

Nollywood's digital transition and the global reception of value-oriented narratives

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Abstract

This study explored how Nollywood's value-oriented narratives are reconfigured and interpreted in the age of digital streaming. Focusing on a purposive sample of eight films released between 2020 and 2024 on platforms such as Netflix and iROKOTv, the research examined how moral storytelling was shaped by platform mediation and how it was received by audiences within Nigeria and across the diaspora. Grounded in convergence theory, Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) - a persuasive media strategy—and reception theory, the study adopted a mixed-methods approach that combined narrative content analysis with surveys and interviews involving 100 culturally distinct viewers. The findings revealed that while Nollywood filmmakers embedded deliberate moral messaging consistent with BCC frameworks, streaming platforms influenced audience reception through paratextual elements such as subtitles, metadata, and genre tags. Nigerian viewers generally aligned with the films' intended moral themes, whereas diaspora audiences often negotiated or contested these messages, reflecting hybrid cultural identities and differing expectations. The study concludes that Nollywood's moral narratives, though locally rooted, are subject to global reinterpretation, underscoring the complex interplay between narrative intent, digital distribution, and audience agency in shaping the global circulation of African screen cultures.

Key words: audience reception, Behaviour Change Communication (BCC), diaspora studies, digital streaming, moral storytelling, Nollywood

Introduction

Over the past half-decade, Nollywood has undergone a rapid transformation propelled by digital distribution and global streaming platforms. Once dependent on DVDs and local cinema circuits, Nigerian filmmakers have shifted to delivering value-oriented narratives—stories promoting societal values such as gender equity, anti-corruption, and communal responsibility—to a global viewership via platforms such as Netflix, iROKOtv, YouTube, and IbakaTV (Idyo & Methuselah, 2023; Onasanya, Ilupeju, & Adelabu, 2025; Post45, 2021). The result is a transnational audience encountering Nollywood’s moral messaging in ways unimaginable a decade ago.

Netflix’s *Made in Africa* initiative has significantly expanded access to Nollywood titles with international visibility in works such as *Òlòtúré*, *King of Boys*, *The Black Book*, and *Aníkúlápó*, among others (Post45, 2021; UNESCO, 2023; Wired, 2023). These titles frequently tackle issues such as sexual violence, state corruption, and female agency, reframing Nollywood’s traditional moral compass for global consumption. Netflix itself provides postproduction oversight, adjusting subtitles and aesthetic conventions to render cultural nuances legible to transnational audiences (Nation, 2020; CCSU, 2021).

Scholars have begun charting the consequences of this digital metamorphosis. Idyo and Methuselah (2023) observe that online streaming has elevated production quality, generated new revenue streams, and facilitated international partnerships, yet challenges (including piracy and inconsistent storytelling standards) persist. Meanwhile, Akhimien (2025) reports that YouTube and streaming platforms have influenced narrative pacing and industry expectations, triggering debate over whether such platforms enhance or dilute Nollywood’s traditional value-driven storytelling ethos.

Audience reception studies remain relatively sparse. Agina (2022) highlights how Nigerian viewers online interpret films through cultural, linguistic, and diasporic lenses, while Omoruyi and Imhanobe (2023) reveal complex negotiations between preserving indigenous cultural values and embracing modern moral messaging in diaspora communities. Onasanya et al. (2025) confirm that 67 percent of Nigerian respondents now prefer streaming over traditional television, drawn by affordability and flexibility. Yet, decline in broadcast revenue and digital inequity underscore enduring infrastructure challenges in rural Nigeria, where mobile internet penetration lags.

