, on Nollywood films' influence in addressing societal issues and whether they foster social stability in Nigeria. Hinged on cultivation theory, this study adopted a survey research design to elicit data from 271 postgraduate students who were randomly selected. With the use of an online questionnaire (Google Form) as an instrument for data collection, findings reveal that postgraduate students view Nollywood films as enabling tools that reflect and shape societal values, still fostering public discourse and serving as a catalyst for social change, which are elements to promote social stability. However, the study indicates the need for more impactful plots and hence recommends that better inspiring and motivating content in Nollywood productions be inculcated to raise more awareness about societal issues.*

KEYWORDS: Film, Influence, Nollywood, Perception, Postgraduate students, Social Stability.

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian film industry, Nollywood, has been praised over the years for shaping and influencing social and cultural dynamics within the country. Over the past few decades, Nollywood productions have surpassed mere entertainment, becoming a significant medium for social commentary and change (Obiora & Chukwuemeka, 2023; Obiora, 2022). The influence of Nollywood in achieving social stability in Nigeria is profound, touching on various aspects such as cultural identity, social norms, and political awareness (Onuoha, 2021). One compelling argument remains whether Nollywood contributes to social stability by reinforcing cultural identity and promoting unity among Nigerians, as films produced by Nollywood often depict local customs, languages, and traditions, fostering a sense of pride and belonging among viewers. Studies have affirmed that Nollywood films serve as a cultural repository, preserving and disseminating Nigerian heritage to both local and international audiences through their narratives. So, Nollywood productions have the potential to reinforce cultural identity, promote social norms, and inspire political awareness. (Adeoye & Fawole, 2020; Obiora & Odoh, 2020; Obiora & Uche, 2021; Onyejelem et al., 2022; Oyewole, 2023; Nnabuife et al., 2023; Obiora & Adikuru, 2024; Nnabuife et al., 2024, Nnaemeka, 2017). This portrayal of diverse Nigerian cultures helps bridge cultural gaps and promote unity (Obiora & Nwafor, 2022), reducing the risk of ethnic and cultural conflicts within the society. Moreover, Nollywood films play a crucial role in challenging and reshaping social norms by tackling pressing issues such as corruption, gender inequality, and violence against women and girls (Obiora, 2025; Obiora & Uche, 2024a; Obiora & Uche, 2024b; Onyejelem et al., 2023). These films raise awareness and spark public discourse, encouraging viewers to question and address societal problems.

According to Onuoha (2021), social stability refers to the endurance and harmony within a society, characterised by the absence of social unrest, the presence of cohesive social bonds, and the effective functioning of social institutions. The author also states that it is the state where societal norms, values, and structures function smoothly, providing a stable environment conducive to growth and development. According to Durkheim (1893), cited in Onuoha (2021), social stability is achieved through a balance of integration and regulation, where individuals feel a sense of belonging and adherence to societal norms. This stability is crucial for ensuring that social institutions such as family, education, and governance operate effectively, thereby preventing social disintegration and promoting collective well-being. Adeola (2023) noted that the factors contributing to social stability include economic security, cultural cohesion, and effective governance.

National cohesion is essential in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria, where shared cultural narratives can foster unity and social stability (Onuoha, 2021). By reflecting on societal challenges and inspiring viewers to advocate for change, Nollywood contributes to a more informed and active citizenry, which is essential for maintaining social stability. Additionally, the political education embedded in Nollywood films, as noted by Hernandez and Gomez (2023), encourages political engagement and accountability by depicting political corruption and electoral malpractice, which encourages political engagement and accountability and serves as a platform for political education. Hence, reinforcing social stability through enhanced political awareness and participation.

