

NOLLYWOOD ON NETFLIX AND THE REIMAGINING OF NIGERIAN IDENTITY IN THE DIASPORA

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of Nollywood movies on Netflix in constructing the Nigerian brand among Nigerians and non-Nigerians in the diaspora. It investigates the dominant themes and narratives in Netflix-distributed Nollywood films, how these narratives shape audience perceptions of Nigeria, and how socio-cultural backgrounds influence interpretation. The study adopted a qualitative research design using in-depth interviews with forty (40) Nigerians and non-Nigerians residing in Canada, selected through purposive sampling. Data were analysed thematically in line with the study objectives. Findings reveal that Nollywood films on Netflix portray a blend of modernity and tradition, featuring themes such as wealth, corruption, family conflict, migration, and romance, which collectively shape a mixed national image. While some audiences perceive Nigeria as creative and culturally rich, others associate it with crime and instability. The study also shows that diaspora audiences actively interpret and negotiate meanings based on personal experiences and digital discussions. The study concludes that Netflix plays a significant role in shaping Nigeria's global image through algorithmic visibility and content curation, while audience interpretation remains dynamic and context-dependent.

Keywords: Algorithmic curation; Diaspora audiences; Nigerian brand; Nollywood; Streaming platforms

Introduction

Nollywood emerged as a major cultural industry through decades of innovation, experimentation, and grassroots creativity. Its origins can be traced to Nigeria's rich oral storytelling tradition, stage performances, and the early home-video era of the 1990s. During this period, films were largely low-budget and locally produced, relying on simple production techniques, indigenous actors, and relatable storylines that reflected everyday Nigerian life (Zamaki, 2022). Despite these limitations, the content strongly connected with audiences because it mirrored their social realities. Over time, the industry expanded and became more structured, developing a recognizable style, professional actors, and more organised production processes. By the 2010s, Nollywood had grown into one of the largest film industries in the world in terms of output, gaining both regional popularity and growing international attention (Onuzulike, 2021).

A major turning point in the development of Nollywood was its integration into global streaming platforms such as Netflix. This shift opened up international visibility and gave Nigerian filmmakers access to a wider and more diverse audience (Oseyi & Ibrahim, 2024). As a result, production quality improved significantly, with better budgets, cinematography, and sound design becoming more common. In addition, filmmakers began to adjust their storytelling approaches to appeal to both local and global viewers, often combining culturally specific themes with universal narratives. Films frequently highlight themes such as wealth, ambition, romance, and urban life, while also addressing issues like corruption and social conflict. Although this has helped Nollywood gain global recognition, it has also raised concerns about the possibility of reinforcing negative stereotypes about Nigeria through certain storylines (Zakari, 2025; Adekanbi & Musa, 2022).

In this context, Nollywood films on Netflix have become important tools for shaping how Nigeria is perceived globally. The “Nigerian brand” is formed through repeated visual and narrative representations of culture, identity, and social life, which audiences interpret and internalise over time (Nwafor, 2021). For Nigerians in the diaspora and non-Nigerian viewers, these films serve as a major source of knowledge about the country, especially when combined with social media discussions and online engagement. Viewers often compare what they see on screen with real-life experiences or global perceptions of Nigeria, leading to mixed interpretations that include pride, admiration, criticism, and curiosity (Mayaki, 2022; Ekwueme, 2023).

Therefore, Nollywood on Netflix does not only function as entertainment but also plays a central role in constructing and negotiating Nigeria's identity and image in the global space and as such the need for more study on it.

Statement of the Problem

Much of the existing scholarship on Nollywood has focused on industry expansion, globalisation, production practices, and cultural influence (Haynes, 2019; Onuzulike, 2021). While these studies provide important insights into Nollywood's growth and international reach, they often treat audience perception, especially the emotional and psychological responses of viewers, as secondary. For example, Haynes (2019) highlights the industry's economic and structural rise but does not examine how audiences internalise the national image constructed through these films. Similarly, Onuzulike (2021) analyses global distribution patterns without addressing how viewers interpret these narratives in relation to the Nigerian brand. As a result, there is limited understanding of how streaming-age Nollywood, particularly on Netflix, shapes national self-perception and brand interpretation among audiences.

