

## Implications of New Media Arts in Nollywood Films: An Interrogation of Selected Films

Divine Sheriff Uchenna Joe, Ph.D

Department of Theatre and Film Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2036-2749>

\*Corresponding Author: Divine Sheriff Uchenna Joe, Ph.D

Article History	Abstract
<b>Original Research Article</b>	<p><i>Nollywood has evolved overtime with several production techniques adopted by filmmakers in delivery of narratives. Notwithstanding, the question of quality still hangs over the industry. This has spurred the inclusion of new media arts by industry practitioners to align with global best standards. This paper is interested in understanding the implication of marriage between the film industry and new media arts. It thus analyses four select films – Nneka the Pretty Serpent, Last Flight to Abuja, Half of a Yellow Sun, The Calabash, Idemili – for the study. Situated within the Narrative Theory advanced by Tzvetan Todorov, it adopts an eclectic approach that incorporates content and case reference analysis as its research method. It concludes that new media arts inclusion has spurred possible emergence of auteurs, widening of the scope of source materials of film stories, comprehensive re-enactment of historical events as well as contributing to the debate on the verisimilitude of magical realism in Nollywood films.</i></p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Nollywood, New Media Arts, Films, Magical Realism.</p>
<b>Received: 24-07-2025</b>	
<b>Accepted: 05-08-2025</b>	
<b>Published: 09-08-2025</b>	
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### Introduction

Some schools of thought opine that the cinema of Nigeria dates back to late 1960s as the business of film making expanded with increased investments in production and intense distribution networks. Notwithstanding the giant strides of this era, it was in the 1990s when Nollywood began its rise to recognition across the world (Giwa Elizabeth 1). But before this time, film production was driven after independence by government owned television stations which were first established by regional governments and later by virtually almost all the existing states in the mid-1980s. Contributing further was the law that limited foreign television content which armed the local popular theatre with the opportunity of providing the local television producers in cities like Lagos with programmes to make up the shortage in programmes as a result of the law. This gave rise many of the local popular theatre productions to packaged and distributed on video which later metamorphosed into an informal video business that was small scale in nature. Later on, the Nigerian government sponsored people to take on technical film courses in the West in order to curb the influence of cultural imperialism with the hope of improving the number of Nigerian productions on television. However, this could not last for so long as the Nigerian government was forced to

allow greater privatization of man sectors, including media with less investment in television. This left many television film makers jobless and directly led to the search for a new media which made them turn from celluloid to reversal film stock and later on, video tapes. Kenneth Nnebue keyed into this with the production of *Living in Bondage* in 1992 which became an instant hit and gave birth to the modern Nollywood (Asogwa, Onoja and Ojih 100-101). However, to capture a broader horizon of Nigeria's cinematic experience, Ernest-Samuel and Joe submit that the practice of cinema in Nigeria could be broadly discussed in light of the colonial, post-colonial, Nollywood and New Nollywood experiences. In their submission, they assert that film made its first entry into Nigeria in 1903 with an exhibition at the Captain Glover Memorial Hall in Lagos. This laid the foundation for rapid advancement of film utilization in Nigeria by the British colonialists. The use of film for publicization of government policies, proselytization and business-entertainment form the fulcrum of the essence of film in that era within the Nigerian territory (171-172). Though Ernest-Samuel and Joe agree with Giwa on the trajectory of the industry is detailed as the post-colonial and Nollywood period, they differ with the addition that Nigeria's film industry "has grown to become the third most prolific film industry after

Hollywood and Bollywood in terms of number of titles released annually. Today, Nollywood is experiencing transnationality, international collaboration and acceptance” (176).

Nollywood has over the year served as medium for interrogation several themes that are relatable to diverse social issues within and beyond Nigeria. These studies include, “Impact of Nollywood Films on Children in Ekpoma, Nigeria” (Omoera, Edemode and Aihevba 351), African social reality from the viewpoint of the Nigeria-Ghana Block of West Africa (Omoera 194) and Human rights (Omoera 237). Nollywood films served a textual material for Joe, Anyira and Anyiam’s study to address the conundrum communal life and existences of the Igbos in contemporary society (9). Ezepue and Nwafor relied on Nollywood film, *October 1* (2014) to explore colonial trauma and promote a decolonial healing approach. The study draws on the experiences of a few chosen characters in the select films. Therein, the psychological pain that some of Afolayan’s characters experienced is analyzed as a metaphor for the damage that colonialism has caused and still causes in Nigeria. Furthermore, Arts of Nollywood have also served a veritable platform for preservation and propagation of indigenous language and culture (Aniago, Joe and Ogu 7; Ibe, Shaka and Uwah 193). Although Nollywood’s distinctive story-telling holds broad appeal, the films produced have tended to be of low technical quality. Films with predictable storylines have been churned out according to tried and tested formulae. For many years, filmmakers made film without formal script, with actors, simply making up their lines as they went along. In recent years however, filmmakers are working hard to shed amateur practices and placing greater emphasis on enhancing the quality of films produced (Oyewole Sandra and Olajide Oyewole 2). To this, Ezepue and Nwafor opine that new Nollywood economic model, which has sparked more debates among industry participants than among academics, is the result of a new generation of filmmakers who are starting to change the landscape of the business (1). These efforts of the filmmakers have over time necessitated the addition of new production techniques which has given rise to the inclusion of new media arts in Nollywood. Yet, no much has been done to ascertain that implications of these new production techniques on the Nollywood productions and it is this gap that necessitated the study. Based on this, the aim of this study is to substantiate the existence of application new media arts in Nollywood as well as reflect on its possible implications on productions in Nigeria’s film industry.

