

AFRICAN CINEMA – An expression of a Cultural Identity

Seeing Africa and the world through African eyes



CAROLINE GACII - UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY (AFRICA) - FALL 2018

Background



- Global communication is the ability to provide and access information across cultures which is done through speaking, listening or reading and writing.
- Films/cinemas tell stories that communicate thoughts or ideas and therefore contribute to global communication by airing of films produced by a host country and exported or shown in countries around the world.
- Films produced in Africa by Africans are referred collectively as African cinema which industry is burgeoning at an incredible pace.
- Cinema is a powerful vehicle for culture, education, leisure and propaganda (UNESCO)
- Contemporary significance of films to global communication can be traced back to end of the 19th Century (even though it might extend further back into history), at a time when technological novelty allowed for new content to reach global audience.
- From the beginning of the 20th Century, film transformed into a new means of presentation or production and distribution.
- Films later became effective mass media integrating entertainment, stories, spectacles, music, humor, drama and technical tricks to global audience.

Introduction

- Conventionally, global communication flows have been from the developed or capitalist west to the less developing countries or the so-called global south.
- However, in the age of globalization and internet there has been a dynamic shift in two regards; first, there is an increasingly willing mass audience for film content from the developed countries in the global south. Secondly, there is a significant increase in the demand for film content within and from outside the global south, including Africa, especially in the developed countries and hence reversing previous global flows.
- As the online craze continues to pervade the African continent and with more demand for African content by people within and even outside the continent, Africa online media or video-on-demand are responding effectively.
- The online-based iROKOTV is revolutionizing the online streaming of African film content and with over half a million users, it has been described as the "Netflix of Africa"
- This paradigm shift has led to some fundamental questions being asked: what is the significance of film in contemporary global communication? What is Africa's role in using film to tell of its cultural identity? What is the place of African media and film in global communication?
- Of what significance is iROKOTV video streaming company in global communication?

Film in Global Communication

- Significance of film seen in its capability to drive audience to imitate what is displayed on films. These range from cultural issues such as code of dressing, to food, to political issues such as public participation.
- Films provide a more intimate sense of global concerns and national issues and are a form of symbolism that disseminates ideas and cultural values, perhaps more than all art forms.
- Films are a timeless reflection of a society as it is at present and as it was in the past allowing for constant dissemination of knowledge from one generation to the next.
- This growing salience of films in global communication was explicit in John F. Kennedy's speech in which he commented that "the motion picture today is the greatest medium of expression the world has ever known" He further noted that film is capable of animating ideas with its only limitation being human inventiveness.
- Films inform attitudes and policies towards peoples' cultures and nations in unexpected ways.
- Scholars have previously examined how governments deploy film as weapon of propaganda.