This gap becomes even more significant when considering Nigerians and non-Nigerians in the diaspora, who often consume Nollywood films as a key cultural connection to Nigeria. For many in the diaspora, Netflix-distributed Nollywood content serves not only as entertainment but also as a symbolic representation of Nigerian identity, culture, and values. However, empirical studies rarely explore how these audiences interpret the Nigerian brand through the emotional and visual narratives presented in these films. Questions remain about whether Nollywood's global visibility through Netflix strengthens national pride, reinforces stereotypes, challenges preconceived notions, or creates conflicting interpretations of what Nigeria represents. This study sought to fill that gap by investigating how diaspora audiences interpret Nigerian culture, identity, and brand narratives as presented in Nollywood films on Netflix.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Identify the specific themes and narratives used in Nollywood movies on Netflix to construct the Nigerian brand among Nigerians and non-Nigerians in diaspora.
2. Determine how Nigerians and non-Nigerians in diaspora perceive the Nigerian brand as presented in Nollywood movies on Netflix.
3. Assess how socio-economic factors of Nigerians and non-Nigerians in diaspora shape their interpretation of the Nigerian brand in Nollywood movies on Netflix.

Conceptual Review

Netflix

Netflix can be defined as a digital streaming platform that functions as a global distributor of audiovisual content, including films, series, documentaries, and other entertainment formats (Smith, 2023). Its influence stems from its ability to deliver curated content to a worldwide audience, transcending geographical, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. By

controlling which content is produced, licensed, and promoted on its platform, Netflix exerts substantial power over the narratives that reach viewers. This selection process is not neutral; it reflects corporate strategies, market demands, and cultural trends, thereby shaping the stories that define global audiences' perceptions of different cultures and societies. For instance, the strategic inclusion of African and Nollywood productions introduces global viewers to Nigerian stories, values, and aesthetics, simultaneously broadening cultural awareness and constructing a mediated image of the nation. In this sense, Netflix functions as both a cultural gatekeeper and an amplifier, mediating access to diverse forms of storytelling and determining which cultural narratives gain prominence. Its curatorial choices, repeated over time, subtly influence global cultural perceptions and contribute to constructing national and regional brands in ways that extend far beyond entertainment alone.

In addition to its role as a distributor, Netflix functions as a powerful cultural influencer, shaping viewers' perceptions of social values, norms, and lifestyles through the narratives it presents (Adeyemi & Eze, 2024). Influence here refers to the platform's ability to embed specific cultural references, ethical frameworks, and lifestyle models within content, which audiences then internalise, often unconsciously. Storytelling elements such as character development, plot progression, and moral resolution expose viewers to implicit lessons about family dynamics, gender roles, social hierarchy, and ethical conduct. For example, Nigerian narratives on Netflix may emphasise entrepreneurship, communal living, or moral responsibility, which subtly guide audience expectations regarding acceptable behaviours and social aspirations. Over time, consistent exposure to such narratives fosters a shared cultural imagination, whereby audiences begin to associate certain traits, values, or identities with particular regions or communities (Moore, 2023). Netflix, therefore, operates not merely as a platform for entertainment but as an agent that influences collective cultural cognition, shaping how audiences interpret, relate to, and even emulate the societies depicted in its content.

Nollywood

Nollywood can be defined as Nigeria's indigenous film industry, recognised as one of the largest in the world in terms of output and audience reach (Adeyemi, 2023). Influence, in this context, refers to the industry's capacity to reflect, interpret, and communicate the social, cultural, and moral landscapes of Nigerian society. Films produced within Nollywood often dramatise daily experiences, familial relations, social hierarchies, and community interactions, offering audiences both locally and internationally insights into the values, struggles, and aspirations of Nigerian people. Through storytelling, Nollywood establishes shared cultural reference points, enabling viewers to recognise and internalise certain behaviours, norms, and ethical considerations (Okafor, 2024). Its production ensures wide dissemination, creating a consistent cultural discourse that shapes collective understanding of identity, morality, and social cohesion. In this way, Nollywood functions as both a mirror of society and a medium through which cultural consciousness is constructed and reinforced.

