

INDIGENOUS CULTURE ON SCREEN: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF AUDIENCE PERCEPTIONS OF CULTURAL REPRESENTATION IN NIGERIAN TELEVISION PROGRAMMES

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Abstract

As the global media landscape shifts toward cultural hybridisation, the role of indigenous representation in domestic broadcasting remains a critical site of identity construction. In Nigeria, a nation characterised by profound ethnic diversity, television serves as a primary vehicle for the dissemination of cultural values. This study employed a qualitative approach, utilising focus group discussions (FGDs) and semi-structured interviews with 40 participants across Lagos and Enugu to explore audience perceptions of how indigenous cultures are represented in contemporary Nigerian television programmes. Drawing on Representation Theory and Cultivation Theory, the findings revealed a tension between authentic cultural projection and Nollywoodised stereotypes. While audiences appreciate the increased visibility of indigenous languages, they expressed concern over the commodification of sacred rituals and the homogenisation of minority ethnic identities. This article concludes with recommendations for producers to engage in collaborative ethnography to ensure more nuanced portrayals.

Keywords: Indigenous, Culture, Audience, Perception, Television, Representation

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The historical trajectory of indigenous representation in Nigerian broadcasting dates back to 1959. The

genesis of television in Nigeria was deeply rooted in the project of national identity and regional pride. Established in 1959, the Western Nigeria Television (WNTV) was

envisioned as a tool for education and cultural reawakening (Umeh, 1989). Early programming was dominated by live theatre recordings, such as those of the Hubert Ogunde Theatre Group, which brought Yoruba folklore and traditional cosmologies to the screen. As noted by Esan (2021), these early representations were debatably more authentic because the creators were themselves cultural practitioners rather than commercial filmmakers. However, the subsequent centralisation of television under the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) in the 1970s led to a nationalist aesthetic. Programmes like *Village Headmaster* and *Cock Crow at Dawn* sought to harmonise diverse indigenous identities into a singular Nigerianness, often smoothing over the frictions inherent in ethnic diversity to promote national unity (Olusola, 2019).

A critical lens for analysing Nigerian television is Post-Colonial Theory, specifically the concepts of mimicry and hybridity as articulated by Homi Bhabha (1994). Many contemporary Nigerian television dramas continue to exoticise other indigenous cultures by framing them through a Westernised moral binary. Adedeji (2022) argues that the persistent depiction of indigenous spirituality as fetish or primitive in modern soaps is a form of internalised orientalism, where African producers reproduce colonial prejudices to cater to a Christianised or Islamised urban

middle class.

This othering is particularly evident in the depiction of traditional priests and shrine settings. Recent studies by Onuzulike (2021) suggest that the shrine in Nigerian television has become a semiotic shortcut for evil, creating a cognitive dissonance for viewers who may still practice traditional rites in their private ancestral homes. This reinforces what Ezigbo (2023) calls the theological gaze, where indigenous culture is only valid when it is being rescued or modernised by contemporary societal forces. Hence, the question of cultural representation in the media has long been a cornerstone of post-colonial discourse, particularly within the African context. In Nigeria, the television industry—ranging from the state-owned Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) to the burgeoning private sectors like Africa Magic—functions not merely as an entertainment hub but as a digital mirror reflecting the nation's socio-cultural soul.

Representation is never a neutral act; it is a process of selection, exclusion, and emphasis (Hall, 1997). For the Nigerian audience, seeing themselves on screen involves a complex negotiation of linguistic accuracy, traditional attire, and the portrayal of indigenous belief systems. However, as the industry professionalises and caters to global streaming giants like Netflix and Amazon Prime, there is a growing concern that indigenous

nuances are being sacrificed for a pan-Nigerian aesthetic that prioritises commercial viability over ethnographic precision. It is against this backdrop that this study explores how Nigerian audiences negotiate the tensions between modern television storytelling and the preservation of Indigenous cultural integrity in Nigeria.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the rapid growth and global influence of the Nigerian television industry, concerns persist regarding the authenticity and depth of indigenous cultural representations. While Nigerian media serve as a primary vehicle for cultural preservation and identity formation, many television programmes continue to rely on homogenised portrayals, stereotypical tropes, or the marginalisation of minority ethnic identities in favour of dominant cultural narratives.

