

## **Nollywood Productions and Campaign against Drug Abuse: Undergraduates' Perception of Teens Characterization in *Far From Home* Movie**

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### **Abstract**

*Nollywood productions have been characterized with depictions of social vices which may influence teenagers indulging in such vices. However, early 2022 during the global campaign against the menace of drug abuse, Nollywood as an industry under the umbrella of Actors Guild of Nigeria (AGN) threw their support behind National Drug Law Enforcement Agency to combat the menace of drug and drug related crimes through their productions, targeting the youth. At the end of the same year, Far from Home movie was released, which characterized teens as major characters that were selling and using drugs in high school. This work is set out to seek the views of undergraduates in Anambra State on teen characterization in a drug related movie like Far from Home and the support of AGN in combating the menace of drug and drug related crimes. This work was hinged on reception theory and adopted focus group discussion as research design to elicit data from undergraduates in Anambra state. Findings revealed that respondents perceived the teen characters as replica of what is obtainable in the society as the movie reflected the happenings in secondary schools and higher institutions. Also, this study showed that Nollywood as an institution has not indulged in campaign against drug abuse through their productions. Recommendations were made that Nollywood productions should be squarely screened through NFVCB before release to ensure that they indulge in correcting social menace in our society by devoting enough screen time to punish victims.*

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**Keywords:** Campaign, Characterization, Drug abuse, Nollywood film, Perception, Teens

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### **Introduction**

Film represents one of the major channels of image constructions in the mind of the audience. Thus, the images, perceptions and value judgement of the general audience concerning a given phenomenon could, to a large extent, be influenced by film productions. Clair, Fox and Bezek (2009) opined that beyond entertainment, film creates an image of society and organizations,

presents issues, affects policy-making, and promotes certain practices. At times these functions are obvious, at other times, less so. Films occupy a significant portion of the media products consumed by people and are a major part of teenage life. They either go to the cinema with a group of friends or sit at home in front of a television or laptop making movie viewing a major part of their lives. Research Clue. (2020) asserts that sometimes, regular references to illicit substances are made in movies without the viewer being even aware of these references, and they enter the audience's minds subliminally with little to no representation of the negative consequences associated with the use. Consequently, films send mixed messages about substance abuse to young adults, and research reveals that these messages may be responsible for some percentage of young adult drug and alcohol abuse.

The amount of consumption of film-based media content may influence the developing minds of adolescents on how they perceive the happenings around their society; this implies that teenagers may be brainwashed from movies depictions. Many movies feature teen parties that glamorize trialling with drugs in the name of a crazy, memorable adventure. It is important to educate teens on the differences between the reality of substance abuse and the media's portrayal of it. Popular media rarely depicts the repercussions of substance abuse, including the negative effects it has on an individual's health and the increased risk of accidents that occur under the influence. The primary purpose of most films is to tell a story. The motivating question in narrative perception centers on how the viewer becomes immersed in the story. Therefore, it is the director's control over what is shown in a film that controls how the audience will perceive the narrative presented in the film.

Nigerian movie industry no doubt has contributed in no small measure to the socio-economic gains of the country, yet, it is also replete with negative tendencies. Some scholars (Eze-Orji, 2015; Ayakoroma, 2011) have condemned and scowled at the film producers who always seem to want to fill in the gap with just anything without considering its sociological impact on the people. Eze-Orji (2015) opined that most of Nollywood films take all the time to glamorize evil, crimes and unethical behaviours like drug abuse, drug related crimes, prostitution, sexual vulgarity and bawdiness, armed robbery, money laundering, money ritual, occultism, scammers, internet fraudsters, 419ners, etc. all these themes run through the whole length of the film, dedication about few minutes to the end of the movie to right the wrongs that spanned through the whole film, just to fulfil the Aristotelian concept of good triumphing over evil. With such films, the aspiration and desire of the audience to come to terms with their culture and life style must have been dashed by the incessant show of all forms of amoral life style and conduct replete in the films. Nigerian home videos themes should be broad and diverse including not only entertainment films or contents reflecting and promoting some of the Nigerian government policies but also movies that teach how to shun drug and drug related crimes and portray good and healthy lifestyles.