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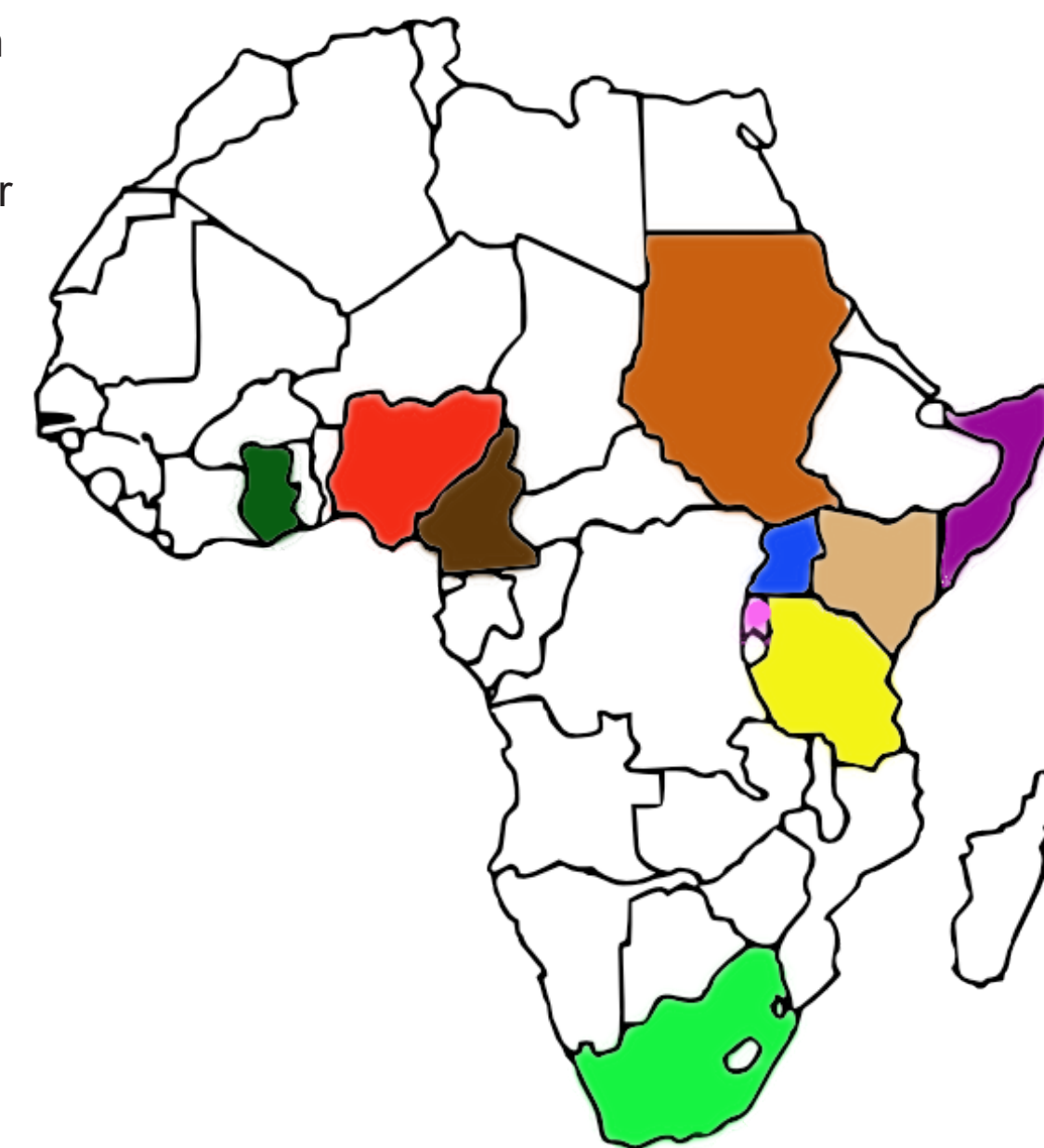
History of African Cinema

- Dates back to early 20th century during the colonial era when African stories and life was shown by the work of the colonial western film makers who depicted Africans as slaves, or workers and subordinate to the white man. They were predominantly racist in nature.
- Reflected unashamedly by the first African film to win international recognition was *Black Girl*, a film produced by a Senegalese, Sembene Ousmane, that showed the despair of an African woman who was working as a maid in France.
- Independence era African filmmakers saw filmmaking as an important political tool for changing this narrative and rectifying the erroneous image put forth by the Western filmmakers and reclaim the image of Africa through film.
- From independence African states confronted different challenges in terms of receiving, disseminating and creating or producing information products on both internal and international news. This challenge was compounded by the fact that Africa's mass media infrastructure was (and still is) oriented on metropolitan countries.
- Consequently, throughout the 20th century, African countries were competent partakers in global communication or informational interaction.
- The modernization theorists would argue that this was due to Africa's continued reliance on conventional mass media and its failure to update mass media.
- Africa played a role of research object or information consumer. It is within this understanding that idea of contraflows account for Africa's position in global communication emerges. In this regard, Africa was perceived as a region or region that was subjected to the dictates of the media system of the developed countries where information or consumption of film (in this context) was one way – 'west to the rest'.
- This situation would persist for more than half a century for majority of African states until Africans started telling their story through film.

Flourishing film industries in Africa

Africa cinema industry in different African countries is burgeoning at an incredible pace. However, Eastern Africa would seem to be doing much better than other regions collectively even though Nollywood is the second largest film industry in the world.