Current scholarship has extensively analysed content production and the Nollywood aesthetic. However, there is a significant empirical gap concerning how diverse Nigerian audiences actually decode and internalise these portrayals. It remains unclear whether viewers perceive these representations as accurate reflections of their lived heritage or as commercially driven distortions. Without understanding audience perceptions, there is a risk that television content may

inadvertently erode cultural nuances and alienate the very communities it seeks to represent. This study attempts to close this gap in knowledge.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to explore audience perceptions of cultural representation in Nigerian Television Programmes. The specific objectives are to:

1. find out how Nigerian audiences perceive the authenticity of indigenous cultural symbols in contemporary television dramas.
2. determine the extent to which television representations influence the youth's connection to their ancestral heritage.
3. Identify the feelings of minority groups about their representation on NTA television screens.

1.4 Research Questions:

1. How do Nigerian audiences perceive the authenticity of indigenous cultural symbols in contemporary television dramas?
2. To what extent do television representations influence the youth's connection to their ancestral heritage?
3. What are the feelings of minority groups in Nigeria about their representation on

NTA television screens?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Television as a Conduit for Indigenous Cultural Representation in Nigeria

Since its inception in 1959, television in Nigeria has been envisioned as a primary vehicle for propagating the ideologies and heritage of the nation's numerous ethnic groups (Chioma, 2013). As a tool for cultural representation, television possesses the unique ability to mirror societal values, preserve indigenous languages, and foster a sense of national identity. However, as the media landscape becomes increasingly commercialised and globalised, the authenticity of these representations has come under scholarly scrutiny. While television can foster a sense of cultural pride, recent findings suggest that audiences frequently encounter cultural transposition, where indigenous values are diluted or misrepresented to suit urban, commercial aesthetics (Okoye & Abunike, 2020).

2.1.2 The Mandate for Local Content and Cultural Learning.

The Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) is the body charged with the responsibility of regulating the broadcasting content of television stations in Nigeria and

ensuring that local content is adequately represented on television screens. NBC serves as a regulatory framework designed to protect indigenous cultures by stipulating local content quotas. Research indicates that public broadcasters, such as the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), often align with these mandates, with cultural relevance in their programming reaching as high as 70% (Chioma, 2013). These programmes, often featuring indigenous language dramas, have historically been vital for transmitting cultural memory and social norms (Saidu, 2025). Furthermore, indigenous-language news and dramas are increasingly seen as functional tools for decision-making and community engagement, reinforcing cultural continuity and audience trust (Okafor, Egwuagu, Agbo & Eze, 2025).

2.1.3 Audience Perceptions and the Challenge of Authenticity

Despite the availability of local content, qualitative explorations reveal deep-seated audience concerns regarding the quality of representation. In indigenous-language film and television, particularly within the "Nollywood Yoruba" genre, audiences have expressed dissatisfaction with the casting of non-native actors who fail to accurately embody the linguistic and cultural nuances of the roles they portray (Ademuyiwa, 2021). Such

wrong casting, often driven by marketers' profit motives, results in cultural disorientation for viewers who look to these programmes to enhance their cultural literacy (Ademuyiwa, 2021).

Moreover, there is a perceived disconnect between traditional thematic content and modern packaging. Contemporary television dramas have largely shifted from rural and semi-urban settings to high-brow urban areas like Lagos and Abuja, replacing traditional grass-to-grass narratives with storylines focused on extreme affluence (Okoye & Abunike, 2020). This shift often alienates audiences who feel that televised realism is being sacrificed for flamboyant sets and Westernised lifestyles.

A critical area of audience perception involves the reinforcement of patriarchal and ethnic stereotypes. Television content in Nigeria frequently portrays women through traditional lenses, emphasising domesticity, subservience, or objectification, rather than as multi-dimensional professionals (Ojomo & Adekusibe, 2020). For instance, female characters in many Nollywood-style productions are often depicted as dependent on male counterparts or as victims of societal pressure, particularly in narratives involving infertility (Temitope, 2025).

From an ethnic perspective, the

dominance of the three major languages (Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba) in the broadcast media often leaves minority cultures marginalised or misrepresented. This cultural imperialism is not only an external threat from Western media but an internal one where dominant local cultures overshadow smaller ethnic identities, potentially leading to a homogeneous media culture that undermines Nigeria's true diversity (Chioma, 2013).