Furthermore, Nollywood can be conceptualised as an agent of identity construction, influencing how individuals and communities perceive themselves and others (Eze & Okeke, 2024). Influence in this sense derives from the repetition of character archetypes, plotlines, and culturally rooted narratives that shape social and personal identity. For instance, depictions of resilience, entrepreneurial spirit, or moral integrity allow audiences to connect with aspirational role models, reinforcing self-conception and social belonging. Conversely, portrayals of societal vices, corruption, or conflict provoke reflection and critique, encouraging audiences to negotiate their identities within a broader cultural framework. Through consistently framing social roles and expectations, Nollywood strengthens collective understanding of what it means to be Nigerian, contributing to national identity formation while simultaneously offering commentary on evolving social norms.

Opinion Review

Platform Curation, Quality Standards and Narrative Shifts

Commentators increasingly observe that platform curation, particularly within global streaming ecosystems, has generated a fundamental reordering of creative priorities in Nollywood. Scholars such as Ibe (2023) and Vitalis (2025) emphasise that Netflix's algorithmic structures, ranking, recommendation, audience segmentation and personalised viewing pathways, effectively function as hidden gatekeepers that determine which films gain prominence. The platform's reliance on viewer retention metrics and cross-market engagement rates privileges films with slick production values, streamlined narratives and predictable emotional arcs, especially those capable of holding the attention of non-Nigerian viewers (Amadi, 2024). Consequently, filmmakers recalibrate their creative strategies to align with algorithmic expectations, recognising that visibility on the platform can exponentially increase both viewership and revenue. This results in an industry-wide shift whereby narrative ambition, cultural specificity and even artistic experimentation become subordinated to platform-friendly content structures (Okonkwo, 2024; Nnaji, 2025).

Additionally, the rise of Netflix as a key distribution partner has introduced new benchmarks of technical and aesthetic quality which many Nollywood producers now treat as baseline industry standards. Analysts like Berebon (2023) and Wang (2024) note that Netflix's technical deliverables, 4K resolution, advanced sound mixing, colour grading standards and international subtitling requirements, have compelled local producers to professionalise their production pipelines. While this has undeniably improved the global competitiveness of Nigerian films, commentators such as Chukwu (2024) argue that these requirements come with economic burdens that smaller, independent filmmakers cannot easily meet. As a result, a stratified production landscape emerges in which well-funded studios dominate Netflix listings, thereby shaping audience expectations about what

“quality Nollywood” should look like. This shift risks marginalising grassroots cinematic expressions, including low-budget community dramas, indigenous-language storytelling, and experimental formats that historically defined Nollywood's creative identity (Eze, 2024; Ogundu, 2025).

Equally significant is the narrative implication of these quality and curation imperatives. Scholars such as Onwuegbuchulam (2024) and Adeyemi (2023) argue that Netflix encourages a “global cross-over logic” in which stories must resonate with international audiences to be algorithmically rewarded. This expectation subtly discourages narratives that rely on uniquely Nigerian cultural textures such as indigenous dialects, proverbs, local comedic timing, rural cosmologies or region-specific conflict dynamics (Yakubu, 2024; Nwosu, 2024). Instead, filmmakers gravitate towards themes and aesthetics that are immediately legible to global viewers, urban aspiration, family reconciliation, romance, crime and psychological tension, thus reducing the space available for particularistic or locally resonant storytelling traditions. Critics warn that this shift risks presenting an overly urbanised, polished and homogenous version of Nigeria that prioritises metropolitan lifestyles while sidelining the country's socio-cultural plurality (Okafor, 2024; Eze & Okeke, 2024).

Digital Audiences, Algorithmic Visibility and Nigerian Brand Narratives

Critical studies increasingly underline the role of algorithmic mediation in determining which Nollywood films gain traction among global and local audiences. According to Yakubu (2024) and Wang (2024), Netflix's recommendation systems prioritise films with high engagement metrics, influencing what viewers encounter and, ultimately, which narratives shape perceptions of Nigeria. This dynamic creates a politics of visibility in which films that align with global tastes, romance, crime thrillers, polished urban dramas, receive more algorithmic amplification than those steeped in cultural specificity (Chukwu, 2024; Adeyemi, 2023).

