

**TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINISM AND THE
QUALITY-CONVENIENCE DEBATE IN
NOLLYWOOD: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF
BANDELE'S *ELESIN OBA: THE KING'S
HORSEMAN* AND O'FRESH'S *SABBATH***

By

Ebuka Emmanuel Ilukwe, PhD

ee.ilukwe@coou.edu.ng / garryneo1love@gmail.com.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-0207-2998>
+2348038813286

Chinedu Chikata

cc.chikata@coou.edu.ng /
nedumkatas@gmail.com ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-7703-8832>
+2348038291697

Okolo Somtochukwu Favour

Department of Theatre Arts
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University,
Igbariam.+2347030807827

Abstract

The rapid technological evolution in film production, particularly the advent of Smartphone as affordable and accessible tool has democratized cinematic storytelling. This shift has challenged conventional notions of cinematic quality and professionalism, thus causing seeming tension between traditional, high-cost filmmaking methods and the rising trend of resourceful, Smartphone-based production. Questions arise regarding the quality, artistic integrity, and cultural authenticity of films produced with varying technologies, and how these choices shape perceptions within the industry and among audiences. This prompts an examination of how different technological approaches influence artistic expression, cultural representation, and industry standards. Hence this study analyzed the visual, thematic, and cultural outcomes of films made with professional equipment versus those shot predominantly with Smartphone using Biyi Bandele's *Elesin Oba ...* (2022) and Oladipo O'Fresh's *Sabbath* (2024) as case study. Guided by Marshal McLuhan's Technological Determinism Theory, the study posits that technological innovations significantly influence social and cultural practices. This perspective underscores that the adoption of Smartphone and other digital tools is reshaping filmmaking paradigms and creative possibilities. The study employed a qualitative methodology, which involved content analysis of case study films supported by data gathered from interview. Findings reveal that while high-

end equipment yields polished, visually striking films aligned with traditional industry standards, Smartphone filmmaking offers unique aesthetic qualities that foster authenticity, immediacy, and grassroots storytelling. Both approaches have valid artistic and cultural contributions, with resourcefulness and post-production skills playing pivotal roles in overcoming technical limitations. The study therefore recommends fostering skills in both traditional and mobile filmmaking, encouraging hybrid production models, revising industry standards to recognize diverse technological approaches, and supporting policies that democratize access to filmmaking resources. The study contends that technological choices are not merely technical decisions but strategic artistic tools that shape the future trajectory of Nigerian cinema. Embracing technological diversity while upholding artistic integrity can propel Nollywood filmmakers toward a more inclusive, innovative, and culturally rich cinematic landscape.

Introduction

The advent of digital technology has revolutionized on-screen storytelling, fundamentally altering the ways in which content is captured, produced, and consumed. Historically, filmmaking relied primarily on motion picture camera, which demanded considerable technical expertise, significant financial investment, and considerable time for editing and post-production.

Before the advent of Nollywood, the Nigeria film industry depended on celluloid, a heavier, more technically, and cost involving equipment for production. That was probably why the population of filmmakers in Nigeria then was fewer. Evidently, celluloid film production was rigorous as affirmed by Hyginus Ekwuazi who states that “Francis Oladele, Ola Balogun, Eddie Ugbomah, Hubert Ogunde, Adamu Halilu etc all contributed significantly to the emergence and development of indigenous the feature film” which were in 16mm, 35mm and 70mm celluloid formats” (“Nollywood: History as Economic Determinism ...” 137). However, certain socioeconomic factors later caused the decline in celluloid film production. The emergence of the video format later opened the floodgate for what is today known as Nollywood. Barclays Ayakoroma, explains that;

unlike the celluloid format, the video film convention offers the director near full control of his production in the sense that the outcome of his experimentations with picture composition, camera movements, sound, light, use of colours, costume and set design, acting and so on (all of which constitute the aesthetics of film), could be ascertained and corrected where necessary through immediate previews. Consequently, a director goes into post production of his work with some level of assurance that he has a good day’s shoot. (22)

Becoming the preferred format of film production, the Nigerian film industry leveraged the advantages the video format provided to become a popular film culture globally. The industry's success is further attributed to its dynamic nature and adaptability to constant technological advancements that characterize the filmmaking industry.