Theoretically, the study will be situated within the Narrative Theory advanced by Tzvetan Todorov. The theory stipulates that: “The fictional environment begins

with a state of equilibrium (everything is as it should be). It then suffers some disruption (disequilibrium). New equilibrium is produced at the end of narrative (A2 Media Studies)”. Todorov’s argument is that narrative doesn’t need to be linear and does involve transformation which entails that characters or the situation are transformed through the progress of the disruption. The disruption takes place outside the normal social framework, outside the ‘normal’ social events (A2 Media Studies). To this effect, new media arts can be seen as a tool of disruption that transforms situations to produce the new equilibrium desired at the end of the narrative.

The study employs an eclectic approach that incorporates content and case reference analysis as its research method. In doing this, the researcher selected films that had evident application of new media arts for the analysis and discussion. However, the selected films are explained in brief while making reference to new media arts inclusions in them that best answers the objectives of the study. This does not imply that the film titles selected are the only ones in the category of films under study.

### Understanding New Media Arts

Maeve Connolly opines that the term ‘New Media Art’ is frequently applied to art works or art practices, involving media not traditionally or conventionally associated with the Fine Arts (8). This definition coming from an erudite scholar notwithstanding does not provide the required understanding needed for this study and therefore necessitates a better one that will clearly define what the term ‘New Media Art’ means. To do this efficiently, there is need to unlink ‘new media’ from ‘art’ as well as understand what ‘media’ and ‘media art’ means independently. Lev Manovich, in his work *The Language of New Media*, helps isolate and particularize the qualities of these new media. Bypassing historical usages, he says that, ‘New Media’ is a term defined by popular usage. In journals and television, new media means “the use of computer for distribution and exhibition rather than production”. He argues that new media is essentially unlike conventional media, either of the art or mass communication varieties. It is a new kind of thing, but we can define it: new media are not just digital; they are marked by characteristics of numerical representation, modularity, automation, variability and trans-coding; and they are complex, containing both “computer” and “cultural” layers (Ryan). On the other hand, ‘Art’ is the product of human creativity; the creation of beautiful or significant things; a superior skill that you can learn by study, practice and observation (“Art”). Media Art refers to artworks that largely depend on a technological component to function (“Media Arts”). Over the years, numerous

artistic disciplines have fallen under the umbrella of “media art” including Biotech Art, Computer Art, Digital Art, Electronic Art, Interactive Art, Kinetic Art, Network Art, Multimedia Art, Sound Art, Space Art, Technological Art, Video Art, Web Art. The “media” applies to any communication device used to transmit and store information (Virtual Museum). Drawing meaning from all stated above; New media art can therefore be defined as the significant products of human ingenuity that largely depend on technological components to function with the capacity of being transmitted and stored, which can be numerically represented, modulated, automated, varied and trans-coded containing both cultural and computer layers.

### Summary of Selected Video films

Zeb Ejiro’s *Nneka the Pretty Serpent* (1992) is about a woman who had delay in child bearing and being led by desperation went to the river goddess for help making a pledge to dedicate the unborn child to the goddess. The child Nneka is born and grows up with mystic powers which she puts into destructive use until the moment of truth caught up with her.

Obi Emelonye’s ‘Last Flight to Abuja’ (2012) is about events that led each individual to board the flamingo flight to Abuja. Those going for a corporate party- three in number, others bailed at the last minute; an elderly couple; a ‘supposedly’ heartbroken fiancée, a just discovered young sportsman and his agent and two other persons. The later crash landed with only one death- the one that refused to leave the plane being unable to face the consequence of his crime.