Consequently, Nigeria's brand narrative becomes subtly shaped by the stories the algorithm foregrounds, while culturally diverse or marginal narratives risk invisibility. This process situates Netflix as an active participant in cultural brand construction, rather than a neutral distribution channel (Eze & Okeke, 2024; Nwosu, 2024).

Equally, scholars stress that viewer engagement behaviour significantly influences how Nigerian brand narratives take shape on Netflix. Researchers such as Onwuegbuchulam (2024) and Amadi (2024) highlight that patterns such as rewatch rates, completion percentages and peak-hour streaming contribute to algorithmic reinforcement. These engagement behaviours often favour films with contemporary urban aesthetics, aspirational lifestyles and cosmopolitan characters, which audiences across regions find relatable (Ogundu, 2025; Eze, 2024). As engagement-driven visibility increases, such films become emblematic of “the Nigeria” that global audiences come to recognise. Critics argue that this creates a selective brand representation that foregrounds modernity and economic aspiration while obscuring rural cultures, grassroots realities or indigenous cosmologies (Yakubu, 2023; Okonkwo, 2024).

Moreover, social media platforms constitute crucial interpretive spaces where the meaning of Nollywood films on Netflix is negotiated. Scholars such as Chukwu (2024) and Vitalis (2025) note that digital audiences actively shape Nigerian brand narratives by discussing, critiquing and meme-ifying Nollywood films. These online conversations often amplify particular scenes, themes or character types, establishing shared readings that circulate widely beyond the original filmic text (Wang, 2024; Nnaji, 2025). Through hashtags, reviews and commentary threads, viewers construct communal interpretations that influence both domestic and international perceptions of Nigeria. As audiences assert interpretive authority, their discussions become part of the broader cultural branding apparatus that surrounds Nollywood (Eze, 2024; Yakubu, 2024).

Soft Power, Cultural Diplomacy and Nigeria's Global Image Through Streaming Media

Over the past decade, scholars increasingly recognise Nollywood as one of Nigeria's most influential soft power assets, capable of shaping global perceptions through storytelling and cultural symbolism. According to Yakubu (2024) and Eze (2023), the global circulation of Nigerian films on Netflix allows the country to project narratives that emphasise cultural vibrancy, social dynamism and creative ingenuity. In contrast to traditional diplomatic methods, Nollywood functions as an informal yet potent channel through which Nigeria communicates its identity, values and aspirations to global audiences (Nnaji, 2025; Okonkwo, 2024). As Nye's (2021) concept of soft power suggests, nations increasingly rely on cultural influence to build global legitimacy, and Nigeria's cinematic sector has become central to this endeavour. With Netflix's unparalleled distribution capacity, Nollywood now operates at the heart of Nigeria's cultural diplomacy, offering an alternative vision of the nation that counters negative stereotypes prevalent in international media.

Moreover, as scholars such as Chukwu (2024) and Wang (2023) argue, Netflix provides Nollywood with symbolic capital by situating Nigerian films alongside internationally acclaimed productions. This adjacency grants Nigerian stories a form of cultural elevation, signalling to global audiences that the nation's creative output is competitive at international standards. The presence of Nollywood films on a respected global platform also encourages cross-cultural engagement, enabling viewers from diverse cultural backgrounds to encounter the complexities of Nigerian society beyond superficial stereotypes (Adeyemi, 2023; Ogundu, 2025). Consequently, the films serve as cultural ambassadors that generate soft power by showcasing Nigeria's capacity for artistic innovation, narrative originality and cultural depth. This symbolic capital plays a vital role in shaping Nigeria's brand in global cultural markets, reinforcing perceptions of the country as a vibrant and culturally rich nation (Eze & Okeke, 2024).