Digital technology continues to revolutionize filmmaking globally and Nollywood benefits substantially from these evolving trends. Ebuka Ilukwe explains that the film industry records “radical” transformations in its production, marketing, and distribution subsectors due to the constant upgrade in digital technology which paves way to innovative approaches to the practice of film and Nollywood, one of the significant film cultures in the world, is not left out. According to Ilukwe, “in spite of the challenge of funding, among other production constraints, which make it difficult for Nigerian film entrepreneurs to compete favourably with their counterparts in developed countries according to global best practices, the industry has nonetheless made efforts to keep in touch with trending innovations in film production” (81). In essence, economic cum technological factors influenced Nollywood's evolution, subsequent growth, and survival.

Therefore, Economy and technology are two major factors that determine the classification of filmmakers

within the current Nollywood production landscape. While one of the groups is what the researchers term “conventionalists”, the other belongs to the “experimentalists” group. Whereas the conventionalists use the camera as the primary tool for film production, the experimentalists adopt the Smartphone as a viable alternative. Part of the criticisms against mainstream Nollywood is the poor camera work and weak plots that characterize its films. Critics contend that despite the popularity of Nollywood right from the inception of video-film production, quality has been the reason it could not win accolades in international competitions. They claim that such mainstream productions were executed with minimal cast, crew, and cheaper equipment as the goal was to minimize expenditure and maximize profit (Ekwuazi “Living in Bondage ...” 305). It took the emergence of a new crop of filmmakers whose films stand out in the global film market due to their professional cinematography and premium storylines, to change that narrative. Marked by sophisticated equipment, heavy budget and detailed plotlines, the filmmakers leveraged the technological innovations that characterize the filmmaking landscape to upgrade the industry’s global reputation (Ilukwe and Ogaraku 260).

Matching the high-budget standard may not be attainable for some Nollywood filmmakers especially as Jonathan

Haynes indicates that many of the “New Nollywood” producers are beneficiaries of million-dollar funding from multinational companies (58). However, the advent of Smartphone has democratized media production by serving as improvisational tool for Nollywood filmmakers, skit-makers, and social media content creators who undertake productions without the burden heavy-duty equipment. In fact, Ebuka Ilukwe and Sandra Ifejiani attribute the decentralization and popularization of the skit-making industry to the advent of mobile and Internet technologies (421 – 422). In other words, the democratization of creative content production and distribution is attributable to advancements in ICT.

The proliferation of Smartphone with inbuilt high-definition camera now tends to challenge the prominence of traditional cinematographic equipment as these devices offer convenience, portability, and affordability, allowing artists to shoot, edit, and distribute videos swiftly and with minimal resources. Sani Khan, Aaqib Butt, and TakrarYattoo explain that the technological leap in Smartphone camera quality – such as higher megapixels, image stabilization, and advanced editing apps – has led to a paradigm shift in how visual stories are created and shared. According to them;

The use of mobile devices for filmmaking has become increasingly popular in recent years, especially with the advancements in mobile technology. Smartphones and

tablets have evolved to feature high-quality cameras, powerful processors, and sophisticated video editing software. This has made them a convenient and cost-effective alternative to traditional video cameras for content creators especially those who produce vlogs, short films, or other types of video content online. (885)

This shift is particularly significant within the Nigerian creative industry where filmmakers and content creators often grapple with balancing quality and convenience, especially when working within resource constraints or in fast-paced production environments. Hence, while conventional filmmakers like Biyi Bandele seeks to preserve high production standards and aesthetic quality through the use of traditional professional equipment to craft cinematic works, experimentalists like Oladipo O’Fresh leverage Smartphone technology to experiment and innovate while emphasizing immediacy and accessibility. This study therefore examines how the industry evolves, how modern technology impacts on the growth of Nollywood, and individual narrative patterns using Bandele’s *Elesin Oba: the King’s Horseman* (2022) and O’Fresh’s *Sabbath* (2024) as paradigm..