2.1.4 The "Nollywoodisation" of Culture and the Global Streaming Influence

The transition from traditional broadcast to the SVOD (Subscription Video on Demand) era has fundamentally altered the texture of indigenous representation. The entry of Netflix and Amazon Prime into the Nigerian market has birthed a genre of "High-Production Indigeneity" (Akanbi, 2023). Films and series such as *Anikulapo & Elesin Oba* (The King's Horseman) utilise high-definition cinematography and global distribution networks to showcase Yoruba culture.

However, scholarly debate is divided on whether this global visibility aids or harms cultural integrity. Chimuanya & Omoera (2022) suggest that the Netflix aesthetic often requires a streamlining of culture—simplifying complex traditional protocols so they are digestible for a global audience. This

leads to a commodification of the sacred, where deep-seated cultural symbols are treated as exotic backdrops rather than living systems of knowledge.

Furthermore, the rise of glamour-centric dramas (e.g., *The Real Housewives of Lagos*) presents a version of Nigerian culture that is heavily Westernised, where indigenous elements are relegated to token appearances in weddings or festivals (Ojekwe, 2024). This creates a filtered indigeneity that appeals to the diaspora but risks alienating the domestic audience who live the realities of these cultures daily.

2.1.5 Linguistic Vitality and the "Engli-Igbo/Yoruba" Phenomenon

Language is the primary vessel of culture, and its representation on screen is a subject of intense academic scrutiny. The proliferation of Africa Magic's language-specific channels has been hailed as a victory for linguistic preservation. Yet, recent linguistic audits by Anyanwu (2023) show a significant shift toward code-meshing in television scripts.

While purists argue that the purity of the Igbo or Hausa languages is being eroded by the heavy infusion of English, sociolinguists like Ihemere (2024) argue that television is simply reflecting the linguistic hybridity of urban Nigeria. The tension lies in whether television should act as a preservative of high indigenous

language or as a 'mirror' of contemporary slang-infused indigenous speech. For the youth audience, the latter is more relatable, but for cultural elders, it represents a linguistic thinning that threatens the survival of deep proverbs and idioms (Ojaide, 2022).

2.1.6 Minority Representation and the Hegemony of the "Big Three"

A major gap in the literature, and a focal point of this study, is the triadic hegemony of the Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa ethnic groups in Nigerian media. Nigeria boasts over 250 ethnic groups, yet as Shaka and Uchendu (2021) point out, the minority groups of the Niger Delta, the Middle Belt, and the Northeast are often invisible or stereotyped.

When minority cultures are represented, they are frequently subjected to identity flattening, where unique customs of the Ibibio or the Tiv are blended into a generic South-South or Northern archetype. This lack of specificity contributes to a sense of symbolic annihilation (Tuchman, 1978) for millions of Nigerians whose cultures are never accurately reflected on the national stage.

2.2 Empirical Review

To ground this research in the current scholarly landscape, seven empirical studies from the last five years are reviewed below. Akanbi (2023) examined *High-production indigeneity: The Netflix effect on*

Nigerian folklore. The study was anchored on Globalisation Theory. Content analysis and semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. 15 Nollywood directors and 10 cultural historians formed the population of the study. The study found that while global streaming platforms increase the budget for indigenous stories, they demand a narrative streamlining that removes complex local nuances to make the content universally accessible. The study recommended that producers should create cultural bible documents for productions to maintain ethnographic integrity. Although both studies examined the impact of modern production standards on cultural authenticity, Akanbi (2023) focused on the producer's perspective, while the present study fills the gap by focusing on audience reception.

Adedeji (2022) investigated *Internalised Orientalism: Depictions of traditional religion in modern Nigerian soaps*. The study adopted Post-Colonial Theory. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was the research design applied. The study population comprised 50 episodes of popular prime-time dramas on Africa Magic. Findings from the study indicate that indigenous religions are consistently framed as the binary opposite of progress, with traditional priests depicted as obstacle characters to the protagonist's modern success. The study recommended

that scriptwriters should undergo sensitivity training to avoid perpetuating colonial-era religious biases. This study provides the visual data that informs the perceptions analysed in our focus groups. While Adedeji (2022) analysed the content itself, the present study fills the gap by investigating how these specific portrayals influence the identity of the viewer.