Equally significant is the role of shared values and emotional resonance in Nigeria's cultural diplomacy through Nollywood. Researchers such as Vitalis (2025) and Amadi (2024) note that films depicting family bonds, community resilience, moral struggle and human aspiration transcend cultural boundaries because they engage universal emotional themes. Netflix's platform amplifies this effect by enabling audiences from Europe, the Americas, Asia and the African diaspora to access Nigerian storytelling in ways that foster empathy and cultural understanding (Yakubu, 2023). As viewers connect emotionally with Nigerian narratives, they develop more nuanced perceptions of the country, challenging reductionist depictions that often dominate global news media. This emotional impact becomes a subtle but powerful form of cultural diplomacy, as it fosters goodwill and strengthens Nigeria's soft power influence (Wang, 2024; Ogundu, 2025).

Empirical Review

Olayinka and Yusuf (2023), in their publication titled *“Streaming, Soft Power and African Image-Making: The Case of Nigerian Cinema”*, explored how Nigerian films distributed on Netflix contribute to broader soft-power projection and national image diplomacy. The main objective was to assess whether globally distributed Nollywood narratives enhance positive impressions of Nigeria or reinforce stereotypes. The study was anchored on Soft Power Theory, which posits that nations shape global perception not only through politics or economics but through cultural expression. Adopting a longitudinal survey design, the researchers collected data from international viewers across Europe, North America and Africa who had watched at least two Nollywood titles on Netflix. Their findings revealed that films portraying urban sophistication, entrepreneurship and modern lifestyles improved viewers' perceptions of Nigeria, whereas films emphasising corruption or moral decline sometimes reinforced negative stereotypes. The study concluded that Nollywood serves as a double-edged

cultural tool whose global impact depends on narrative framing. Recommendations emphasised purposeful storytelling that aligns with national image aspirations. This work relates closely to the current study by demonstrating how Nollywood content can shape conceptions of the Nigerian brand, although it examines global audiences rather than domestic viewers in the Federal Capital Territory.

Ibrahim and Nwachukwu (2024), in their study titled “*Digital Platforms and the Global Rebranding of Nigerian Cinema*”, examined how Netflix partnerships restructure the production ecosystem in Nollywood and influence global interpretations of Nigerian identity. The objective of the study was to evaluate how collaborations with international streaming companies affect creative decisions, production funding and branding strategies in Nigerian cinema. The study utilised Media Globalisation Theory, which asserts that cross-border media flows shape local industries, cultures and identities. Using interviews with twenty filmmakers, producers and distributors who had worked directly with Netflix, alongside a document analysis of Netflix's commissioning guidelines, the researchers found that the platform subtly but significantly influences Nollywood's creative direction. Key findings indicated increased emphasis on universal storytelling, polished cinematography and culturally hybrid narratives, all aimed at enhancing cross-market appeal. The study concluded that Netflix's influence acts as a catalyst for the internationalisation of Nollywood's brand identity. The authors recommended that Nigerian filmmakers balance global expectations with local storytelling traditions. This study aligns with the current research by addressing how streaming platforms contribute to brand shaping, though it focuses on industry stakeholders rather than audience perception.

Mohammed and Adeoye (2024), in their article titled “*Audience Perception of Nigerian Identity in Netflix-Hosted Nollywood Films*”, investigated how Nigerian viewers interpret portrayals of national identity in

films streamed on Netflix. The central objective was to analyse whether audiences perceive these portrayals as accurate, aspirational or distorted. The research was grounded in Reception Theory, which emphasises that viewers actively interpret media content based on their socio-cultural contexts. Employing a survey of 600 respondents across five Nigerian cities, including Abuja, the researchers discovered significant differences in perception based on age, education and exposure to global media. Their findings showed that younger, urban and globally connected audiences perceived Netflix-hosted Nollywood films as improving Nigeria's international image, whereas older respondents were more critical of what they saw as excessive Western influence. The study concluded that audience interpretation varies widely and can either strengthen or weaken national brand identity. Recommendations included producing content that bridges generational divides. This study relates to the current research by addressing domestic audience perceptions, although it adopts a national sample rather than focusing specifically on residents within the Federal Capital Territory.