Statement of the Problem

While technological innovations have made film production more accessible, concerns persist regarding the trade-offs between convenience and quality. Some

critics argue that Smartphone lack the technical capabilities necessary for high-end cinematic production, such as superior image resolution, dynamic range, and control over aesthetic elements like lighting and focus. Consequently, there is a perception that pictures produced with Smartphone may be of inferior quality, potentially affecting their artistic value and audience reception. Conversely, proponents of Smartphone cinematography emphasize the practical benefits – speed, affordability, and ease of use – especially in environments where traditional equipment is impractical, unavailable or unaffordable. They suggest that technological advancements have minimized quality gaps and that creative storytelling can compensate for technical limitations. In the context of the Nigerian film industry, this debate is further complicated by resource constraints, cultural considerations, and the desire to reach wider audiences rapidly.

Despite the necessity such scholarly discourse, there is limited empirical research assessing how these technological choices influence the artistic and cultural impact of Nollywood films. This gap raises critical questions: Does reliance on Smartphone diminish the artistic quality or does it enhance storytelling accessibility and immediacy? How do these choices affect audience perceptions and critical evaluations of Nigerian cinematic works? This study therefore seeks to

address these issues by examining the technological, artistic, and cultural implications of digital camera and Smartphone as cinematic tools in the production of *Elesin Oba ... and Sabbath*.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative comparative methodology. Two Nollywood films were selected using the purposive sampling method. Whereas one is shot with a digital camera, the other was produced using a Smartphone. The selection provided the basis for a comparative study. Content analysis of case study films provided qualitative data for the study. Additional data were also gathered using interview as a qualitative instrument. Library and the Internet served as secondary sources of data gathering.

Theoretical Framework: Marshal McLuhan's Technological Determinism Theory

The theoretical underpinning of this study is Marshal McLuhan's Technological Determinism Theory, which posits that technology shapes and determines societal structures, cultural practices, and human behaviors. McLuhan's famous assertions that "the medium is the message," and "the world is a global village" underline his theoretical postulation as they point to technology as the main determinant to world's advancement. The theory emphasizes the idea that the technology of the

media influence how societies communicate and perceive the world. Khan, Butt and Yattoo hold that McLuhan posited that every significant technological advancement spark a desire for exploration, often leading to experimentation with the medium itself, sometimes at the expense of content (886). The scholars further aver that “the contemporary age of science and technology has provided mankind with numerous avenues for expression facilitated by the rapid evolution of media platforms for sharing images. Social media giants like Instagram, Facebook, and Sina Weibo have become integral parts of people's lives, serving as new mediums for communication” (886). The theory’s core argument is that technology is the bedrock of social and cultural change. It posits that advancements in technology shape how people think, act, and organize things, and that society adapts to new tools available to it. A key idea is that technology develops along an inevitable course that directly influences historical progress.

This theory is directly linked to cinema in general, digital filmmaking in particular and the adoption of Smartphone as a filmmaking tool specifically. According to Işıkman,

Cinema, which is in absolute relation with technology, constantly renewed and improved itself with new technological developments within the historical

development process, and it has passed through many stages thanks to technological developments. Sound, color, and three-dimension in cinema narration are the results of technological developments. Besides digitization begun at the end of the 20th century and have made great progress in the early 21st century has also affected and will continue to influence the cinema as an art form. In the digital era, the equipment needed for audiovisual records have become much smaller, lighter and cheaper and therefore more accessible. Likewise, it has become much easier to edit these records and get them ready for broadcasting by means of digital systems including internet. Moreover, the availability of possibilities to copy these records easily and to publish them on the internet provides easy access to viewers. Therefore the recent informatics and communication technologies have rendered possible the production, distribution and the consumption of media contents for broader parts of the society. (97)