The portrayal of political narratives and diverse ethnic groups in Nollywood films either promotes political awareness and social cohesion or reinforces existing biases and tensions. While the economic benefits of Nollywood are acknowledged, it is crucial to understand how these contributions translate into long-term social stability. Thus, there is a need to explore and understand the nuanced perceptions of postgraduate students on the true impact of Nollywood in fostering a more just, equitable, and stable society in Nigeria. It is on this basis that this study emphasises the perception of postgraduate students in Anambra state on the influence of Nollywood productions in achieving social stability in Nigeria. Therefore, the essence of this study lies in examining the extent to which Nollywood films align with these existing assertions about their role in sustaining social stability. This study aims to:

1. Ascertain postgraduate students' perception of Nollywood productions' in fostering social stability in Nigeria.

2. Identify better ways that Nollywood films can foster social stability in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Film and Nollywood Industry

Film as a mass medium has been proven to have some influence on its audience due to its unique features of combining sound, visuals, dialogue, characters and special effects, which allows it to penetrate the feelings and emotions of its audience. This connects them to the content of the film and makes them perceive what they watch as accurate (Ojiakor & Obiora, 2019). The film has been praised for its ability to reflect the activities of humans in their respective societies, just like a mirror. Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry, gained popularity after its 1992 blockbuster film, *Living in Bondage,* and it has since then kept soaring high. Amobi and Shaibu (2015), cited in Obiora (2020), noted that one major strength and cause of Nollywood's success story in spite of its flaws is in its offerings to represent the challenges, hopes and aspirations of Nigerians. Adeola (2023) highlights how Nollywood's portrayal of these challenges serves as a catalyst for social change, encouraging viewers to confront and question the status quo. This transformative power of Nollywood is particularly significant in a country grappling with numerous social and political issues.

Nollywood serves as a unifying force by addressing common social challenges that affect Nigerians regardless of ethnicity. Issues such as poverty, corruption, education, and healthcare disparities are portrayed in films that resonate with audiences nationwide. This shared portrayal of societal issues fosters a sense of collective identity and empathy among viewers, as noted by Adediran and Akande (2019), which paves the way for national stability. Moreover, it has played a great role in promoting political awareness through its political narratives, as it educates viewers about the intricacies of Nigeria's political landscape, including themes of electoral malpractice and governance. Economically, Nollywood has been a powerhouse, contributing significantly to Nigeria's GDP and providing employment opportunities for thousands. Adeoye and Adegbulugbe (2021) note that the industry's economic impact extends beyond job creation, helping to alleviate poverty and reduce crime rates. The financial success of Nollywood exemplifies its potential as a driver of economic empowerment and development within Nigeria.

Role of Nollywood in addressing societal issues: A path to social stability

Nigerian society has been acknowledged by scholars to have witnessed insecurity and social unrest (Nnaemeka. & Ezebuenyi, 2016; Nnaemeka et al., 2024; Nnaemeka & Ezeoke, 2023; Nnaemeka & Ogunbadejo, 2024), and the media has kept reporting it including Nigeria's film industry, Nollywood, through their representations. The industry has played a crucial role in reflecting and shaping societal values and discussions. The essence of Nollywood lies in its ability to mirror the complexities of Nigerian society (Chambers, 2017).

Nollywood has emerged as a powerful medium for addressing societal issues, just like social media, which raises users' knowledge and brings about attitude and behaviour change (Adikuru & Obiora, 2021). Through its wide-reaching narratives and relatable characterisations, Nollywood films tackle a range of pressing social problems, thereby playing a crucial role in raising awareness and stimulating public discourse (Obiora & Uche, 2025). According to Adeola (2023), these films do more than depict corruption; they provide a critical commentary that encourages viewers to reflect on their roles in perpetuating or combating corrupt practices. By exposing the details of corruption, Nollywood fosters a more informed and engaged citizenry.

Gender inequality is another significant issue that Nollywood confronts. Films often depict the struggles and triumphs of women in a patriarchal society, shedding light on issues such as domestic violence, economic disenfranchisement, and gender-based discrimination. Hernandez and Gomez (2023) argue that Nollywood's portrayal of strong female characters and their battles against societal constraints serves as an inspiration for women, promoting gender equality and empowerment. These narratives help to challenge traditional gender roles and advocate for a more equitable society. With these narratives, Nollywood contributes to the broader movement against women and girls and supports efforts to create safer communities that contribute to social stability.