Uzochukwu and Igwe (2023), in their study titled *“Cultural Hybridisation in Contemporary Nollywood: The Impact of Global Streaming Markets”*, examined how the global streaming economy has led to hybrid cultural expressions within Nollywood films. The objective was to determine the extent to which global distribution influences creative blends of Nigerian and foreign cultural elements. Anchored on Hybridisation Theory, the study explored the mixing of cultural forms as global and local forces interact. Using a textual analysis of twelve Netflix-acquired Nollywood films, supported by interviews with film critics and cultural scholars, the researchers found that hybrid elements such as multilingual dialogues, Westernised fashion styles and internationalised urban settings increasingly featured in contemporary productions. Their findings showed that while hybridisation allowed Nollywood films to reach broader audiences, it sometimes diluted deep-rooted cultural specificities. The study

concluded that hybridisation is both a creative opportunity and a cultural risk. Recommendations proposed strengthening cultural oversight within content creation. This study connects with the current research by examining cultural negotiation within Nollywood films distributed on Netflix.

Theoretical Framework

Cultural Imperialism Theory

Cultural Imperialism Theory was formulated by Herbert Schiller in the 1970s and developed to explain the global dominance of Western media. The theory argues that powerful nations export their cultural products to weaker nations, leading to homogenisation and dominance over local cultures. Modern scholarship has adapted this theory to digital streaming and global content distribution (Moyo & Ndlovu, 2020; Adepoju, 2022). In the context of Nollywood on Netflix, the theory helps examine how global media structures influence local production and consumption. While Netflix offers a platform for Nigerian films, it also imposes standards, algorithms, and visibility hierarchies that may privilege global appeal over local authenticity.

Cultural Imperialism operates through several tenets. First, media flows are asymmetrical, with content from dominant cultures often reaching broader audiences. Second, local cultures may internalise foreign values and aesthetics, sometimes at the expense of indigenous traditions. Third, power is embedded in production and distribution systems, influencing what content is created, promoted, or suppressed. Fourth, cultural consumption is ideological, shaping preferences, aspirations, and identities over time (Moyo & Ndlovu, 2020; Adepoju, 2022). Nollywood films on Netflix thus navigate a tension between local storytelling and the globalised standards required to attract international audiences.

Critics of Cultural Imperialism argue that it underestimates audience agency. Audiences are not passive recipients; they interpret, remix, and selectively consume media according to personal and cultural contexts (Obi & Ibekwe, 2023; Mensah & Alabi, 2024). Furthermore, the rise of streaming

platforms has created opportunities for non-Western media to gain global prominence, challenging the traditional one-way flow of cultural influence. Netflix's curation of Nollywood films illustrates this shift, as Nigerian stories can now reach international audiences without Western mediation, suggesting a more reciprocal form of cultural exchange.

Despite criticisms, Cultural Imperialism remains relevant for understanding structural pressures in media production. Scholars note that content intended for global streaming often aligns with market logics rather than purely local narratives (Adepoju, 2022; Mensah & Alabi, 2024). The theory explains why certain Nollywood films adopt cosmopolitan aesthetics, English language usage, or universalised plot structures. It provides insight into the compromises and adaptations Nigerian filmmakers make to access international platforms, highlighting the tension between global visibility and cultural authenticity.

Regarding the Nigerian brand, Cultural Imperialism Theory underscores the influence of global media systems on local perceptions. Netflix does not merely distribute content; it shapes which narratives are visible and how they are framed. This impacts the domestic understanding of what constitutes a “successful” or “modern” Nigerian film. While the theory emphasises structural dominance and external influence, it differs from audience-centred frameworks like Uses and Gratifications, which focus on how local viewers actively interpret and derive meaning from Nollywood content. Together, these perspectives offer a better understanding of the interplay between global distribution, local culture, and national branding.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative research design and it relied on in-depth interviews. This approach was chosen because the study is interested in understanding meanings, opinions and personal experiences of viewers of Nollywood films on Netflix. These kinds of issues are better explained through conversation rather than numbers. Through interviews, respondents

were able to explain in detail how they see Nigerian culture and identity in Nollywood films and how these films shape their opinion of the Nigerian brand in Canada. This makes the method suitable for a topic that is based on perception and interpretation.