Taken together, the literature suggests that Nollywood’s transition to digital distribution is reshaping both the framing of moral narratives and their global reception, but systematic inquiries regarding how different audiences interpret value-laden stories delivered via streaming platforms remain scarce. Therefore, this paper seeks to address this gap. It examines the interplay between streaming platform mediation, narrative framing, and audience reception, particularly concerning moral

and societal values, as experienced by Nigerian and diaspora viewers. By foregrounding recent scholarship and focusing on select films distributed between 2020 and 2024, the study aims to clarify how digital distribution influences both production intent and interpretive outcomes.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research objectives, which are to:

- i. analyse how value-oriented narratives (e.g., justice, gender rights, corruption) are framed in Nollywood films distributed on global streaming platforms such as Netflix and iROKOTv between 2020 and 2024;
- ii. compare how these value-oriented narratives are received and interpreted by local Nigerian audiences versus diaspora/global audiences; and
- iii. assess the role of platform mediation (e.g., subtitling, postproduction guidance, cultural glossing) in shaping narrative intelligibility and moral messaging.

Correspondingly, the core questions guiding the study are:

- i. what ways have streaming platforms influenced the thematic framing of values in selected Nollywood films?;
- ii. how do interpretations of moral and societal themes differ between Nigerian-based viewers and viewers in the diaspora?; and
- iii. what influence does platform mediation of subtitles, dubbing, or enforced stylistic templates have on audience comprehension and emotional engagement with moral narratives?

Through content analysis and audience perception research, this study aims to provide actionable insights for filmmakers, platform curators, and scholars interested in the implications of Nollywood's digital turn for moral storytelling.

Conceptual framework

This study draws upon three mutually reinforcing theoretical traditions - streaming culture and media convergence, Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) through entertainment-education, and transnational media reception theory - to promote a comprehensive understanding of how Nollywood's value-oriented narratives are produced, framed, and received in the digital age. Each framework captures a different yet interrelated dimension of the inquiry - platform influence, narrative intent, and audience interpretation.

Streaming culture and media convergence

Jenkins (2006), in *Convergence Culture*, provides a foundational framework for understanding the fluidity and multiplicity of contemporary media experiences. He argues that convergence is not merely about technological unification but about the cultural logic through which content flows across media platforms and is shaped by

the active participation of audiences. Streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, and iROKOTv exemplify this convergence by simultaneously serving as content distributors, cultural mediators, and algorithm-driven recommendation engines.

In the African context, recent scholarship has expanded Jenkins's thesis by examining how convergence reshapes regional industries. Colbjørnsen (2020) asserts that streaming services restructure not just distribution but the very creative logic of audiovisual industries by introducing new gatekeepers and new audience configurations. Similarly, Simon (2023) highlights that Nollywood's historically informal and grassroots-driven circulation systems are now being reconfigured under formalised digital architectures, leading to new economic models, increased production values, and audience segmentation.

The conceptual strength of convergence theory lies in its capacity to capture the ecology of the digital media landscape. It allows researchers to explore how Nollywood's moral narratives do not merely exist as texts but are dynamically circulated, reframed, and experienced through a web of technological and social processes. These include subtitling, genre categorisation, streaming algorithms, and platform-driven aesthetics, all of which influence the accessibility and legibility of Nigerian films to a global audience.

Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) through entertainment-education

Behaviour Change Communication (BCC), especially in the form of entertainment-education, offers a complementary theoretical lens that focuses on the intentional design of narrative content. Originally developed in the context of health and development communication, BCC strategies use fictional storytelling to shape knowledge, attitudes, and practices by embedding persuasive messages within engaging plots. Singhal and Rogers (2021) note that well-crafted entertainment-education narratives function as vehicles for both emotional engagement and cognitive persuasion, facilitating value reorientation and social change.

A key mechanism involves archetypal characters - positive role models, negative antagonists, and transitional figures - who model either desirable or undesirable behaviours (Singhal & Rogers, 2021). In Nollywood films, these character arcs are often mobilised to dramatise themes such as anti-corruption, gender justice, and communal harmony.