Anyanwu (2023) studied *Linguistic hybridity in Africa Magic Igbo: A sociolinguistic audit*. The study adopted Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory. A quantitative survey designed was used to gather data from 300 Igbo-speaking residents in Owerri and Aba. Findings from the study showed that there is a 65% preference among youth for "Engli-Igbo" (mixed) dialogue over pure central Igbo, suggesting a shift in what is perceived as authentic modern indigenous life. The study recommended that educational broadcasters should maintain pure language content, while entertainment channels should reflect contemporary speech. This study and the present study investigated the role of language as a carrier of indigenous culture on screen. However, Anyanwu (2023) study was strictly quantitative; the present study added qualitative depth by exploring *why* audiences feel an emotional disconnect from "pure" language.

Shaka & Chengdu (2021) examined the *hegemony of the 'Big Three': Ethnic representation in Nigerian media*. The

study used Hegemony Theory. It employed a mixed-methods research design, combining case study and survey. 200 media students and 50 minority ethnic leaders formed the sample population. The study found that minority ethnic groups (Tiv, Ijaw, etc.) feel symbolically annihilated, appearing in less than 5% of non-news television programming. In line with this finding, the study recommended implementation of a "Minority Representation Quota" by the National Broadcasting Commission. While this study addressed a research question regarding the homogenisation of minority identities, the present study focused on the volume of representation; thus it fills the gap by exploring the perceived quality of that representation.

Madu (2020) investigated *the cultivation effects of Nollywood on the cultural identity of Nigerian youth*. The study adopted Cultivation Theory. The research design adopted was correlation analysis. 400 undergraduates across three Nigerian universities formed the sample population of the study. Findings showed that heavy viewers of glamour-centric Nollywood content showed a 30% lower affinity for traditional indigenous customs compared to light viewers. The study recommended that producers should integrate indigenous success stories into urban-themed dramas. Both this study and the present study used Cultivation Theory as a primary

theoretical anchor. However, Madu (2020) measured behavioural correlation, while the present study fills the gap by using FGDs to understand the psychological negotiation behind those numbers.

Ojekwe (2024) examined *The glamour-centric turn: Reality TV and the dilution of Nigerian heritage*. Social Comparison Theory was adopted for this study. The study applied Netnography (Online Ethnography) for data collection. The population of study comprised 5,000 social media comments on *The Real Housewives of Lagos*. Findings from the study showed that audiences celebrate modernised indigeneity (like high-fashion Aso-Ebi) but mock unrefined rural indigenous portrayals. The study recommended that media literacy programmes should be introduced to help audiences distinguish between performance and culture. This study is relevant to our discussion on the "filtered indigeneity" of modern television. Ojekwe (2024) looked at unstructured social media data, while the present study fills the gap through structured qualitative interviews that allowed for follow-up questions.

Ezigbo (2023) examined *The theological gaze: Media and the construction of the 'heathen' in Nigeria*. The study was anchored on Agenda Setting Theory. It employed a longitudinal content analysis design. The population and sample of the

study comprised 10 years of NTA and Silverbird television programming. Findings showed that there is a persistent agenda-setting effort to link indigenous culture with poverty and modern religion with wealth. The study recommended that media houses should establish interfaith and Culture desks to review scripts. This provides the historical context for the "Occultic Trope" discussed in our findings. Ezigbo (2023) provides a longitudinal view of the past; the present study fills the gap by capturing the current 2025-2026 audience sentiment.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two theories: Hall's Representation Theory (1997) and Cultivation Theory (Gerbner, 1976) and its Modern Application. Stuart Hall's Representation Theory, propounded in 1997, posits that media do not merely reflect a pre-existing reality but actively construct meaning through signs and symbols. In the Nigerian context, the construction of an Oba, an Obi, or an Emir on screen becomes a powerful pedagogical tool. If these figures are consistently portrayed with specific personality traits (e.g., the "tyrannical" traditional ruler), those traits become associated with the office itself in the public imagination. Cultivation Theory suggests that heavy television viewers are more likely to perceive the real world in ways that mirror the most stable and

recurrent messages of the television world. Applying this to indigenous culture, if a Nigerian youth primarily sees indigenous life as "rural, poor, and superstitious" on television, they are cultivated to view their own ancestral roots with disdain or embarrassment (Madu, 2020). This socialisation by screen is critical in a country where the median age is 18, and traditional oral transmission of culture is in decline.

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Philosophy

To investigate the complex and subjective nature of cultural perception, this study adopted a qualitative research design. Qualitative research is particularly suited for this inquiry as it allows for an emic perspective—understanding the internal logic and emotional responses of the audience within their specific cultural contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study is rooted in the interpretivist paradigm, which asserts that reality is socially constructed and that meanings are generated through human interaction with cultural artefacts such as television programmes. By prioritising the thick description of audience experiences, the research moves beyond mere statistical correlation to uncover the nuanced reasons *why* certain representations resonate with or alienate Nigerian viewers.