The population of the study consists of Nigerians and non-Nigerians living in Canada who watch Nollywood films on Netflix. From this population, forty (40) respondents were selected for the interviews. This number was considered appropriate because in qualitative research, the focus is not on large samples but on depth of information. In addition, the principle of data saturation guided the choice. This means that interviews were conducted until the responses began to repeat and no new ideas were emerging. Therefore, forty participants were enough to capture different views across both Nigerian and non-Nigerian viewers.

Purposive sampling was used in selecting the respondents. This means that only people who actively watch Nollywood films on Netflix were included in the study. This was necessary because they are the ones who can give useful information related to the research topic. The research instrument used was a semi-structured interview guide. This guide contained open-ended questions that allowed respondents to speak freely about their experiences, while still keeping the discussion focused on the objectives of the study. In this way, the researcher was able to gather relevant and detailed responses from all participants.

For validity, the interview guide was checked by experts in mass communication and related fields to ensure that the questions were clear and suitable for the study. Also, the questions were reviewed to make sure they matched the objectives of the research. Data collection was done through both face-to-face and online interviews, depending on the location and availability of respondents. All interviews were conducted after obtaining consent from the participants, and confidentiality was assured. More so, the data collected were analysed using thematic analysis. The interviews were

first recorded and then written out in full. After that, the responses were carefully read and grouped into common themes. These themes reflected issues such as cultural representation, identity, and perception of Nigeria through Nollywood films. The participants were coded to ensure confidentiality and easy identification. Nigerians were coded as N1–N25, while non-Nigerians were coded as NN1–NN15. This helped to clearly separate responses while still maintaining anonymity. The findings are presented according to the research objectives, which were re-stated as questions for clarity. In the end, this method helped the researcher to clearly explain how Nollywood films on Netflix influence the way Nigeria is seen by both Nigerians and non-Nigerians in Canada.

Data Presentation

What themes and narratives are used in Nollywood movies on Netflix to construct the Nigerian brand?

From the responses, participants identified several recurring themes in Nollywood movies on Netflix. These include wealth and success, family conflict, love and betrayal, corruption, religion, and migration. Many respondents also pointed out that modern Nollywood films on Netflix tend to show a mix of luxury lifestyle and social problems. For example, participants mentioned films such as *King of Boys*, *Blood Sisters*, *Citation*, *The Black Book*, and *Aníkúlápó*. These films were repeatedly referenced as shaping how Nigeria is seen internationally. Some participants noted that these movies show both “soft life” and “hard reality” at the same time.

A Nigerian participant (N7) explained: “Most of the Netflix Nollywood movies I watch show rich people living big lives in Lagos, but at the same time there is always crime or power struggle inside the same story.” Similarly, a non-Nigerian participant (NN3) said: “I first saw Nigeria through *Blood Sisters* on Netflix. It looked modern but also very violent and emotional.”

Another participant (NN9) added that: “The movies mix culture and luxury,

so Nigeria looks both traditional and very modern.”

From these responses, it is clear that Nollywood films on Netflix construct the Nigerian brand through a combination of aspiration, conflict, and cultural expression.

How do Nigerians and non-Nigerians in the diaspora perceive the Nigerian brand through Nollywood movies on Netflix?

The responses show that perception of Nigeria is mixed and strongly influenced by the type of film watched. Many participants said their view of Nigeria has improved in terms of creativity, fashion, and storytelling. However, others still associate Nigeria with crime, corruption, and instability based on film narratives. A Nigerian participant (N12) stated: “When I watch Netflix Nollywood movies, I feel proud sometimes because it shows we are creative and intelligent, but other times it shows too much fraud and violence.” A non-Nigerian participant (NN6) explained: “I used to think Nigeria was only about poverty and corruption, but these films show something different, even though some parts are still negative.” Another participant (NN2) noted: “Films like *The Black Book* made me see Nigeria as more organised and modern than I expected.”

However, some participants expressed concern about negative image construction. A Nigerian participant (N18) said: “Sometimes I feel these movies damage our image abroad because they focus too much on crime and rituals.” From the responses, it is clear that the Nigerian brand is not fixed. Instead, it is shaped by the specific narratives viewers consume, and this leads to both positive and negative perceptions.

How do socio-cultural experiences of diaspora viewers shape their interpretation of the Nigerian brand in Nollywood films on Netflix?