The representation of diverse ethnic and cultural identities is another area where Nollywood makes a significant impact. Nigeria's complex ethnic landscape often breeds tension and conflict, but Nollywood's inclusive narratives promote understanding and unity. Adeoye and Adegbulugbe (2021) highlight that films depicting inter-ethnic cooperation and harmony help to mitigate ethnic tensions and foster social stability. Oyewole (2023) notes that Nollywood's emphasis on themes of love, family, and communal harmony has the potential to mitigate ethnic conflicts and promote social stability.

Furthermore, Nollywood plays an essential role in addressing political issues. The industry's portrayal of electoral malpractice, governance challenges, and civic responsibilities educates viewers about the political processes and their rights as citizens. This educational aspect of Nollywood is crucial for fostering a politically aware and active populace who would work towards social stability; just as Adeola (2023) noted, such films enhance political engagement and encourage democratic participation, which is vital for achieving social stability. Moreover, Nollywood's economic influence cannot be overlooked. The industry provides employment for thousands of Nigerians, contributing to economic stability. The growth of Nollywood has led to the development of ancillary industries such as film production, marketing, and distribution, creating a ripple effect on the economy. Adeoye and Adegbulugbe (2021) argue that the economic empowerment generated by Nollywood helps to alleviate poverty and reduce crime rates, further contributing to social stability.

Nollywood's ability to address societal issues is not limited to its domestic audience. The industry's international reach amplifies its impact, bringing Nigerian social issues to a global platform. This international visibility helps to attract attention and support from the global community, fostering cross-cultural understanding and solidarity. Oyewole (2023) notes that the global success of Nollywood films has positioned Nigeria as a cultural hub, contributing to positive perceptions of the country and its societal challenges. Films that celebrate Nigerian culture, history, and achievements instil a sense of pride in viewers, reinforcing a shared national identity (Ejiofor, 2020). Also, the industry's ability to reach diverse audiences across socioeconomic strata enhances its impact on social cohesion. Nollywood films are accessible to a wide spectrum of viewers, from urban centres to rural communities and across different age groups. This accessibility allows messages of unity and social harmony to resonate widely, transcending geographical and demographic boundaries. The global popularity of Nigerian films introduces international audiences to Nigeria's cultural richness and societal challenges. According to Olofinnika, Onyekachi, and Oseni (2019), international recognition fosters a positive global image of Nigeria, contributing to cross-cultural understanding and diplomatic relations.

According to Ezeaka, Ochuba and Bartholomew (2025), effective advocacy requires clear, persuasive, and culturally relevant communication, and so through Nollywood storylines, themes, characterisation, representations, sound, and dialogue can play a crucial role in addressing and challenging social norms and issues which can directly and indirectly fosters social stability in the minds of Nigerians who are majorly the audience of Nollywood productions. Exploring postgraduate students' perceptions of the influence of Nollywood productions in fostering social stability in Nigeria will provide insights into the effectiveness of Nollywood films in moulding Nigerian citizens' attitudes and behaviours towards social stability.

Review of Empirical Studies

Obiora (2025) examined the perceptions of female undergraduates on feminist depictions in *The Woman King* (2022) film. With the adoption of focus group discussion to ascertain the feminist themes contained in the film and determine the opinions of female undergraduates about them. There were three (3) discussion groups from three (3) universities randomly selected from Anambra State, Nigeria, to represent the federal, state and private universities. Findings showed that female empowerment through leadership was most relevant to the female students, and their perception of the feminist portrayals was inspiring and thought-provoking.

In another study, Obiora and Chukwuemeka (2023) set out to investigate the perception of undergraduates in Anambra State on teen characterisation in a drug-related film, *Far from Home* (2022), to determine the role of Nollywood in combating drug abuse in Nigeria. The study was anchored on reception theory and applied focus group discussion to draw data from undergraduates in Anambra State, Nigeria. Results showed that students view teen characterisation as a reflection of what is going on in typical Nigerian society. Findings further revealed that Nollywood as an industry was not involved in fighting against the societal menace of drug abuse through their representations.