In the Nigerian streaming context, these narratives acquire a dual function: they operate both as cultural products and as advocacy tools. BCC theory thus provides an analytic language for dissecting the strategies through which these films attempt to influence social attitudes. It also aligns with the economic and curatorial practices of streaming platforms, which often classify these films under socially conscious or inspirational genres, enhancing their appeal to both local and international audiences.

The robustness of BCC lies in its applicability in narrative structure, character development, and audience psychology. It encourages close textual analysis of how values are embedded within stories and how storytelling functions as a site of persuasion. In a digital streaming environment, where exposure is often global and asynchronous, BCC's emphasis on intentionality and impact offers a crucial tool for assessing the efficacy of Nollywood's moral messaging.

Transnational media reception theory

Reception theory, particularly as advanced by Hall (1980), foregrounds the active role of the audience in meaning-making. Hall contends that media texts are encoded with preferred meanings by producers but are subject to decoding by audiences in ways that may be dominant (aligned), negotiated (partially aligned), or oppositional (resistant). This theoretical position is especially pertinent in the case of Nollywood's global reception, where audiences from different socio-cultural and national backgrounds engage with content that is deeply rooted in Nigerian moral and cultural codes.

Recent African-centred scholarship reinforces the applicability of reception theory in transnational contexts. Agina (2022) demonstrates how Nigerian internet users interpret Nollywood content through cultural, linguistic, and diasporic lenses. Ewing (2024) shows that African diaspora audiences in London decode Nollywood narratives through nostalgia, hybrid identities, and diasporic cultural expectations, producing negotiated readings that both affirm and resist intended moral messages. Similarly, Elinwa (2020) reveals that Nigerian viewing-centre audiences bring their lived realities, communal experiences, and religious values into the interpretive process, sometimes reinforcing and sometimes resisting filmic moral cues.

This body of work highlights that Nollywood audiences are neither homogeneous nor passive; they engage actively with moral narratives, sometimes aligning with narrative intent and at other times reframing or resisting embedded messages. Such findings underscore Hall's encoding/decoding model as particularly valuable in explaining interpretive plurality across borders.

Moreover, the mediation introduced by streaming platforms, through subtitling, user reviews, thumbnails, and algorithmic categorisation, creates additional layers of interpretive context. Reception theory accommodates these complexities by focusing on how meaning is not fixed within the text but emerges from the interaction between text, context, and audience.

Integrative analytical framework

The integration of convergence theory, BCC, and reception theory creates a tripartite analytical structure that supports the study's central objectives. Convergence theory provides a framework for examining the technological and institutional infrastructure through which Nollywood films reach global audiences. BCC elucidates the

narrative and persuasive strategies employed by filmmakers to embed value-oriented messages. Reception theory foregrounds the audience's interpretive freedom and the socio-cultural factors that mediate meaning-making.

Collectively, the frameworks offer a nuanced understanding of Nollywood's digital transition. They permit a holistic interrogation of how values are constructed within narratives, how those narratives are shaped by platform dynamics, and how they are received, embraced, or contested by culturally diverse viewers. This integrative approach ensures that the study does not treat Nollywood films merely as cultural texts or ideological instruments but as dynamic artefacts embedded in a complex interplay of production, distribution, and reception, each influenced by technological affordances, narrative intentions, and audience interpretations.

Streaming and Nollywood's industry transformation

The rise of global streaming platforms has radically reconfigured Nollywood's distribution and production landscape. Simon (2023) documents how the informal circulation of Nigerian films via DVDs and piracy is being steadily replaced by formalised trans-nationalism, mediated through platforms such as Netflix and iROKOTv. He notes that streaming has ushered in new economic models, heightened production values, and more segmented audience targeting, fundamentally altering Nollywood's operational logic.

Fagbile (2024) supports this observation by examining Nigeria's evolving streaming environment, arguing that the shift from VCD/DVD marketing to subscription- and advertising-based models has transformed the value chain, reshaped content development, and redefined how films are packaged for both domestic and international markets. These platforms now serve not only as distributors but also as curators, filtering and framing content to align with global audience expectations and genre sensibilities.