Biyi Bandele’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2013) historically reflects back to the mid to late sixties, when twin sisters Olanna and Kainene return to Nigeria after their education in England and made decisions that shook their family. Olanna moved in with her lover Odenigbo and his house boy Ugwu while Kainene took over the family interests and pursued a career as a businesswoman, failing in love with Richard. In the struggle to establish Biafra as an independent republic, the sisters become caught up in the violence of the Nigerian civil war and a betrayal that threatens their family forever.

Ernest Obi’s *The Calabash* (2014) depicts the life of Chukwuma and his wife Ugonma who are plunged into suffering and misery following the circumstances that preceded their marriage. Their union results in a daughter Mary who is endowed with manly strength and takes to fighting at any slightest provocation. The bid of Chukwuma to unravel the mystery behind their suffering forces him to murder his wife and commit suicide leaving Mary to face the consequences of their action until help eventually came her way.

*Idemili* (2015) directed by Ernest Obi depicts the story of Amaidemili where Okwadike from Amadim dared the gods to marry Ekenma daughter of the priestess who was betrothed to the gods of land. Okwadike and his allies meet their doom in the process. The story transits to the modern time where a prince intends to marry and unknown to him gets involved with Mma a reincarnation of Ekenma which landed him and his father’s kingdom in a dilemma. Attempts to resolve the mystery behind Mma’s genealogy and getting the prince a wife approved by the gods leads to heavy implications on all involved in the story.

### New Media Arts Inclusions in the Films under Study

Taking *Idemili* for a start, the group of bats that chased after Mma at close range till they caught up with her in the montage marked the beginning of inclusion of new media art in the film. The impression created of the feet of Ekenma, the daughter of her priestess to be perpetually on water with splashes even on dry ground is another example. New media arts in these scenarios aided the enactment of an egg emerging from the mouth of the dead priestess which travelled in space into Ekenma’s mouth at the cleansing ceremony. In addition, the emergence of Ekenma from the tree trunk at the instance of the ‘spirit god’. Ekenma’s eyes were made to transform into all white with fire at vital scenes in the movie. The movie witnessed the transmogrification of Okwadike’s men into statues followed by the dismembering of the heads and hands. A successful attempt at interplay of human agents and animated agents in film enactment was made in the movie when a python emerged from the ground in form of sand and later transformed to a live python which Ekenma took up with her hand. In the modern time of the movie, the scene where the prince was to solemnize his marriage to Mma was the high point of new media art inclusion in the movie. This witnessed the transformation of the room into a wavy smoke-filled atmosphere; Mma was encircled by a python as she was lifted off the bed and suspended in space to the full glare of the priestess and the King who came to the rescue of the prince. Also, a smoky imaginary hand grabbed the staff of the priestess through the door of the prince’s room.

In *The Calabash*, new media arts inclusion began with the montage where the native doctor’s eyes turned white with the calabash in his hands enveloped in fire without hurting him. Subsequently in the film, Ebuka disappeared from the scene of his attempted murder to his house after his eyes had turned red where nine spirit beings appeared to him having staff that produced flames when stamped on the floor. The appearance of two vultures in all the scenes that witnessed Mary’s show of might was enabled with the aid

of digital graphic imagery. Toward the end of the second part, the red coloured light rays that emanated from Mary's pot which were broken by a strange man and the dust that closed up door of the hut of the two strange female beings that Mary was in pursuit of all depicted the inclusion of new media art in this production.

In *'Half of a Yellow Sun'*, the pattern adopted for indication of location on the screen was a paradigm shift from what is obtainable in Nollywood. On the screen as the movie progressed appears map of Nigeria with an arrow pointing from the previous location to the present one. At some other scenes, the arrow and locations appeared without the map. This pattern was also applied to delineate Biafra area on the Nigerian map on screen while the movie continued uninterrupted. The infusion of Ojukwu's declaration speech alongside the dialogue of the cast with both clearly audible was a master piece in Sound Art. The enactment of explosions in different scenes of the movie like the ones that occurred in Umuahia during Odenigbo's wedding and at the refugee camp was made so real with expertise in digital graphic imagery.

In *'Nneka the Pretty Serpent'*, Nneka the protagonist was transmogrified facially into a part cat, part human whenever she intends to hypnotize any one as seen in her encounter with Mrs. Ogbonna's maid. The night She got Tony to sleep over at her place, the enactment of her spirit being leaving her body to interact with her spirit husband was inclusion of the new media art that is, digital imagery. Then there was an enactment of the fire that emanated from CY's food which made him blind and eventually resulted in his death. Also, ray of a red coloured light which emanated from Nneka's eyes into that of Tony and Emeka at different scenes in the movie was achieved with the aid of computer graphic art.