3.2 Population and Sampling Technique

The target population for this study comprised adult television viewers in two major Nigerian metropolitan hubs: Lagos and Enugu. Lagos was selected as the commercial and media nerve centre of Nigeria, representing a highly cosmopolitan and ethnically diverse demographic. Enugu was selected to provide a comparative regional perspective, serving as a historical and cultural cornerstone for the South-Eastern (Igbo) indigenous experience.

A multi-stage purposive sampling technique was employed to select 40 participants (20 per city). Purposive sampling ensured that participants possessed the necessary cultural competence and viewing history required for deep discussion. The sample was stratified into two primary cohorts:

- The "Gen Z" Cohort (Ages 18–25): To capture the perspectives of digital natives who consume indigenous content alongside global media.
- The "Baby Boomer" Cohort (Ages 55+): To capture the views of cultural custodians who experienced the pre-Nollywood and early NTA eras of broadcasting.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Primary data were collected through

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) that comprised 15 discussants and semi-structured interviews. FGDs were the preferred method for audience perception as they stimulate inter-subjective dialogue, allowing participants to challenge or validate each other's perceptions in real-time (Morgan, 1996). To complement the audience data, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with supply-side stakeholders—including five cultural historians and five television producers from Africa Magic and the NTA. These interviews provided necessary context regarding the commercial and creative constraints that influence representation. 15 Gen Zs participated in the study.

Four FGD sessions were held (two in Lagos, two in Enugu), each lasting approximately 90 to 120 minutes. The discussions were guided by a semi-structured instrument covering three thematic areas:

- Visual and Symbolic Accuracy (Costumes, rituals, and architecture).
- Linguistic Authenticity (Dialogue, proverbs, and accents).
- Moral Frameworks (Depiction of indigenous vs. modern religions).

3.4 Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

The data was analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All

FGDs and interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English where indigenous languages were used. The coding process involved identifying recurrent motifs, which were then grouped into broader themes such as "The Occultic Trope" and "Aesthetic Commercialisation."

To ensure the trustworthiness and rigour of the study, the researchers employed member checking, where preliminary findings were shared with a subset of participants to verify accuracy. Furthermore, peer debriefing was utilised, involving an independent media scholar to review the coding process and minimise researcher bias.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

An ethical guide was followed by ensuring anonymity and the use of pseudonyms in the final report. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. Given the sensitivity of discussions regarding ethnic identity and religious beliefs, the moderators were trained to maintain a neutral, respectful environment that prevented the marginalisation of any viewpoint.

4.1 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This qualitative exploration into audience perception of cultural representation in Nigerian television programmes, integrating insights from individual interviews and the

15-member Focus Group Discussion (FGD), revealed critical patterns mapped against the three core research questions. On the perceptions of cultural authenticity in contemporary TV Dramas, findings from the study indicated a sharp paradox in modern Nigerian television production. It showed that while technical qualities and cinematic budgets have drastically improved, commercial pressures have accelerated the commodification and distortion of indigenous cultural symbols. Audiences, particularly older demographics, critiqued the superficial, plastic aesthetic of modern sets. As P1 (Male, Elder, Yoruba) noted: "When they want to show a traditional King's palace, everything looks like a Nollywood movie set built in Lekki—too shiny, too clean. Real ancestral setups have more spiritual and historical gravity that contemporary directors miss". Older participants in Enugu specifically noted that royal protocols in modern Epic dramas are often sacrificed for dramatic effect. This finding is strongly supported by Akanbi (2023), who identified that global streaming standards enforce a narrative streamlining that removes complex local nuances to satisfy international audiences. It also aligns with Chimunya and Omoera (2022), who argued that the Netflix aesthetic leads to a commodification of the sacred. The current study confirms that the Nigerian audience is acutely

aware of this filtered indigeneity and feels it degrades the educational value of television.