The central message here is that technology is the key driver of social, economic, cultural and political transformation. It argues that new media and technologies alter how individuals interact and communicate, and how society operates as a whole. Technology is in fact, according to the theory, the life wire of the society because prevalent innovations, at any point in history, determine how people communicate and

ultimately survive their environment. Using satellite as an example Danai Fasouli illustrates how technology propels social change. According to him;

There was a time were the programming for cable TV systems was limited to off the air pickups from nearby broadcast stations and to programs imported by microwave from more distant stations. The variety of programs available to cable subscribers in the more populous metropolitan areas was not much greater than could be received off-the-air from local stations; and cable had little appeal in these areas. It was once a distant dream found only in sci-fi books. But for over half a century, satellite television pictures are now beamed into millions of homes around the world. We have already celebrated the half-century anniversary of the first public satellite television broadcast across the Atlantic from the United States to Britain and mainland Europe. The transmissions using a space satellite launched into orbit revolutionised popular entertainment and sparked an explosion in technological development.

(2)

Akin to the transformations in broadcast communication propelled by satellite, digital technology continues to revolutionize filmmaking. Apart from the camera which constantly benefits from technological upgrades, the mobile phone has also felt the wave of the technological revolution blowing across the digital communication

terrain. Today, the Smartphone has become an alternative filmmaking tool used by both Nigerian and foreign filmmakers. Although a welcome development, owing to its contribution to the democratization of film production, media/performing arts, and social media content creation as a whole, it stirs debate bordering on quality, convenience and expertise.

In the context of videography/cinematography, McLuhan's theory suggests that the evolution of motion picture capture devices – moving from traditional film camera to digital camera and the Smartphone – has fundamentally transformed storytelling, production practices, and audience engagement. The emergence of the Smartphone as a primary production tool exemplifies how technological shifts can democratize media production, influencing cultural expression and consumption patterns. Furthermore, McLuhan's notion of "media extension" – where technology extends human senses – applies directly to video devices. Digital camera and Smartphone extend the filmmaker's capacity to capture reality, shaping the aesthetic and narrative possibilities of visual storytelling (Khan, Butt and Yattoo 887). This theory provides a lens to analyzing how technological innovations influence industry standards, artistic choices, and the democratization of video/film production.

Literature Review: Evolution of the Camera, Technological Revolution and the Emergence of Smartphone as Alternative Motion Picture Capture Device

The history of camera technology reveals a trajectory marked by continuous innovation aimed at improving image quality, ease of use, and cost-efficiency. The earliest cameras were large, cumbersome, and required extensive technical knowledge, limiting access to a select few (Thompson and Bordwell 9). The invention of the camera was purely born out of scientific experimentations. Charles Okwuowulu explains that “the birth of film leans on the representation of dramatic images on a recordable playback device. The origin of early photography dates back to 1826; to a French man called Nicephore Niepce who captured temporary images on a metal plate with a device known as camera obscura” (64). Interest in motion picture later grew after the camera obscura was used by many to record still images over the years.

The advent of film cameras in the early 20th century brought higher resolution and cinematic quality but remained expensive and technically demanding. The 1980s and 1990s saw the emergence of digital video cameras, replacing film with electronic sensors that allowed easier editing and distribution. Digital cameras rapidly improved in resolution, color quality, and

portability, making high-quality video production accessible to a broader audience. The development of high-definition (HD) and 4K cameras further elevated production standards, bringing cinema-quality visuals to mainstream markets. These technological advancements also led to the proliferation of independent filmmaking, as filmmakers could produce professional-looking content with relatively modest investments (Ilukwe 81). Ekwuazi further states that “the relatively short distance between the disappearance of the reversal and the appearance of the home video is paved with economic indicators which paint in bold relief the potential economic – cum – artistic viability of the video” (“Nollywood: History as Economic Determinism ...” 138). Video has been a modest alternative to cine equipments, not just in Nigeria but also in America where film first blossomed. Thompson and Bordwell affirm that;