Finally, concerning *'Last Flight to Abuja'*, although it could be neglected by some other analyst, but it was clear from start to finish that sound art in the film was far above the normal Nollywood sequence. This can be seen in the sounds in between scenes. There was combination of environmental ambience, radio vibes, local beats and soul tune in quite unusual and appealing manner by the sound artists or designer which entails utilization of sound art. The enactment of the tyre compartments of the plane on takeoff alongside the overhead/bird eye view of the city couldn't have been possible without digital graphic imagery. The reflection of the sun on the faces of pilots of the aircraft midair increased the verisimilitude of the flight. The points at which the plane shook and the final crash landing were enacted with a touch of expertise.

## Discussion of Findings

A thorough observation of the films under study indicates that new media arts have over time had implications on Nollywood productions and coupled with the development of technology will have more implications on the Nigerian video film industry. These implications noted in this study are enumerated in the following paragraphs.

With growing inclusion of new media arts in Nigerian video films (Nollywood), there is possibility of emergence of auteurs in the industry. Paul Watson in *Introduction to Film Studies* maintains that "...the auteur infused their work with a personal vision, leaving behind a distinctive signature across a significant number of films (98). Based this assertion, using *Idemili* and *The Calabash* which are among the many works of film director Ernest Obi, any films critic or practitioner would perceive the consistency of his directorial signature and vision without a second thought. This is reflected in his use of montage that contains series of digital generated images as typified both films and some others not considered for this study for want of space. In addition to this, he has sustained the depiction of serious actions of the protagonists of his films (mostly epic) with the transformation of their eyes into either white or red colours in form of light rays.

Furthermore, the inclusion of new media art in Nollywood films has enabled the widening of the scope of the source materials of stories narrated in film form. Before now, sources of stories have mostly been domiciled in folklores and rituals without much being done to incorporate factual and non-fictional stories development. This is typified in *Last Flight to Abuja* that emanated from the deadly Sosoliso Airlines Flight that crashed in 2005. To effectively reflect on these events, the director had to include new media arts to enact the film. Besides, historical events of national importance such as the Nigerian civil war which took place between 1967 and 1970 have been adapted from documented form into film format with the aid of new media art techniques making it possible for happenings of the past which can only be explained on paper to be re-enacted on screen. The inclusion of new media arts in various scenes of *Half of Yellow Sun* to depict the experiences of that period was a class of its own as Biyi Bandele adopted new media art techniques to this effect.

Also, the inclusion of new media arts has contributed immensely to the growing debate on magical realism which is very prevalent in Nigerian video films. Lindstrom notes that magical realism is: "a narrative technique that blurs the distinction between fantasy and reality. It is characterized by an equal acceptance of the ordinary and the extraordinary" (as qtd. in Alberto). Luis Leal's explanation of magical realism brings to the fore the African and specifically, the perception of the concept by the ordinary

Nigerian. He opines that, “In magical realism, key events have no logical or psychological explanations” (as qtd. in Alberto). The disappearing acts and show of mystic powers in the films under study are believed to have no logical explanations but are accomplished by forces beyond human understanding and involves only individuals who have the opportunity of coming in close contact with the source of these powers. The Nigerian video film audience accepts the depiction of these acts in most cases just because of the cultural connotation in which they are presented permits it. This point was buttressed by Gabrielle Foreman who points out that, “Magical realism unlike the fantastic or surreal, presumes that the individual requires a bond with the traditions and faith of the community, that he or she is historically constructed and connected” (as qtd. in Alberto). This is the reason why the depiction of magical realism the films under study are basically a representation of what is believed to be obtainable in the Nigerian context. Examples of such acts are seen in the emergence of Ekenma from the tree trunk at the instance of the ‘spirit god’, the transmogrification of Okwadike’s men into statues, a smoky imaginary hand that grabbed the staff of the priestess through the door of the prince’s room, the enactment of Nneka’s spirit being leaving her body to interact with her spirit husband and the enactment of the fire that emanated from CY’s food which made him blind and eventually resulted in his death which were all witnessed in *Idemili and Nneka the Pretty Serpent*.

## Conclusion

This paper has established that new media arts inclusion is strongly portrayed in Nollywood films and has fast become quite an important element of narrative of its films. This is reflected in the video films considered for this study which had different elements of new media arts in their production. The purpose of new media arts inclusion may have been necessitated by the need to improve on the technical quality of Nollywood productions but has spurred other implications such as possible emergence of auteurs, widening of the scope of source materials of film stories, comprehensive re-enactment of historical events as well as contributing to the debate on magical realism in African films. To this effect, efforts should made to research into ways of sustaining its inclusion in Nigerian films, improving on the quality and mitigating any negative effects that it may incur on the industry and its audience.

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