Some of Nollywood's movies are geared towards teens and young adults who feature as cast of individuals who engage in reckless behaviour due to drug use. While their intention is to create entertaining film, the production leaves many impressionable teens with the wrong idea about drug abuse. This further promotes the false belief that there are no serious consequences associated with

drug abuse. *Far from Home* movie audience is bombarded with images of secondary school students having fun and being seen as they sell and use drugs. It is pertinent to examine the opinion of undergraduates in Anambra State on how they perceive the teen characters and their involvement with drug abuse depictions in *Far from Home* movie in an era where Nollywood industry has pledged to join hands through their productions and combat the menace of drug abuse. Therefore this study aimed to ascertain the views of undergraduates in Anambra State on the teen characters' involvement in drug abuse in the movie understudy and examine whether their opinions about teen characters in the movie is in tandem with Nollywood's campaign against drug abuse.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Drug Abuse among Teens and Nollywood's Campaign against Drug Abuse**

Enamhe and Maxwell-Borjor (2021) posit that drug use among youths and teens should be a matter of concern to all Nigerians especially the family, society, government, school heads, religious leaders, groups and other NGOs as well as the media. In battling this menace, all hands must be on deck to ensure this scourge is rid-off the society. Curbing of drug abuse should involve the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders – Government, Drug Control Agencies, Community, traditional media, Schools, family and the media (film inclusive).

The Nollywood phenomenon has remarkably become an international moviemaking culture, serving as one of the determinants of Nigerian perception formation on social and educational behaviours. Globalisation in the film industry impacts audience taste and perception, not only in the global free market but also among niche audiences. Today, Nollywood production is a multi-billion naira industry which provides a source of livelihood for many people both at home and abroad. The industry has also produced many “stars” as well as its own international events, (Uwah, 2008).

In his work on Nollywood and post-colonial pan-Africanism, Uwah (2011) argues that Nollywood films present a filmic system of representation close to Africa's perception of existential realities. He argues:

The films provide the audience with different views of their identity construction. The portrayals of the people's cultures not only connect them to richer meanings and larger forces operating but also continental and ecological symbiosis towards realizing the ideological mission creating the vision of pan-Africanism” (p. 113).

The film media remains an undeniable force to consider in attitudinal change, as it could be used if properly harnessed, to propagate an ideology within a community and within a given period of time either to construct and re-construct or to deconstruct a social order of a non existing or an existing status quo that could be inimical or progressive to the overall development of even a state. This is so, as “film medium whether on celluloid or video format like every other mass medium of communication does not exist outside the social, political or economic milieu of the state in which it is made” (Kwaghkondo, 2006, p. 77).

Substantially, Ezenwanebe, (2019, p. 17) notes that “one common characteristic of all arts is the power to arrest and sustain the attention and interest of its audience”. Hence, film “deploys the

best in each subunit of humanities in its attempt to make the society a better place to live in...films holds a mirror up to the society to see itself' (Anyawu, Ibekwe & Ojinnaka, 2020, p. 95). Therefore, if the society does not like what it sees only because its conscience is pricked by what is represented in words, music and pictures, then such representation is said to be good enough to provoke critical thinking and reflections on the thematic concerns thrust to the fore, thereby making audience to take action either solely or (preferably) collectively to reconsider an existing social vice that hinder development.

Olowolagba (2022) reported that the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, NDLEA, also appealed to the Nollywood industry to join the war against drug abuse in Nigeria. The NDLEA Chairman, Brig. Gen. Mohamed Buba Marwa (Retd), in February 2022, at the National Headquarters of the Agency in Abuja said a number of entertainers use and encourage others to abuse drugs through their works, which needs to stop. He asked that the guild set a good example by promoting messages against the use of illicit drugs through movies as the minds of millions of Nigerians are shaped through this. In response to this appeal, Punch newspaper reported that the National President of the Actors Guild of Nigeria (AGN), Emeka Rollas Ejezie, pledged the support of the Nollywood movie industry to the war against drug abuse championed by NDLEA. The AGN President said the era of glorifying drug barons and criminals is far gone while stating that the Guild is ready to support campaigns on the menace of drug abuse and trafficking. It was towards the end of the same 2022 that the movie, *Far from Home* was released on Netflix. Herein lays the rationale for the interrogation of perception of undergraduates in Anambra on the teen characters involvement in the *Far from Home* mo