The videocassette recorder also helped the film industry to new profits. Japan’s Sony corporation began marketing the Betamax home machine in 1975, and Matsushita introduced its Video Home System (VHS) soon after. Home Video expanded rapidly throughout the world; by 1988, most U.S households had a VCR. (Thompson and Bordwell 702)

As technology advance, there are clearer transitions from analogue to digital production, a development that

has revolutionized the industry, significantly reducing costs and production time. The technological transformation also facilitated the rise of online streaming platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Telegram, Netflix, Showmax, IrokoTV, FilmHouse, and Nollyland, which become digital film marketplaces (Ilukwe 78; 86).

The technological revolution in mobile devices has radically altered the landscape of film production. Smartphone cameras, once rudimentary, have evolved into tools capable of capturing high-resolution images and videos comparable to professional digital cameras. Features such as optical image stabilization, autofocus, HDR, and 4K recording have made Smartphone a viable alternative tool for film production. Işıkman affirms that Smartphone has democratized media production by lowering barriers to entry, enabling anyone with a mobile device to create and disseminate visual content. More so, persons with fundamental knowledge of filmmaking can turn their phones into a film recording device, shooting scenes and packing films without the constraints of standard equipment (98 – 99).

The proliferation of editing applications and social media platforms has further empowered users to produce polished videos with minimal technical expertise. Gourav Gill and Rahul Tiwari affirm that;

The advent of digital photography, the quick evolution in data storage that followed, and the growth of the internet set the way for the era of digital film making. This change is being observed by us. It is noteworthy that film specialists from all over the world have been adjusting to the changes. Newer generation prospective filmmakers must be up to date on the most recent advances and should be knowledgeable of the numerous stages the filmmaking medium has undergone over the last 100 to 150 years. The majority of industry professionals believe that the current digital era is one of the most significant changes the film industry has experienced to yet. To draw viewers and advance the industry, new tools must be used. (233)

This shift has led to new production paradigms, including mobile journalism, viral content creation, and documentary filmmaking that leverage the convenience and immediacy of the Smartphone, emphasizing the device's role in authentic, accessible storytelling.

However, the emergence of Smartphone as an alternative cost-effective cinematographic tool has also sparked debates about quality standards, artistic integrity, and the future of professional filmmaking. Critics argue that while Smartphone enhance accessibility, they may compromise on technical quality, aesthetic depth, and cinematic storytelling. Conversely, supporters contend that technological innovation blurs the boundaries

between amateur and professional, fostering new creative possibilities (Khan, Butt and Yattoo 889). Despite the ideological and scholarly contentions, the Smartphone has become part of the technological revolution that continues to reshape the film industry, challenging traditional notions of quality, professionalism, and artistic expression.

Synopsis of *Elesin Oba: The King's Horseman and Sabbath*

Biya Bandele's adaptation of Wole Soyinka's play, *Elesin Oba: The King's Horseman*, serves as a poignant introspection into the complexities of tradition, culture, and the facade of societal norms. The story revolves around Elesin Oba, a eunuch and the King's horseman, who, bound by tradition and duty, must commit ritual suicide upon his king's death. This act is a testament to the cultural values of the Yoruba people, where loyalty and duty to one's king supersede personal desires and aspirations. Bandele's adaptation brings forth a nuanced exploration of human nature, revealing the tensions between tradition and personal freedom, as well as the societal pressures that can dictate the course of a person's life. The conflict of the story is pitched in Pilkings, the British colonial officer's refusal to allow tradition prevail by letting Elesin to fulfilling the ritual

of transition which entails committing suicide in order to accompany the Oba to the great beyond.