- Key:
- Cinema of Egypt
 - Somaliwood - Somalia
 - Riverwood - Kenya
 - Wakaliwood - Uganda
 - Hillywood - Rwanda
 - Swahiliwood/Benga Films - Tanzania
 - Jozwood - South Africa
 - Nollywood - Nigeria
 - Collywood - Cameroon
 - Ghollywood/Ghallywood & Kumawood - Ghana

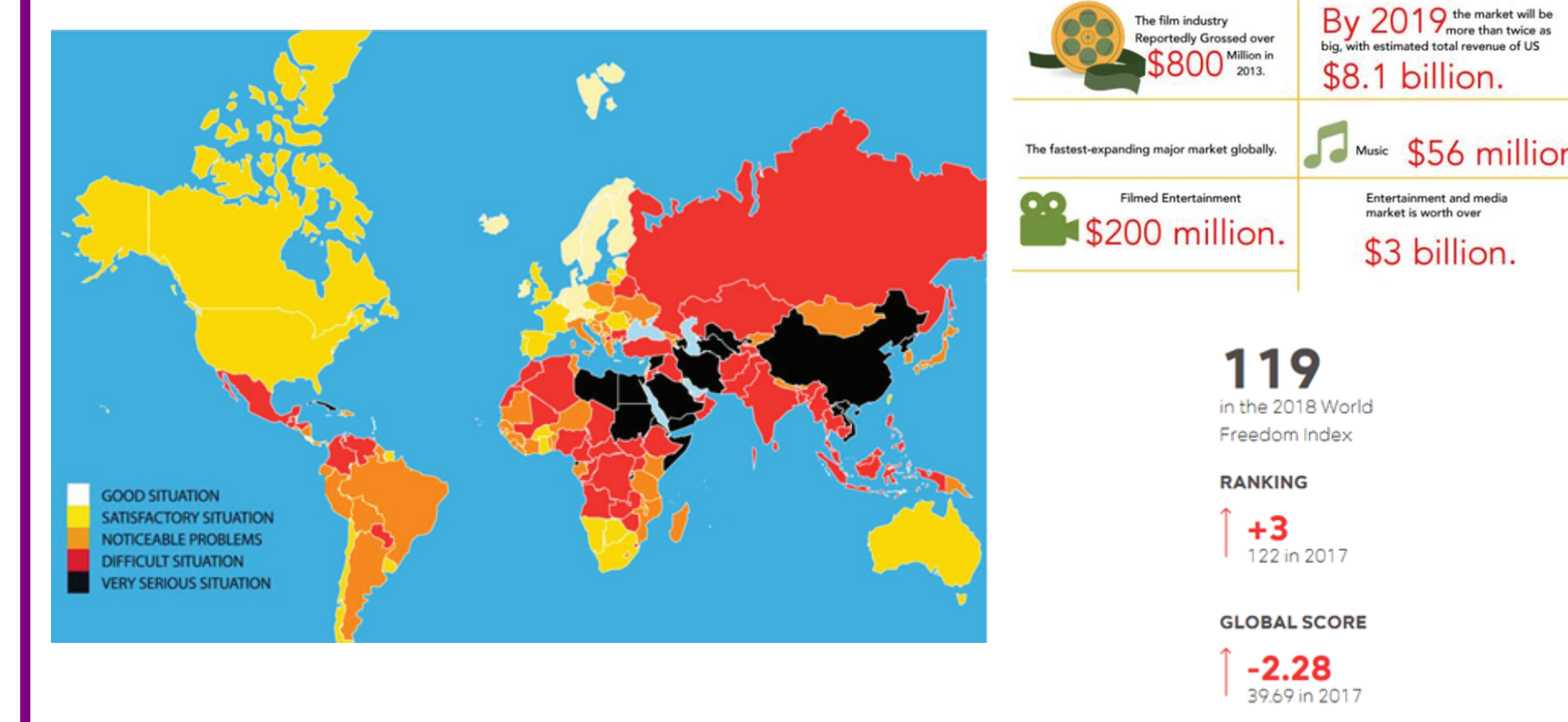


Nollywood in Global Communication



- Created in 1992, Nollywood has transformed into a distinctive cinema industry that has changed overtime.
- Nollywood originated or emerged as a response to economic, political and social struggle created by colonial and post-colonial circumstances with an initial lgbm film shot in 1992 with a theme of greed and supernatural retribution pegged on what Nigerian natives believed in, making it a unique West African cultural product.
- Content and aesthetics of these films are distinctly African including the cast and story lines influenced by the indigenous people traditions – which includes mythic stories, witchcraft melodrama and morality tales.
- By its name, Nollywood can be conceived as a corrupted version of the name Hollywood and this may create the perception that it struggles to conform to standards and content of Hollywood and as such is Nigeria's version of Hollywood.
- However, a closer scrutiny of Nollywood in terms of industry producers, directors, actors and content suggest that it is a distinct industry that aims not only at entertaining its global audience but also at communicating African cultural content.
- "Nollywood is Nollywood and Nollywood is African" and that is African stories told by Africans (Omega, 2017)
- In this regard, it can be argued that Nollywood is Africa's strongest attempt yet to mitigate against or even reverse the flow of information from the Western world to the African continent.