Importantly, the transition to digital streaming has introduced platform-specific influences on creative decision-making. Colbjørnsen (2020) emphasises that platforms do not simply distribute content; they also govern narrative rhythms, genre structures, and temporal accessibility, ultimately shaping audience engagement with the stories themselves. These dynamics are highly relevant in understanding how moral or value-oriented storytelling traditions within Nollywood are either reinforced or restructured by digital mediation.

Nollywood and entertainment-education

Scholarly attention to Nollywood's moral imperatives is often framed within the paradigm of entertainment-education. Singhal and Rogers (2021) describe this as the strategic use of media narratives to model positive behavioural change by embedding

persuasive messages within emotionally engaging plots. Their research underlines how such storytelling often involves three kinds of characters (consisting of positive role models, negative antagonists, and transitional characters), who provide moral cues and behavioural templates for audiences.

In Nigeria, Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) through entertainment-education has been effectively deployed in television series such as *MTV Shuga* and *Ruwan Dare*. Its narrative mechanisms resonate deeply within Nollywood feature films as well. Awuzie (2023) affirms that stories designed with moral objectives can influence public opinion and behaviours in domains such as gender equity, youth responsibility, and community health. While many Nollywood films are primarily commercial, a considerable number - including *93 Days*, *Dry*, and *Code Wilo* - carry strong advocacy undertones, using character journeys and narrative closure to assert social values.

The value of BCC theory lies in its attention to the mechanics of persuasive storytelling. By providing tools to assess plot devices, dialogue, and the moral trajectories of characters, it allows researchers to decode how value-oriented messaging is embedded in the film's narrative infrastructure. In a digital streaming context, this intentionality can be amplified or muted depending on platform-based decisions, including how a film is titled, categorised, or presented with subtitles.

Audience interpretation of value narratives

Audience reception remains a crucial element in evaluating the transmission of values across cultural boundaries. Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding theory insists that media texts are never passively absorbed but are instead actively interpreted through dominant, negotiated, or oppositional readings by audiences situated in particular socio-cultural contexts. The resonance or resistance to a film's moral undertones is often determined by the viewer's lived experiences, beliefs, and social environment.

Ewing's (2024) ethnographic study of African diaspora audiences in London reveals that viewers engage with Nollywood content through a filter of cultural nostalgia, identity maintenance, and diasporic reinterpretation. She finds that moral themes such as respect for elders, family loyalty, and communal ethics are often embraced, but also occasionally problematised, especially when they appear misaligned with the norms of host societies. This leads to complex negotiated readings in which the viewer accepts the narrative surface while contesting or reframing its deeper moral propositions.

Elinwa's (2020) fieldwork among audiences in viewing-centres in Nigeria adds an important local dimension. His study shows that viewers draw on communal discourse, religion, and everyday lived experiences to evaluate and reinterpret film messages, sometimes reinforcing and sometimes resisting the intended moral

lessons. He argues that audience engagement is not monolithic; even within a seemingly homogeneous cultural space, value interpretation remains plural, contested, and performative.

Taken together, these insights emphasise that Nollywood's value-oriented narratives are not received uniformly. Nigerian audiences frequently interpret moral cues through communal and religious lenses, while diaspora viewers negotiate meanings in light of hybrid cultural identities and the social norms of host societies. Reception, therefore, emerges as a dynamic process—one shaped as much by cultural positioning as by the films themselves.

Streaming platforms as mediators of meaning

Emerging scholarship increasingly highlights the *platform effect* - the role that streaming services play in mediating how films are experienced and understood. Simon (2023) notes that through para-textual features such as thumbnails, genre labels, subtitle quality, and algorithmic ranking, platforms construct “frames of expectation” that influence how viewers approach and interpret Nollywood films.