Kubrak (2020) embarks on a task to identify changes in the attitudes of young people, as the most active viewers, towards topical social issues after watching a specifically selected film. Using a psycho-semantic technique that included 25 scales designed to identify attitudes towards elderly people, respondents evaluated their various characteristics before and after watching the film. Using a number of characteristics related to the motivational, emotional and cognitive spheres, significant changes were revealed. At the same time, significant differences were found in assessments of the elderly between undergraduate students and postgraduate students. After watching the film, postgraduate students' attitudes towards elderly people changed in a positive way, while undergraduate students' negative assessments only worsened. The revealed opposite trends can be explained by individual differences of respondents, which include age, educational status as an indicator of individual psychological characteristics, the experience of interaction with elderly people and, as a result, attitudes towards elderly people at the time before watching the movie. The finding that previous attitudes mediate the impact of the film complements the ideas of the contribution of individual differences to media effects. Most of the changes detected immediately after watching the movie did not remain over time. A single movie viewing did not have a lasting effect on viewers' attitudes, and it suggests the further task of identifying mechanisms of the sustainability of changes.

Nwogbo, Ikot-Osin and Jeremiah (2021) assessed the audience perception of diabolism portrayal in Nollywood and 21st century image of Nigeria. The study adopted the survey research design.

The population of the study was made up of residents of Enugu state in Nigeria. A sample size of 385 persons was studied. The study used multi-stage sampling technique where different sampling techniques were adopted in the selection process. Findings of the study show that 41.3% of the respondents agree that Nigerian films contain a lot of diabolic scenes which project Nigeria to have a negative image. Also while 57.1% still believe Nollywood has great role to play in improving and promoting a positive Nigerian image through scientific advancement, patriotism, advancement in entrepreneurial skills etc inspired themes. The study therefore recommends among other things that The National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) should organise regular seminars for producers, directors and others involved in the film making process to enlighten them on their obligations to feed the minds of the people.

Badru, Hashim and Adisa (2022) investigated how the Nollywood audience in Nigeria perceives its movies and the factors that influence their perception. Audience perceptible elements in this research are classified as tripartite (education, entertainment, information). Using a semi-structured questionnaire, 387 were distributed, but only 367 were valid. The study employs a descriptive and regression analysis to showcase the frequency of audience perception and compare how effectively the factors affect audience perception. Based on the descriptive analysis, the results showed that Nollywood movies are mostly entertainment, followed by educative and informative. In addition, the regression results revealed that factors such as the level of income, occupation, tribe, the language of movies watched, triggers watching movies, genre, streaming platforms, time (weekdays, weekends, and times watching movies in a week) significantly influenced audience perception. Whereas time constraints (watching during weekdays and weekends) weakly influence audience perception. The findings suggest a need for Nollywood movies to pay more attention to audience expectations and experience in their dissemination to enhance audience perception of the movie industry.

The above literature review shows the gap in literature around the perception of undergraduates in Anambra State on the teen characterization in *Far from Home* movie and the campaign efforts made by Nollywood in combating drug abuse in our society.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is hinged on reception theory which points out that, a movie, book, or game events though it has none/some inherent meaning, the audience who watch them or experience it make a meaning. Stuart Hall developed reception theory, popularly known as audience theory or reader's reception theory, in 1973. The audience receives the creative work done and perceives to its content in either similar or different. The meaning of the message can change in the way they see it fit according to their social context which can be age, gender, religion, race, political views, ethnicity, class, culture and the mood in which the audience receive the message etc, (Hall, 1980) Hall (1980) further explains the three categories that works can be perceived:

- **Dominant, or Preferred Reading** - Audience members will take this position if the messages are clear and if the audience member is the same age and culture; if it has an easy to follow narrative and if it deals with themes that are relevant to the audience. In other words, this is the audience that receives the film just as it is delivered by the Director. The messages are understood properly and followed by the viewer.