Sabbath, directed by Oladipo O'Fresh, is a thought-provoking film that delves into the complexities of power, corruption, and the religious institution. The story revolves around Iretomiwa Martins, a charismatic church leader who unexpectedly becomes the General Overseer of the Church of Nations. His rise to power is meteoric, and his ministry initially flourishes, drawing large crowds and capturing the hearts of the congregation. However, as the story unfolds, it becomes clear that Iretomiwa's ascension was facilitated by unseen forces and hidden motivations, leading to a web of deceit and corruption that threatens to destroy the very foundations of the church. Through *Sabbath*, O'Fresh offers a scathing critique of the excesses of the religious establishment, highlighting the dangers of unchecked power and the exploitation of religious fervor.

Analysis of the Cinematographic Techniques in the Case Study Films

The cinematographic techniques in the films is a vital component of understanding the broader discourse on film artistry, cultural representation, and the role of visual storytelling in conveying complex narratives. This discourse elucidates how technical choices in cinematography such as camera shots, angles,

movements, and their accompaniments like lighting, composition, color palette are not merely aesthetic decisions but integral to the storytelling process that enhances cultural authenticity and emotional engagement.

Elesin Oba: The King's Horseman, is a visually engaging film that employs a range of cinematographic techniques to bring the Yoruba culture to life. The film's cinematography is a crucial aspect of its narrative, working in tandem with the story to evoke a sense of tradition, ritual, and cultural identity. The composition and framing in the film are noteworthy, as Bandele uses the camera to create a sense of ritual and tradition. Long takes and static shots are used to emphasize cultural motifs, create a sense of stillness and quiet contemplation, while rapid cuts and dynamic framing are used to convey the chaos and disorder that arises from the clash of cultural values and personal desires in the film. For example, during the sequence where Elesin Oba is preparing for his ritual suicide, the camera lingers on his face, emphasizing his introspection and emotional turmoil.

Camera angles and movement are utilized to create a sense of drama and tension. Low-angle shots and dynamic camera movements are used to convey the sense of ritual and tradition, while high-angle shots and static camera positions are used to create a sense of

detachment and objectivity. For example, during the sequence where Elesin Oba is being led to his ritual suicide, low-angle shots are used to emphasize cultural significance while heightening tension:



Plate 1: Elesin Oba dances and celebrates as he prepares for the ritual sacrifice.

The picture quality projects the splendor, vitality, and richness of the Yoruba and by extension African culture. Costume, music, and dance which are cultural markers of the Yoruba nation are given emphasis through shot composition as shown above. The use of lighting, color palette, camera angles and movement all work together to create a rich and immersive visual experience that underscores the cultural significance of the Yoruba people thus underscoring the importance of visual language in conveying complex cultural stories and advancing the artistic integrity of African cinema.

In the broader context of the discourse, cinematography acts as a bridge between the narrative's thematic depth

and the audience's visual perception. By employing specific techniques, Bandele emphasizes the cultural rituals, traditional values, and emotional states of characters, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of Yoruba cultural identity. This aligns with the broader study of how visual elements can reinforce or challenge cultural paradigms within film. Furthermore, the cinematographic techniques adopted situate the film within the larger framework of African cinema, which increasingly leverages visual storytelling to assert cultural sovereignty and challenge Western cinematic dominance. The use of natural lighting, earthy color palettes, and deliberate framing reflects a conscious effort to portray indigenous aesthetics authentically, contributing to the discourse on decolonizing African narratives through film.

O'Fresh's *Sabbath* employs a distinctive array of cinematographic techniques that contribute significantly to its thematic depth and visual storytelling. The film's cinematography captures the raw emotion, social commentary, and cultural nuances that underpin the narrative. Meticulous composition and framing guide viewers' focus and evoke emotional responses in the film. Symmetrical framing is used in scenes depicting community gatherings, emphasizing social cohesion, while asymmetrical compositions highlight moments of conflict or disorder. Close-ups are frequently employed

to capture raw emotional expressions, creating intimacy between characters and viewers. Wide shots, on the other hand, are used to showcase the environment and social settings, grounding the narrative within its cultural context as shown below:



Plate 2: Worshippers singing the “I Surrender All” hymn in church as Iretinonwa kneels before the pastor to show total surrender.