Furthermore, both individual interviews and the FGD highlighted how complex moral codes are sacrificed for sensationalism. P6 (Female, Youth, Igbo) underscored this by stating, "My issue is the repetition—it's always either a royal feud or juju. They reduce our rich culture to pure dramatics and witchcraft." Echoing concerns about tangible cultural elements, P3 (Female, Elder, Hausa) stated "The dressing is sometimes wrong. Traditional attire is worn casually or incorrectly by actors who don't know the cultural significance behind the folds or caps." Similarly, P11 (Male, Minority - Ijaw) pointed out the complete lack of cultural depth for riverine setups. P11 stated that "They just put someone in a wrapper and give them a paddle. They never capture the true philosophy or dialect accurately; it's always a caricature."

On whether watching Nigerian cultural programmes on TV screens draws the young generation close to their root, or pushes them further away, the study found that the data illustrates a deep generational divide regarding how television influences youth engagement with their ancestral roots. Younger respondents revealed that youth are drawn to traditional elements only when packaged through modern aesthetics and viral trends. P7 (Male,

Youth, Yoruba) observed that "social media and TikTok clips of TV shows make us more interested in our roots. If a slang or a traditional dance trend from a drama, youths want to learn it. It makes being traditional look cool for a minute". However, older participants argued that this connection remains hollow. P2 (Male, Elder, Hausa) warned that "cool is not enough. Most youth are learning the superficial parts—the fashion or the slang—while losing the core moral values, respect, and deep language proficiency." Highlighting the platform disconnect, P8 (Female, Youth, Pidgin-fluent) explained why traditional TV fails to hold youth attention: "We connect more with Netflix or YouTube web series than NTA. NTA feels like it's stuck in 1999." This isolation is compounded for minority youth, as P12 (Female, Minority - Tiv) noted: "As a youth from a minority background, mainstream TV doesn't even give my heritage a chance to connect with anyone. My peers grow up watching Yoruba, Igbo, or Western cultures, so they end up losing touch with Tiv folklore entirely."

The finding that audiences perceive a visual displacement in contemporary dramas suggests that as Nigerian television scales for global platforms, it undergoes a process of aesthetic grooming. Older participants in Enugu specifically noted that royal protocols in modern "Epic" dramas are often sacrificed for dramatic effect. This

finding is strongly supported by Akanbi (2023), who identified that global streaming standards enforce a narrative streamlining that removes complex local nuances to satisfy international audiences. It also aligns with Chimunya and Omoera (2022), who argued that the "Netflix aesthetic" leads to a commodification of the sacred. The current study confirms that the Nigerian audience is acutely aware of this "filtered indigeneity" and feels it degrades the educational value of television.

The research also found that Gen Z viewers feel comfortable with hybridised speech (Engli-Igbo/Yoruba), while Boomers feel it signifies cultural death. This finding resonates with Anyanwu (2023), whose sociolinguistic audit showed a 65% youth preference for "code-meshing." However, our discussion goes further to show that this is not just a linguistic choice but an identity marker. As Ihemere (2024) suggests, television dialogue is now a site of modern indigenous performance where English is no longer seen as foreign but as a component of contemporary African identity. On the other hand, the rise of subtitled indigenous content has allowed for cross-cultural viewing (e.g., an Igbo man watching a Yoruba drama). However, the "Gen Z" participants expressed that they feel culturally inadequate when watching shows with "deep" language they cannot understand without subtitles. This

suggests that while television preserves the language, it also highlights the growing linguistic gap between generations.

Findings from the study also indicate that cultural shows on television do not adequately represent the culture of the minority group in Nigeria. The data gathered regarding minority groups on the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) confirms a profound, systemic sense of marginalisation and cultural invisibility. Minority participants expressed acute frustration over their lack of presence. P13 (Male, Minority - Ebira) stated bluntly: "It's almost non-existent. On NTA network news, you might see a 2-minute clip of a festival once a year, but in terms of drama, language, or daily programming, we are invisible. Nigeria has over 250 ethnic groups, but television acts like only three exist." When minority groups do appear, it is frequently perceived as insincere. P4 (Female, Elder, Igbo) noted that "it feels like tokenism. They bring a minority group on screen just to tick a federal character box, rather than telling deep, meaningful stories." This breeds deep alienation, with P14 (Female, Minority - Igala) remarking: "It creates a feeling of second-class citizenship. When your language is never heard on national TV, you begin to feel like your culture doesn't matter to the country." While P9 (Male, Youth, Yoruba) suggested a shift toward digital alternatives ("Minority groups shouldn't wait for NTA; digital spaces

are evening out the playing field"), P15 (Male, Minority - Kataf) countered with the enduring institutional weight of public broadcasting: "Digital is good, but traditional TV still commands national authority. If NTA doesn't institutionalise our representation, future generations of our people will lose their identity to the dominant tribes."