2018 Press Index & Nollywood Revenue



Case of iRokoTV

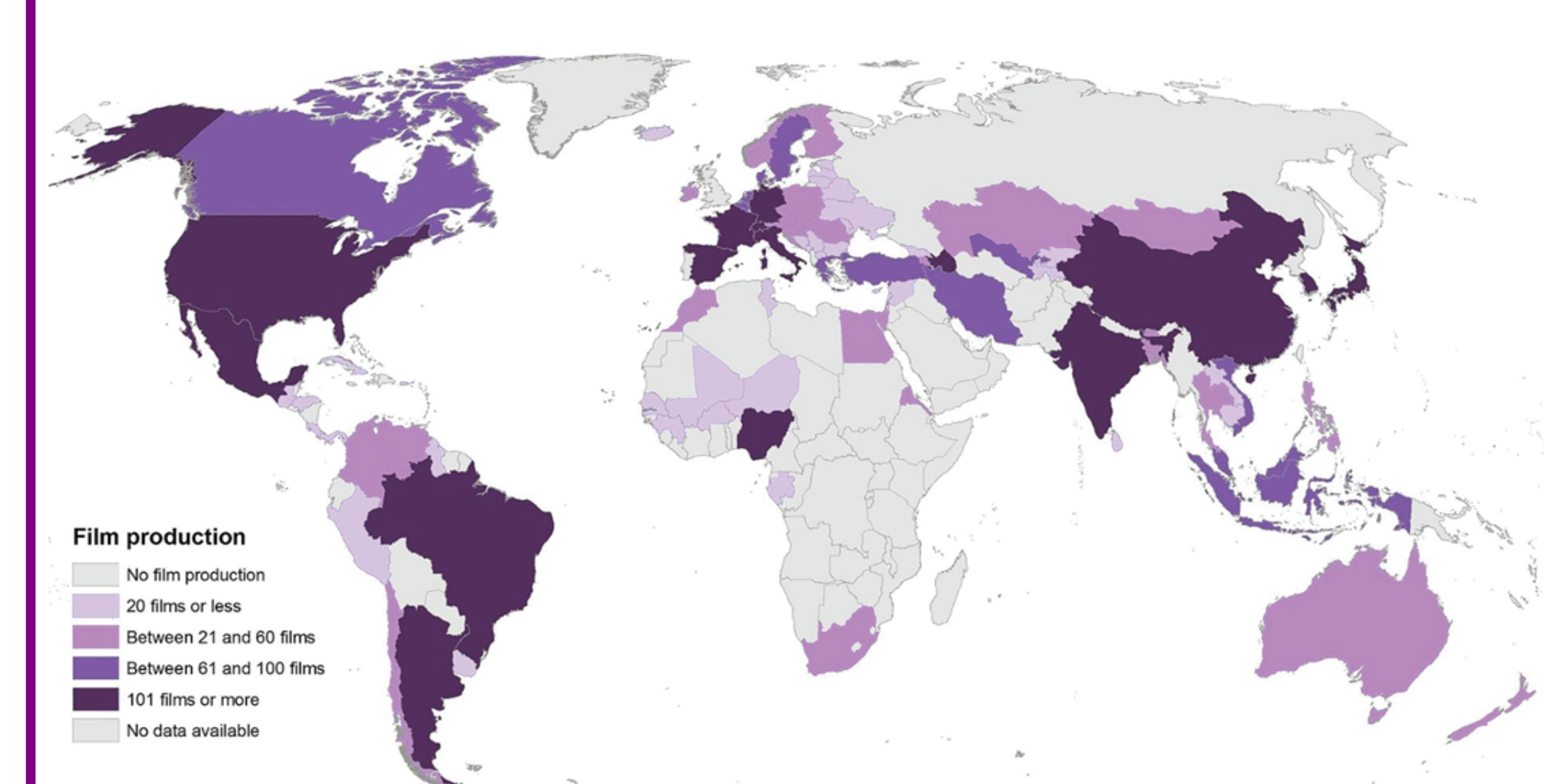
- iROKOTV was established in 2010 as Iroko Partners by Jason Njoku, a UK-based Nigerian entrepreneur (CommsWeek, 2010).
- The use of new technologies is in line with the modernization theory and is at the root of iROKOTV's success since it permitted the streaming of films to African diaspora, something which could not be done through traditional media. As such, several years after its founding, iROKOTV persists as the leader in the video-on demand space (particularly for African films).