- **Oppositional Reading** - when the audience rejects the preferred reading, and creates their own meaning for the text. This can happen if the media contains controversial themes that the audience member disagrees with. It can also arise when the media has a complex narrative structure perhaps not dealing with themes in modern society. Oppositional reading can also occur if the audience member has different beliefs or is of a different age or a different culture. So it can be said that this is the audience that takes the message of the film but does not accept it. They see what the filmmaker is trying to say, but they are not having it. It goes against their beliefs.
- **Negotiated Reading** - A compromise between the dominant and oppositional readings, where the audience accepts parts of the producer's views, but has their own views on parts as well. This can occur if there is a combination of some of the above e.g. audience member likes the media, is of the same age as you and understands some of the messages, but the narrative is complex and this inhibits full understanding. This is the audience that thinks they understand the message of the film. But it goes against what they stand for personally. They accept the message anyway and enjoy the content.

The reception theory in film represents a unique concept that enables the audience to decode the message encoded by the filmmaker, whether there actually is or is not a message to decode. Reception theory is relevant to this study because it is far more complex in understanding as undergraduates' minds perceive the teen characterization in the film under study in their own ways. A single undergraduate can have a mixed reaction of being a dominant, oppositional, and negotiated reader when they are going through the process of receiving the message (teen characterization).

### **Synopsis of the movie, *Far from Home***

*Far From Home* is a 2022 young adult movie series that doubles as first Netflix Nigerian young adult television limited series. The limited 5 series movie is written by Dami Elebe and produced by Inkblot productions premiered on Netflix on 16 December, 2022. Ishaya Bello is a talented but poor teenager from the poor parts of Lagos struggling to pursue his dream of becoming an artist who has big dreams. An opportunity comes knocking when he is selected to be part of an art program organised by a renowned artist, Essien. Unfortunately, he must pay over a hundred thousand Naira to be accepted into the programme in London. Seeing this as his ticket out of obscurity, he begins to save up some money. Ishaya works menial jobs, cleaning houses, working as a busboy and even selling his drawings to make as much money as possible. One day, Ishaya returns home to find out that, Patricia his mother, spends his hard-earned savings on his ailing father, without his consent, dimmed his ambition. So, Ishaya steals 150,000 Naira from his boss, Oga Rambo from the nightclub where he works as a waiter. Meanwhile, Ishaya has been encouraging his sister to pursue her dream of getting a scholarship at Willmer Academy. Upon noticing his sisters' disinterest and receiving the shocking revelation that the scholarship comes with a cash prize of \$10,000 that will be given to the best-performing student, Ishaya decides to go to Wilmer College on a scholarship, so he applied.. With the help of examination answers

illegally obtained, he got the scholarship into the school and realised that after expenses incurred, he was left with 5,000 Naira. Barely weeks after, when the theft from the club house has been discovered, Oga Rambo and his partner, Government, respond by abducting Ishaya's sister and forcing her to work as a stripper at his club. Ishaya's ex-girlfriend, Adufe, who has now become a favourite of Oga Rambo, gets Ishaya an audience with him. To protect his sister, Ishaya promises to pay them back by selling drugs (Molly) to the students in his new school, some of whom he had caught in the bathrooms earlier getting high.

Ishaya meets Carmen, the Wilmer Academy founder's granddaughter, and starts developing feelings for her. He also meets Vima and Frank, who soon become his best friends. Things are going pretty great as Ishaya is thriving in the drug business. Trouble once again looms when Ishaya's ex-girlfriend reaches out, informing him about her run-in with Rambo. Since she owes Rambo a lot of money, she orchestrates a plan with Ishaya to kidnap Frank. After the successful kidnapping, Rambo proposes that they do it again, except this time with Carmen. Ishaya refuses and turns to the school authorities to help him out of the mess. Government is apprehended, but Rambo escapes. When it seems like the dust is settling, Rambo returns and unleashes an unexpected rage on Ishaya and his friends. His plans halt when the students defend themselves, and Adufe later betrays him. At last, we see Ishaya pursue his dream. However, the survival of Rambo and Government leaves room for a twisted season two.