Minority participants in the groups expressed a sense of cultural fatigue from seeing the same three cultures represented. They noted that even when a minority character is introduced, they are often used as a comic relief or a loyal servant or as background extras, reinforcing ethnic hierarchies within the Nigerian social fabric.

The finding that minority groups feel erased or mocked on screen remains one of the most critical issues in Nigerian broadcasting. This is directly supported by Shaka and Uchendu (2021), who quantified this triadic hegemony. Our qualitative data adds emotional weight to their quantitative findings, revealing that this lack of representation leads to a sense of alienation and a lack of national belonging among minority youth. This reinforces the "Symbolic Annihilation" theory (Tuchman, 1978), where a group's absence from the media implies their lack of social importance. Findings from this study confirm ethnic hegemony and symbolic annihilation of the minority

tribes in Nigeria.

Finally, the study found that a recurring theme in the FGDs was the demonization of traditional shrines. Participants noted that while Christian and Islamic clerics are depicted as agents of "light," the "Babalawo" or "Dibia" is consistently the agent of "darkness." This confirms that television constructs a binary where indigenous culture is equated with a primitive past. This finding echoes the work of Adedeji (2022) on "internalised Orientalism" and Ezigbo (2023), who described the theological gaze in Nigerian media. The persistence of this trope, despite the modernisation of the industry, suggests that producers are operating under a cultivation framework (Gerbner, 1976), where they reproduce the most stable societal prejudices to ensure mass appeal. Our study extends this by showing that even young, Westernised Nigerians (Gen Z) feel this portrayal is cliché and tiresome, indicating a potential shift in audience demand. "Occultic" trope and religious hegemony remain common features on Nigerian TV screens. The most passionate discussions centred on the "evil forest" and "juju" tropes. There is a consensus among audiences that television has successfully "demonised" indigenous belief systems. "Every time you see a man in white wrappers with chalk on his eyes, you know he is about to kill someone," observed a Lagos participant. This

representation serves to validate modern religious identities by positioning the "indigenous" as the dark past that must be overcome.

4.2 CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that while television remains a powerful vehicle for cultural transmission in Nigeria, a critical chasm exists between commercial production motives and audience expectations of cultural integrity. Contemporary television dramas frequently trade deep cultural authenticity for aesthetic gloss and sensationalised tropes. Furthermore, while screen media can spark brief youth interest in ancestral heritage, it often delivers a watered-down version of culture that lacks foundational value systems. Most urgently, public broadcasting institutions like the NTA continue to foster cultural alienation among Nigeria's minority ethnic groups through systemic exclusion and tokenism. Reforming Nigerian television requires an intentional shift toward rigorous cultural research, equitable ethnic representation, and a balance between modern visual standards and authentic indigenous storytelling.

While the industry has achieved global reach, it must now turn its focus inward to address the nuances of accuracy, minority representation, and the demonisation of traditional beliefs. To achieve true cultural sustainability, the industry must move beyond surface-level representation.

Recommendations

Based on the triangulated findings from the interviews and focus group discussions, the following actionable recommendations are proposed:

1. Establishment of Cultural Advisory Boards for Production Studios: Television production houses and streaming platforms should collaborate with local historians, elders, and cultural custodians from specific ethnic backgrounds during the scriptwriting and pre-production phases to prevent the exact misrepresentations critiqued by participants like P1 and P11.
2. Institutional Overhaul of NTA Programming Policies: Addressing the exclusion highlighted by P13 and P14, the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) must revise its programming frameworks to institute dedicated time slots and quotas for minority-language dramas and cultural documentaries, moving past superficial tokenism into sustained, nuanced storytelling.
3. Intentional Integration of Intergenerational Heritage in Youth Media: Content creators must heed the insights of P7 and P8 by leveraging digital-first storytelling (such as web series and interactive social media campaigns) to bridge modern visual appeal with deep-rooted indigenous values, moving away from repetitive tropes like royal feuds and witchcraft.
4. Strengthening Regulatory Oversight by the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC): The NBC should enforce stricter guidelines regarding

the commercial caricature of indigenous practices, ensuring that broadcasters who distort sacred cultural symbols or misrepresent traditional attire—as noted by P3—face appropriate regulatory sanctions.

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