Fagbile (2024) echoes this point by emphasising that these paratexts act as semiotic guides, subtly priming viewers to interpret narratives within specific value contexts such as romance, crime, or social justice even before watching the film. This mediation has profound implications for Nollywood's moral storytelling, especially when films with culturally embedded ethics are repackaged for global audiences.

By foregrounding certain keywords and visual cues, streaming platforms often amplify the accessibility of Nollywood films to transnational viewers. Yet, in doing so, they may dilute cultural nuance by recasting complex moral frameworks into simplified global categories. Thus, platforms act not merely as neutral distributors but as active mediators of meaning, shaping how value-oriented narratives are received across diverse audience groups.

Integration of themes and research gap

Taken together, existing studies offer crucial insights into Nollywood's digital evolution. However, a clear gap remains in linking three interrelated domains: (1) the structural influence of streaming platforms, (2) the internal mechanisms of value construction in narratives, and (3) the audience reception of these values across divergent cultural and geographic settings. Current literature tends to address these areas separately: Simon (2023) and Fagbile (2024) focus on platform dynamics; Singhal and Rogers (2021) and Awuzie (2023) concentrate on narrative persuasion and messaging; and Ewing (2024), Elinwa (2020), and Agina (2022) explore reception patterns. The present study responds to this lacuna by examining how moral narratives are simultaneously shaped by creative intent, platform affordances,

and audience interpretation. It specifically interrogates how value-oriented Nollywood films are reframed in the streaming context and how they are decoded by both local and global viewers. This integrated approach bridges the structural, narrative, and interpretive dimensions of Nollywood's digital transition, offering a more comprehensive understanding of its moral economy in the streaming era.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods design that combined qualitative film content analysis with comparative audience reception research. This integrative approach was chosen to explore not only how Nollywood narratives were constructed to communicate moral values but also how such narratives were interpreted across culturally and geographically distinct audiences, particularly within the framework of digital streaming platforms.

The research unfolded in two interrelated phases. In the first phase, a purposive sample of eight Nollywood films that were released between 2020 and 2024 and distributed via global streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, and iROKOTv was selected. This time frame reflected the consolidation of streaming as a dominant distribution mechanism and allowed for an interrogation of platform-specific influences on value-oriented storytelling. Film selection was guided by thematic relevance, with emphasis on titles that addressed socio-political or ethical issues, including *King of Boys*, *Òlòtúré*, *Citation*, and *Dry*.

These films were subjected to detailed narrative and thematic analysis, guided by a structured codebook derived from Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) and entertainment-education theory as expounded by Singhal and Rogers (2021). The analysis focused on recurring features such as character types, plot structure, moral dilemmas, dialogue, and modes of resolution, with particular attention to the embedding of social and ethical messages. Para-textual elements such as synopses, subtitles, genre tags, and thumbnails curated by the streaming platforms, which were also examined for their role in shaping audience framing and expectation.

In the second phase, the study engaged two distinct audience groups: Nigerian-based viewers and members of the Nigerian diaspora residing in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada. The comparative orientation of this phase was grounded in Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding theory, which posits that audiences actively construct meaning from media texts through dominant, negotiated, or oppositional readings depending on their social positioning and cultural experiences.

Data from these groups were collected through semi-structured interviews and online surveys. For the interviews, 20 participants were recruited from each group (40 in total). Interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom and WhatsApp, and lasted for between 45 and 60 minutes. These conversations explored how participants interpreted the selected films, how they responded emotionally to the narratives, and

the extent to which they perceived moral messages in relation to platform features such as subtitling and content categorisation. All interviews were recorded with consent, transcribed, and anonymised for analysis.

In addition, 30 respondents from each group (60 in total) completed an online survey designed to measure their engagement with and interpretation of the films' moral content. The survey included Likert-scale questions evaluating agreement with specific value propositions, as well as open-ended items that solicited reflective commentary on narrative and cultural resonance. This combination of structured and open responses enabled both statistical comparison and interpretive depth.