The findings show that personal background, cultural exposure, and migration experience play a strong role in how participants interpret Nollywood movies. Nigerians living abroad often compare film content with their real experiences, while non-Nigerians rely more on what they see on

screen. A Nigerian participant (N3) said: “As someone living in Canada, I always compare what I see in films with what I know back home. Some are accurate, some are exaggerated.”

Another participant (N21) added: “Living outside Nigeria makes me more emotional when I watch these films because it reminds me of home.”

For non-Nigerians, interpretation is more shaped by first impressions. A participant (NN11) stated: “I don't know much about Nigeria, so what I see in Netflix movies becomes my understanding of the country.” Also, some participants noted that social media discussions influence their interpretation. A respondent (NN5) said: “After watching Nollywood films, I usually check Twitter or TikTok to see what people are saying. It changes how I understand the story.” From these responses, it is clear that interpretation is shaped not only by the films themselves but also by personal experience and digital conversations around them.

Findings

The findings of this study show that Nollywood movies on Netflix play a strong role in shaping how the Nigerian brand is constructed among Nigerians and non-Nigerians in the diaspora. The study revealed that viewers are exposed to mixed narratives of modern lifestyle, wealth, family conflict, corruption, crime, and cultural identity, and these combine to form their understanding of Nigeria. This finding supports Cultural Imperialism Theory, which explains that global media platforms often shape cultural meaning through dominant distribution systems and content selection processes. In this case, Netflix acts as a powerful gatekeeper that influences which Nollywood films are most visible, and this in turn affects how Nigeria is imagined globally. This aligns with Johnson (2023) and Kumar and Silva (2022), who argue that streaming platforms control visibility through algorithmic curation, thereby shaping audience exposure and perception.

Furthermore, the study found that audience perception of the Nigerian brand is not uniform but varies depending on exposure,

background, and interpretation. Nigerians in the diaspora often compare film narratives with lived experience, while non-Nigerians rely more heavily on screen representation to form opinions about Nigeria. This supports the Uses and Gratifications Theory by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974), which explains that audiences actively interpret media based on personal needs and social context. It also supports Lee (2021), who argues that audiences in the digital age are active meaning-makers rather than passive receivers. In addition, Isah (2021) and Martinez and O'Connor (2023) explain that transnational audiences interpret global media differently depending on cultural exposure, which is clearly reflected in the findings of this study.

The study also found that Nollywood films on Netflix contribute to Nigeria's soft power image by projecting both positive and negative representations of the country. Films such as *The Black Book*, *King of Boys*, *Blood Sisters*, and *Citation* were frequently mentioned as shaping perceptions of Nigeria as both modern and problematic. This supports Liu and Zhang (2021), who argue that global media platforms play a major role in shaping national image and soft power. It also aligns with Haynes (2019), who explains that Nollywood's evolving genres reflect both local realities and global storytelling demands. However, Cultural Imperialism Theory also helps explain that global platforms may privilege certain narratives over others, thereby influencing how Nigeria is represented internationally. At the same time, Koffi and Toure (2022) and Mayaki (2022) show that diaspora audiences actively negotiate these representations, using films for identity connection and emotional engagement.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Nollywood movies on Netflix significantly influence the construction of the Nigerian brand among Nigerians and non-Nigerians in the diaspora. The Nigerian image formed through these films is

mixed, combining positive representations of culture, creativity, and modernity with negative portrayals of crime, corruption, and social instability. It also concludes that Netflix plays a key role in shaping visibility and exposure through its algorithmic and gatekeeping systems, while audience interpretation remains highly active and influenced by personal and cultural background. Overall, Nollywood on Netflix serves as both a cultural and soft power tool that contributes to how Nigeria is perceived globally.

Recommendations

Resulting from the findings, it is recommended that:

1. Filmmakers should ensure a balance between positive and negative portrayals of Nigeria to promote a more realistic and constructive national image.
2. Government and film institutions should support Nollywood productions that maintain strong cultural identity while still meeting global production standards.
3. There should be increased awareness to help international and diaspora audiences critically interpret film content rather than accept it as a full representation of Nigeria.

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