Adesemoye (2023) investigated whether Nigerian students view Nollywood as a cultural ambassador. With the use of surveys and questionnaires as data collection instruments, 283 Lagos State University of Science and Technology mass communication students were

surveyed. Results indicated that the respondents perceived Nollywood as a cultural industry. However, their responses still revealed that they perceived Nollywood productions as weak in relation to cultural depictions. In the same vein, VIatlis and Orunonye (2022), through critical analysis of some Nigerian movies, analysed the Nigerian Nollywood industry and how it can become an instrument for nation-building in the area of social security and socio-political stability. The study recommends that director, scriptwriters and Nollywood actors must not see their jobs and professions as avenues for money making only; they must for national interest also direct and produce movies that can influence the Nigerian populace towards appreciating their national heritage, socio-cultural diversity and building of a socially stable and secured Nigerian society.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Cultivation theory initially developed by George Gerbner and Larry Gross in the 1970s, which is a prominent communication theory that explores the long-term effects of television on audiences' perceptions of the real world. The theory posits that prolonged exposure to television content, particularly in the form of narratives and portrayals of social reality, can shape individuals' beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions about the world (Winks, 2015). It suggests that television cultivates a shared, distorted worldview among viewers, which may influence their understanding of social issues, violence, and various aspects of life (Oyetola, 2022).

This theory, in relation to this study, emphasises how Nollywood productions are a significant source of media content for postgraduate students, and repeated exposure to these productions can cultivate a particular worldview, shaping their perceptions of social stability in Nigeria. The cultivation theory suggests that this exposure can shape students' understanding of what is deemed acceptable and desirable behaviour, ultimately influencing their attitudes and beliefs about social stability. The theory also implies that Nollywood productions can shape students' perceptions of social issues, such as conflict resolution, political participation, and gender roles, which are all crucial aspects of social stability. By examining the relationship between Nollywood productions and postgraduate students in Anambra state on perceptions of social stability, this study can gain insight into how media influences students' understanding of social issues and their potential role in achieving social stability in Nigeria. Ultimately, the cultivation theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how media can shape our perceptions of reality, making it a vital lens for this study.

METHODOLOGY

In order to gather data for this study, the researchers used the survey research method. A sample size of 271 postgraduates was randomly drawn from the five universities which run postgraduate programmes out of nine universities situated within Anambra state. They include: Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka; Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam; Paul University, Awka; Madonna University, Okija; and Tansian University, Umunya. Google Form links were shared with a representative from each school who shared the same in various postgraduates' WhatsApp groups. In the end, a total number of 271 respondents filled out the online questionnaire. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics tables.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The data were collected using a frequency distribution table and represented in simple percentages.

Table 1: Respondents' perception of the role of Nollywood in fostering social stability in Nigeria

Perception Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Nollywood films raise awareness about social issues	71	122	39	31	8	271
Nollywood films influence societal attitudes	84	109	33	36	9	271
Nollywood films promote cultural identity	105	69	47	33	18	271
Nollywood films contribute to political awareness	63	69	50	74	15	271
Nollywood films encourage civic engagement	51	43	49	68	60	271

Nollywood films address gender inequality	39	44	29	86	73	271
Nollywood films highlight economic challenges	97	69	60	33	12	271

Source: *Field Survey 2024*

Data in Table 1 revealed that postgraduate students generally perceived Nollywood films positively in terms of their role in addressing societal issues that pave the way to social stability in Nigeria. A significant majority agree or strongly agree that Nollywood raises awareness about social issues, influences societal attitudes, and promotes cultural identity, which are the elements that pave the way for social stability. This suggests that Nollywood is seen as a powerful medium for social commentary and cultural preservation. However, perceptions are more divided regarding Nollywood's contribution to political awareness, with a notable number of students expressing neutrality or disagreement. The most contentious areas are civic engagement and gender inequality, where a significant number of students disagree or strongly disagree with Nollywood's effectiveness. This indicates that while Nollywood is recognised for its positive influence on certain societal aspects, there are areas where its influence is perceived as less effective, highlighting the need for further exploration and potential improvement in these areas.