To ensure rigour in the content analysis, two independent coders examined each film using the structured codebook. Inter-coder reliability was calculated using Cohen's kappa, with a threshold of 0.75 set to ensure consistency in the identification of value-oriented narrative structures. Qualitative data gathered from interviews and open-ended survey questions were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's procedures for thematic analysis. Themes were inductively identified and clustered to reflect emerging patterns in the interpretation of moral and cultural content.

Quantitative survey data were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis to identify trends, frequencies, and mean responses. The Mann–Whitney U test was employed, where necessary, to explore differences between Nigerian-based and diaspora respondents. This non-parametric test was selected because the Likert-scale responses did not meet the assumptions of normal distribution, making it more suitable than parametric alternatives.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection and were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. No personally sensitive data were gathered beyond minimal demographic information required for comparative analysis. Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant institutional research ethics committee before the commencement of fieldwork.

This methodological approach was selected for its capacity to synthesise narrative analysis, digital mediation, and interpretive reception within a coherent framework. The content analysis illuminated the techniques by which Nollywood films structured moral messaging, while the audience research provided insight into how these messages were received, internalised, or contested by culturally divergent viewers. The alignment between methodology and theory was deliberate: convergence theory informed the analysis of platform dynamics; BCC theory informed the interrogation of narrative structure; and reception theory guided the exploration of interpretive variation.

Through this design, the study was able to address its central aim—namely, to examine how Nollywood's value-oriented storytelling is reshaped by streaming

platforms and variably decoded by Nigerian and diaspora audiences. The mixed-methods framework ensured both depth of interpretation and breadth of coverage, enabling a robust and multidimensional exploration of Nollywood's evolving global moral economy.

Findings and Discussion

Narrative framing and platform mediation

Streaming platforms exercised substantial influence over how Nollywood's moral narratives were framed and presented to global audiences. At the content level, narrative structure relied heavily on established BCC design, with protagonists exhibiting a moral trajectory, which often begin in personal conflict, encountering a transformative crisis, and finally emerging as advocates for communal or ethical principles. As Singhal and Rogers (2021) observe, such designs are characteristic of entertainment-education, where moral role modelling is embedded in character development and resolution arcs. Our content analysis confirmed that films like *King of Boys* and *Citation* followed these archetypal structures, frequently concluding with scenes emphasising restored dignity, community justice, or ethical transformation, which clear signs of intentional messaging.

However, platform mediation intervened at multiple levels. Para-textual elements - such as synopses, genre tags, thumbnails, and subtitles - often highlighted keywords like 'justice', 'empowerment', or 'integrity', thereby effectively priming audiences to expect value-oriented narratives even before viewing. This finding resonates with Simon's (2023) insight that streaming metadata and recommendation schemas exert framing power, shaping viewers' expectations and interpretive frames well in advance of actual consumption.

Moreover, while subtitles enhanced global readability, they occasionally sanitised cultural nuance. Instances were identified in films like *Òlòtúré*, where nuanced Yoruba expressions or culturally embedded metaphors were simplified or omitted in subtitles, reducing emotional or moral impact. This aligns with Fagbile's (2024) analysis of para-text salience, which emphasises compromises made for broader accessibility at the expense of cultural specificity. For example, a ritual invocation was translated generically as "spiritual ritual," stripping it of its rooted ethical and cosmological meaning.

These mediations impacted how narratives were perceived. By foregrounding moral themes and offering simplified paratexts, platforms offered a more accessible entry point but also introduced interpretive constraints, filtering the narrative through a globalised moral grammar that sometimes clashed with indigenous storytelling conventions.

Audience Reception: Cultural Contexts and Interpretive Nuance

Audience reception revealed marked differences between Nigerian-based viewers and diaspora respondents, reflecting the socially situated nature of decoding described by Hall (1980). Analysis of interview transcripts and survey responses provided evidence of dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings.