Here framing is employed to convey the mood and atmosphere. The film’s color palette is predominantly muted and earthy, with tones of brown, green, and gray dominating the scenes. This choice reinforces the themes of religion, decay, and social stagnation. Occasionally, vibrant colors are used selectively to symbolize moments of hope or religious renaissance. The restrained palette helps to create a somber, reflective mood that underscores the social commentary embedded in the narrative.

O'Fresh employs a variety of camera angles and movements to enhance the storytelling. Low-angle shots are used to depict authority and power dynamics, especially in scenes involving social or political figures. Conversely, high-angle shots often portray vulnerability or social marginalization. The use of handheld camera work during tense or confrontational scenes adds a sense of immediacy and realism, immersing viewers into the characters' experiences. Smooth tracking shots are employed during moments of reflection or community gathering, emphasizing collective identity. Selective focus and depth of field are used to highlight specific characters or objects, directing viewers' attention to critical narrative elements. For example, isolating a character in sharp focus against a blurred background emphasizes their emotional state or importance in the scene, reinforcing the film's thematic concerns about individual agency within social structures.

The cinematographic techniques in O'Fresh's *Sabbath* work synergistically to deepen the narrative and evoke emotional engagement. The deliberate use of lighting, composition, color, camera angles, and focus not only enhances the visual aesthetic but also underscores the social and cultural themes explored in the film. This technical mastery contributes to the film's overall impact, making it a compelling example of how cinematography can serve as a powerful tool in

storytelling. O'Fresh's use of Smartphone for filming highlights an innovative approach to cinematography that challenges traditional notions of cinematic technology. This choice significantly impacts the execution and aesthetic of the film's cinematographic techniques.

Furthermore, the adoption of Smartphone for the shoot demonstrates how accessible, portable technology can be harnessed to achieve a cinematic quality that aligns with the film's thematic concerns of authenticity, immediacy, and social realism. Smartphone's capabilities; such as its mobility, ease of use, and ability to shoot in various lighting conditions, allowed for spontaneous, intimate, and unobtrusive shots, which are evident in the film's naturalistic lighting and candid framing. It also influenced the composition and movement. With its lightweight design, O'Fresh deployed dynamic camera angles, handheld shots, and quick repositioning, contributing to the film's visceral realism and emotional immediacy. This flexibility enhanced the use of close-ups and selective focus, enabling the filmmaker to capture raw emotions and social nuances effectively. Furthermore, the limited depth of field and the unique lens options available to mobile devices fostered a distinctive visual style evident in *Sabbath*.

In essence, O'Fresh's innovative use of Smartphone underscores a broader trend in contemporary

filmmaking, where technological accessibility democratizes film production and allows for more authentic, culturally embedded storytelling. It exemplifies how cinematographic techniques such as natural lighting, composition, and camera movement can be effectively achieved through non-traditional tools, thereby expanding the creative possibilities for filmmakers working within resource constraints or aiming for a raw, unfiltered visual style. This approach aligns with the film's thematic emphasis on social realities and collective identity, emphasizing that impactful storytelling is not solely dependent on high-end equipment but rather on creativity and deliberate technical choices. O'Fresh's *Sabbath* is a testament to the evolving landscape of cinematography, demonstrating that innovative techniques can produce compelling visual narratives aligned with the film's artistic and thematic intentions.

Comparative Analysis of the Production Quality in *Elesin Oba ...* and *Sabbath*

The production quality of a film significantly influences its visual impact and audience perception. In examining *Elesin Oba ...* and *Sabbath*, it becomes evident that their differing approaches to filmmaking – conventional versus experimental – produce markedly different outcomes in picture quality, which in turn reflect their respective technical and artistic philosophies.