| NETFLIX | | IROKO TV | |
|--------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|---|
| Launch | 1997 | Launch | December 2011 |
| Film titles | 9109 titles (films and TV shows) | Film titles | 5,000 (Mainly Nollywood) |
| Subscribers | 56.71 (in US only) | Subscribers | 500,000 |
| No. of Employees | 3,500 | No. of Employees | 405 |
| Founders: | Reed Hastings & Marc Randolph | Founders: | Jason Njoku |
| Headquarters: | Los Gatos, Ca | Headquarters: | Lagos, Nigeria |
| Countries using Netflix | 190 | Countries using iROKOTV | 200 |
| Global Business | 68.29 International Netflix subscribers | Global Business | Offices in New York, Johannesburg and London |
| Netflix Revenue | \$11million (2017) and \$15billion (2018) | Global Offline Distribution | British Airways, South African Airways, Emirates, Kenya Airways and United Airlines |
| Company value | 130billion | April 2015 | Began to move some of its content offline and launched two new TV channels, iROKO Play and iROKO Plus on Africa's StarTimes |

Conclusion

- African movie makers are now showing a more vibrant Africa with the help of new technologies.
- New media especially social media and media streaming sites are changing the position of Africa in global communication and as African films are being streamed to global audiences through platforms such as iROKOTV it is appropriate to conceive a new paradigm shift which has been referred to as the 'new cultural imperialism' through film.
- In this sense, the influence of the global media, even though still dominated by Western media, is increasingly being shaped by the non-Western non-conventional web-based media platforms such as iROKOTV.
- What is conceivable is a situation in which African cultural content is being infused into the western society through African films.
- African films showcase diversity and unique perspective of different cultures.
- Nonetheless, it is conceivable to consider Africa as reversing the global flows. Global communication even in the film industry is still dominated by western countries - the infrastructure and business models for global communication is adopted or built upon Western technology and standards.
- West African region has always done well but East Africa - Tanzania and Kenya, is now coming up with global products
- More importantly, while iROKOTV has more than half of its subscribers in the developed world, the majority of these are African diaspora. As such, the influence of African mass media on global communication is insignificant at best.
- However, with the partnership between iROKOTV and Netflix as well as between iROKOTV and Amazon Prime, a lot remains to be seen on how African film's will shape the discourse of global communication.

Worldwide Feature Films (2015)



Recommendations

- African movie makers should refrain from using foreign models that militate against African efforts to shape the film industry. Some film content and narrative is still primarily dictated by foreign story-telling models.
- African cinema should come up with good movies and storylines that people will pay good money to see. This will help build confidence for investors and general cinema-going public.
- African cinema should introduce films that challenge afro-pessimism and grasp the fact that films generate revenues because of their entertainment factor.
- Communication scholarship should desist from comparing Nollywood with Hollywood. It should be emphasized that the two industries are distinct in terms of their production and content.
- Scholars of global communication should also refrain from comparing iROKOTV to Netflix. They should understand that such a comparison plays in the hands of proponents of media imperialists who perceive Africa and Africans as playing a peripheral role in global communication.
- It is important for such scholarship to accentuate the demonstrated ability of iROKOTV to project its influence beyond the African continent.
- In addition, scholars and researchers need to conduct more research to quantify the impact of iROKOTV on the popular culture of Western societies. Such studies should be longitudinal; eliminating the Africans in the diaspora and sampling only western citizens.

"In Nollywood, you don't waste time, it's not the technical depth that has made our films so popular. It's because of the story. We tell African stories." Ugezu J. (one of Nigeria's top filmmakers)