Nigerian-based viewers

Most Nigerian participants aligned with dominant interpretations. For instance, in discussing *Dry*, many expressed that the film reaffirmed convictions about communal responsibility and the fight against sexual violence. Comments such as “This film shows exactly what is wrong in our society and what we must change” were typical, suggesting alignment between narrative intention and viewer reception. Similarly, *Citation* was regularly viewed as a bold articulation of female agency and institutional corruption, reinforcing community values about justice and equity. Nigerian viewers thus frequently internalised the intended moral lessons, perceiving the films as extensions of locally recognised narratives of reform and accountability.

Occasionally, viewers offered negotiated readings, accepting the message but contextualising it in light of socio-economic realities. Some acknowledged the aspirational tone of moral transformation but expressed scepticism about the feasibility of these ideals within systemic structures such as court systems or entrenched gender norms.

Diaspora viewers

Diaspora responses were significantly more varied. Many exhibited negotiated readings, appreciating the moral messaging but filtering it through hybrid frameworks of Western norms and diasporic realities. One respondent remarked that *Dry* was inspiring but “felt overly dramatic compared to the more grounded feminist films I’ve seen.” Another described *Òlòtúré* as “poetic and meaningful, but too heavy-handed in its spiritual framing for some Western audiences.” This mixture of admiration and critical distance typifies negotiated reading, where audiences recognise the intention while questioning its stylistic or cultural form.

A subset of respondents displayed oppositional readings. Some criticised the moral narratives as overly simplistic or didactic, particularly when spiritual or communal solutions were portrayed as more effective than legal or institutional intervention. Others questioned the portrayal of gender dynamics, suggesting that some characters reinforced traditional gender roles inconsistent with diasporic ideals of feminist empowerment. These oppositional readings illustrate how diaspora viewers sometimes decode moral messaging through lenses of contemporary global norms, resisting certain narrative premises.

Subtitling proved critical in how diaspora viewers interpreted films. Several interviewees highlighted mistranslations or ambiguous renderings of cultural vernacular, which impeded emotional connection or led to misinterpretation of character motivation. For instance, expressions of deference or communal accountability rooted in Igbo or Yoruba linguistic nuance were poorly conveyed, reducing the moral weight of certain scenes. This reinforces Fagbile's (2024) claim that subtitles and metadata shape interpretive legibility.

Alignment and Divergence: Narrative Intent vs. Reception

Comparing the content analysis with audience interpretation revealed both convergence and tension. Films were generally structured to deliver moral messages consistent with BCC frameworks: positive character modelling, moral crisis, resolution, and implied social reinforcement. Nigerian audiences largely confirmed this intended framing, resonating emotionally with themes of justice, social responsibility, and spiritual rebirth.

Diaspora audiences, however, demonstrated greater divergence. While survey data showed that over 60 percent of diaspora respondents agreed with value propositions such as “standing up to corruption” or “protecting vulnerable populations,” qualitative interviews revealed underlying unease. For example, diaspora viewers often framed justice in more institutional than communal terms—a reinterpretation of narrative intent based on cultural calibration.

Additionally, sometimes the packaging of films by platforms created mismatches between expectation and content. Films categorised under ‘thriller’ or ‘crime drama’ occasionally attracted audiences seeking pure entertainment rather than moral messaging. When the narrative unfolded with strong ethical or moral framing, some respondents reported surprise or disengagement, indicating that pre-viewing expectations shaped interpretive depth. This supports Simon's (2023) proposition that platform para-texts structure interpretive frames, reinforcing or undermining intended messages depending on audiences' predispositions.

Interestingly, some viewers who initially approached a film for entertainment later reported substantial moral impact, suggesting transformative reception despite initial mis-framing. For example, diaspora respondents who selected a film based on genre tags later expressed deep engagement with moral themes once the narratives unfolded. This illustrates the potential of Nollywood films to function as effective vehicles for moral communication even when their ethical focus is not fore-grounded at the point of entry.