### **Methodology**

This research was designed as qualitative study with the use of focus group discussion (FGD). This was apt in order to provide in-depth analysis of the variables being measured and respondents were expected to relax and share their feelings and perceptions on the issue being discussed. Focus group discussion guide was used as the instrument to moderate the discussion sessions. The population of this study was university undergraduates in Anambra State. However, A total of 30 discussants were purposively drawn from three universities in Anambra state that include: Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (Federal), Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus (State) and Paul University, Awka (Private) based on willingness and availability. They participated in three discussion sessions – ten discussants per session and one session were held per school. The discussants in each group were all undergraduate regular students aged from 17 years and above covering all levels. The gender of discussants was equally distributed across each group. The participants watched the movie understudy individually at their homes and gathered at specified lecture halls for the discussion. The FGD guide comprised key questions which the researchers directed to the discussants as well as key points the researchers observed from the answers and other comments by the discussants. The FGD session was recorded with a tape recorder while notes were equally taken at the same time. The recorded voice was transcribed for analysis. Each session lasted for about 30 minutes each. The FGD data analysis was thematically done. The data presentation was segmented into three, in line with the three major variables of the study: perception, reinforcement of held beliefs and opinion on Nollywood's fight against drug abuse.

### **Data Analysis and Presentation**

The respondents generally disclosed that the use of teens in the movie understudy is not a bad idea as it is a reflection of what is going on in the society. It shows that the use of drug is much prevalent

among adolescents as well as common among secondary school students. Although, few respondents felt that teen characterization in the movie may influence some teenagers who watched such movie to want to practice what they have seen. Also, majority of the discussants affirmed that the perception they have about *Far from Home* movie reinforces their existing ideology about drug abuse. They did have the ideology that drug abuse is caused by peer pressure, thirst for social experience or feel part of a social group, relieve stress, seek new experiences and take risks and to relieve symptoms of mental health disorders (eg, depression, anxiety). However, very few maintained that they do not have any existing ideology about drug abuse. The foregoing shows that the discussants perceive that the teen characterization in the movie under study is a reflection of what is happening in our society. Also, there may be tendency of teenagers desiring to copy the harmful actions of those teenagers seen in the movie. Their opinions as well reflect that the adults in the lives of the teenagers are not doing enough to guide them against drug consumption. The above discussions indicate that the perception of the discussants supports the held views they had about drug consumption and drug abuse.

On the second aim of this study, respondents do not think that Nollywood's campaign against drug abuse is well depicted in the movie's teen characterization. Some feel more needed to be done in teaching morals to teenagers. From the FGD, it is obvious that the discussants feel that Nollywood did not indulge in campaign against drug abuse through teen characterization in this movie under study. In spite of the support they threw behind NDLEA earlier before the release of *Far from Home* movie.

### **Discussion of Findings**

This study showed that the undergraduates in Anambra State perceived teen characterization in *Far from Home* movie as replication of what is happening in our society. The teens' involvement in drug consumption in the movie is exactly same way adolescents in our contemporary Nigerian society are involved in drug abuse. This goes to support the assertion of scholars like Anyawu, Ibekwe and Ojinnaka (2016); Clair, Fox and Bezek (2009) who have described film as a mirror to society, "film creates an image of society and organizations" (p.71). Another thing they perceived was that, there may be room for 'copycat'. Situation where teenage audience who consumed the film content of drug abuse may want to emulate what they have watched especially in situations where there was little or no punishment of bad consequences for the same actions they have consumed from the media. This was the viewpoint of Research Clue. (2020) when it asserted that sometimes, regular references to illicit substances are made in movies without the viewer being even aware of these references, and they enter the audience's minds subliminally with little to no representation of the negative consequences associated with the use. Consequently, films send mixed messages about substance abuse to young adults, and research reveals that these messages may be responsible for some percentage of young adult drug and alcohol abuse. This is part of the reasons some scholars like Eze-Orji (2015) and Ayakoroma (2011) condemned and scowled at the film producers who always seem to want to fill in the gap with just anything without considering its sociological impact on the people. This study also revealed that undergraduates in Anambra State are of the view that parents and teachers of teenagers are not making good effort in guiding teenagers against social vices as the case of drug abuse in this movie. This is the reason Enamhe.



and Maxwell-Borjor (2021) admonished that drug use among youths and teens should be a matter of concern to all Nigerians especially the family, society, government, school heads, religious leaders, groups and other NGOs as well as the media.