Table 2: Responses on better ways Nollywood films can foster social stability in Nigeria

Social Issues Addressed by Nollywood	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Mitigating ethnic tensions	96	35
Address common social challenges	108	40
Promotes national pride and patriotism	67	25
Total	**271**	**100**

Source: *Field Survey 2024*

Data in Table 2 revealed that postgraduate students suggest that mitigating ethnic tensions is a crucial strategy, indicating a recognition of the need for unity in a diverse society. Additionally, many postgraduate students highlight the importance of addressing common social challenges, reflecting a desire for films to tackle shared issues that affect all Nigerians. Promoting national pride and patriotism is also seen as vital, suggesting that students see value in films that build a collective national identity. These insights indicate that students see Nollywood as a powerful tool for enhancing social cohesion and suggest specific strategies for filmmakers to adopt to achieve this goal.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Postgraduate students generally perceived Nollywood films positively in terms of their role in addressing societal issues. Also, a significant majority agree or strongly agree that Nollywood raises awareness about social issues, influences societal attitudes, and promotes cultural identity. These claims support the assertions of Adeola (2023), who stated that Nollywood has emerged as a powerful medium for addressing societal issues. Through its wide-reaching narratives and relatable characters, Nollywood films tackle a range of pressing social problems, thereby playing a crucial role in raising awareness and stimulating public discourse. Adeoye and Adegbulugbe (2021) also highlighted that Nollywood's ability to address societal issues is not limited to its domestic audience. The industry's international reach amplifies its impact, bringing Nigerian social issues to a global platform. This international visibility helps to attract attention and support from the global community, fostering cross-cultural understanding and solidarity. Oyewole (2023) noted that the global success of Nollywood films has positioned Nigeria as a cultural hub, con further tributing to positive perceptions of the country and its societal challenges.

Respondents suggest that mitigating ethnic tensions is a crucial strategy, indicating a recognition of the need for unity in a diverse society. This is also supported by Oyewole (2018), who stated that these representations help to mitigate ethnic tensions by showcasing shared values and experiences that resonate across Nigeria's diverse population. Their suggestions seem to align with the views of Adediran and Akande (2019), who posited that Nollywood serves as a unifying force by addressing common social challenges that affect Nigerians regardless of ethnicity. Issues such as poverty, corruption, education, and healthcare disparities are portrayed in films that resonate with audiences nationwide. This shared portrayal of societal issues fosters a sense of collective identity and empathy among viewers. This finding also confirms the position of Ejiofor (2020), who asserted that Nollywood contributes to social cohesion by promoting national pride and patriotism. Films that celebrate Nigerian culture, history, and achievements instil a sense of pride in viewers, reinforcing a shared national identity, which are paths that lead to social stability.

CONCLUSION

Based on the objectives, the study concludes that postgraduate students generally perceive Nollywood films positively in terms of their role in addressing societal issues which foster social stability. These perceptions highlight Nollywood's effectiveness as a powerful medium for addressing societal issues through its wide-reaching narratives and relatable characters.

Postgraduate students in Anambra suggest that mitigating ethnic tensions is crucial, recognising the need for unity in a diverse society. Hence, the researchers recommend the following:

1. Nollywood filmmakers should focus on creating films that address common social challenges such as poverty, corruption, education, and healthcare disparities. By showcasing shared values and experiences that resonate across Nigeria's diverse population, these films can foster a sense of collective identity and empathy among viewers, thereby mitigating ethnic tensions and promoting unity in a diverse society.

2. Efforts should also be made to expand the international reach of Nollywood films further. By bringing Nigerian social issues to a global platform, Nollywood can attract attention and support from the global community, fostering cross-cultural understanding and solidarity. This international visibility can help amplify the influence of Nollywood in addressing societal issues and enhancing positive perceptions of Nigeria and its societal challenges.

3. Nigerian policymakers should involve the use of Nollywood productions to sell ideas to Nigerian audiences since it is a powerful tool that shapes opinions and attitudes, thereby teaching Nigerian citizens the importance of social integration and cohesion.

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