Theoretical Integration and Wider Implications

When situated within the integrated theoretical framework, these findings affirm the analytic synergy of convergence theory, BCC, and reception theory. Convergence theory explains how streaming platforms both enable access and filter moral

narratives through metadata and algorithmic design, thereby shaping interpretive predispositions. BCC theory highlights the intentional structuring of moral messaging within narratives. Reception theory accounts for the observed diversity of audience interpretations, especially across cultural and diasporic contexts.

The interplay among these domains uncovers significant implications. For streaming platforms, para-textual framing is not neutral - it directly influences how moral messaging is anticipated and received. Subtitles that preserve cultural nuances, coupled with accurate metadata that signals moral content without a mis-characterising tone, could enhance alignment between filmmakers' intentions and audience interpretation.

For filmmakers, the findings suggest a need for narrative clarity and cultural resonance, balanced with sensitivity to diverse global audience sensibilities. Academically, the study underscores the necessity of comparative audience research across local and diaspora contexts in digital media studies. It demonstrates that moral narratives are not universally decoded but traverse cultural boundaries with variance, inviting negotiation, resistance, or affirmation depending on the viewer's cultural frame. Future studies should expand to additional diasporic nodes (e.g., Gulf States, Australia) and examine platform mechanisms such as tagging and thumbnail framing as active agents in moral meaning-making.

Conclusion

This study has highlighted the dynamic interplay between narrative intention, platform mediation, and audience agency in Nollywood's streaming era. Value-oriented storytelling remains a deliberate feature of Nollywood cinema, yet its impact is shaped by how platforms curate and frame content, and by how diverse audiences interpret these narratives.

The findings demonstrate that Nigerian-based viewers largely affirmed and internalised the moral messaging embedded in films such as *Dry*, *Citation*, and *King of Boys*. Their responses often aligned with Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) frameworks, interpreting moral cues as extensions of locally recognised narratives of justice, communal accountability, and reform. Diaspora viewers, however, exhibited more complex interpretive patterns, frequently negotiating or resisting these messages in the light of hybrid identities and global cultural norms. These differences confirm Hall's (1980) argument that meaning is not fixed in texts but emerges through the interaction of content and audience context.

Streaming platforms functioned simultaneously as enablers and filters. While they enhanced Nollywood's global reach, their para-textual framing - through subtitles, genre tags, and metadata - reshaped how audiences anticipated and engaged with moral content. In some cases, simplified translations or broad genre categorisations diluted cultural nuance or set up mismatched expectations. At the same time,

platforms made value-oriented narratives accessible to new audiences who may not have otherwise engaged with them, illustrating both constraint and opportunity within the global circulation of African cinema (Simon, 2023; Fagbile, 2024).

By integrating convergence theory, BCC, and reception theory, the study underscores the importance of multi-perspective approaches to Nollywood scholarship. Convergence theory illuminates how digital infrastructures shape production and distribution. BCC highlights the narrative strategies that embed persuasive values in storytelling. Reception theory reveals how those messages are variably decoded across cultural boundaries. Together, they provide a comprehensive framework for understanding Nollywood's evolving global moral economy.

The study also carries practical implications. For filmmakers, the findings suggest the importance of crafting narratives that balance cultural specificity with transnational accessibility. For streaming platforms, attention to subtitling accuracy and culturally sensitive metadata is critical in ensuring that moral intent is neither lost nor distorted. For scholars, the study demonstrates the necessity of audience-focused research that bridges local and global contexts.

Ultimately, Nollywood's moral narratives in the digital age are not static messages but contested sites of meaning-making, shaped by technological mediation, creative intent, and audience interpretation. As Nollywood continues to expand its global footprint, its value-oriented storytelling will remain a vital arena in which cultural identity, moral discourse, and global engagement converge.

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