Nigerian film industry has been praised for telling the Africans stories but one of the flaws that Nollywood has been condemned for is its film producers who always seem to want to fill in the gap with just anything without considering its sociological impact on the people, (Eze-Orji, 2015; Ayakoroma, 2011). Eze-Orji (2015) emphasized that most of Nollywood films take all the time to glamorize evil, crimes and unethical behaviours like drug abuse and just dedicate nothing or few minutes to the end of the movie to right the wrongs that spanned through the whole film, just to fulfil the Aristotelian concept of good triumphing over evil without sending a strong message to correct the social vices that played out in the entire movie. This was what replicated in *Far from Home* movie and respondents agree with this flaw which shows that the producers of this film did not indulge in campaign against drug abuse. In spite of Kwaghkondo (2006, p. 77) viewpoint:

Film remains an undeniable force to consider in attitudinal change, as it could be used if properly harnessed, to propagate an ideology within a community and within a given period of time either to construct and re-construct or to deconstruct a social order of a non existing or an existing status quo that could be inimical or progressive to the overall development of even a state.

The film producers in this movie did not put film as an agent of change to full use. Rather, it appears they are more interested in creating an entertainment content without any social impact.

Viewed from the point of view of the reception theory applied in this work, the finding of this study is an indication that the audience made meaning out of the movie as Hall (1980) stated that the audience receives the creative work done and perceives to its content in either similar or different. The meaning of the message can change in the way they see it fit according to their social context which can be age, gender, religion, race, political views, ethnicity, class, culture and the mood in which the audience receive the message. Hence, undergraduates in Anambra State as audience of *Far from Home* movie can be referred to as dominant spectators since this is the audience that receives the film just as it is delivered by the director. The messages are understood properly and followed by the viewer.

### **Conclusion**

From the findings of this study it can be concluded that film is a mirror that is held above the society to reflect all that is going on within it. It is indeed a powerful tool for representation that film producers use on audience to assume certain things about a character since they play on existing representations of such a character. Perception in Nollywood's production is hinged on the fact that the industry has emerged as popular source for the construction of meaning and a powerful creator of memory. Consequently, its depiction of any aspect of the people's experience is to be taken seriously (Omijie, 2015). Finally, Nollywood has not lived up to their promise of fighting against drug abuse as the case of the movie studied here. There is always room for

continual improvement where film producers in Nigeria consider greatly the social impact of their productions while still trying to create entertainment and make money. It is time to go back to the drawing board and let all hands be on deck to make our society drug free.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers came up with the following recommendations:

1. There is need to encourage production of films that faithfully promote a drug free society. This could be done by way of instituting high profile awards to reward filmmakers that have distinguished themselves in this respect. Such awards would potentially enhance growth in the quantity and quality of such films produced in the country.
2. Filmmakers should go beyond thinking what momentarily satisfies the audience but start figuring out how their audience use their works to get knowledge. If filmmakers know how people find and react to their works, they can unleash their power of creativity to fully engage them.
3. Parents and teachers of teenagers should get involved in the lives of their wards and students. Parents need to know what their children are capable of, who they mingle with and what they do at school and leisure periods. Teachers, also do not just teach the curriculum but get involved in moulding students in character and morals. There should be a parent-teacher formation in education. Parents should not leave their jobs for the teachers as knowledge starts from home. Teachers should not also leave the entire work for parents, let them get involved where and when necessary.
4. The National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) should work harder in enforcing their objective aimed at identifying various gaps in professionalism of the Nigerian movie industry from scriptwriting to production. There is need to protect the Nigerian society, particularly the teenagers, from contents that may lure them to engage in social vices or be put under avoidable peer pressure.

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