Elesin Oba ..., directed with a more conventional methodology, utilizes digital cameras and sophisticated filmmaking equipment. This approach allows for higher resolution, better control over lighting, color grading, and overall image clarity. Consequently, the picture quality is sharp, detailed, and polished, aligning with the standards of mainstream cinematic production. The technical investment in high-end equipment results in a visually crisp and immersive viewing experience, suitable for capturing intricate details of costumes, set design, and facial expressions, which are crucial for storytelling in cultural and historical contexts.

In contrast, O'Fresh's *Sabbath* employed an entirely different methodology, relying on a Smartphone – specifically an iPhone 15 Pro Max, according to data gathered through an interview with the filmmaker. This choice reflects an experimental and resource-efficient filmmaking practice, emphasizing authenticity, immediacy, and social realism over technical perfection. The inherent limitations of Smartphone cameras, such as lower resolution and reduced control over image quality, are evident in the comparatively softer and grainier visuals of *Sabbath*. However, these qualities contribute to the film's raw aesthetic, intensifying its thematic focus on everyday life and social realities.

O'Fresh's deliberate adoption of a Smartphone for production underscores a philosophical departure from

conventional filmmaking. He explained during an interviewer with the researchers that this approach provides him with greater flexibility and creative freedom. According to him, using a Smartphone allows him to be more spontaneous and experimental, adding that he can shoot in real environments without the intimidating presence of bulky equipment, which makes filmmaking more flexible and economically viable for him (online interview). Furthermore, O’Fresh explained that he undertook specific research and training on the use of Apple-enabled Apps and software for film production. These skills enable him to enhance image quality through post-production editing, color correction, and stabilization, thereby maximizing the potential of his mobile device.

The difference in production quality between the two films manifests not only in resolution but also in the overall aesthetic and narrative tone. *Elesin Oba ...*’s high production value creates a more formal, polished visual experience, aligning with its traditional storytelling approach. Conversely, *Sabbath*’s experimental visual style fosters an intimate, immediate connection with viewers, emphasizing social realism and experimentation as shown in the plate below:

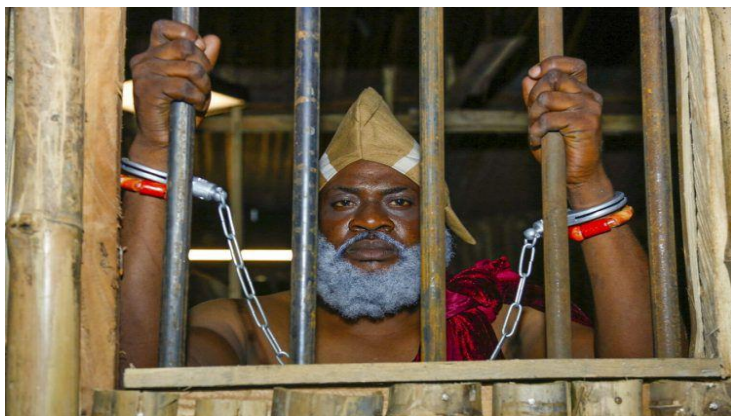


Plate 3: Scenes from *Elesin Oba ...* and *Sabbath* respectively.

This comparative analysis underscores how technological choices influence filmmaking outcomes. While *Elesin Oba...* benefits from advanced equipment and a conventional approach to achieve high technical

quality, *Sabbath* leverages the flexibility of Smartphone filmmaking, supported by targeted training and research, to produce distinct aesthetics that complement its thematic objectives.

Both approaches demonstrate valid artistic and practical philosophies. The choice of technology – whether sophisticated or flexible – shapes not only the visual quality but also the narrative style and emotional engagement of the audience. O’Fresh’s innovative use of Smartphone technology exemplifies how experimental techniques, supported by research and skill development, can produce compelling cinema outside conventional paradigms.

Summary of Findings, Recommendations, and Conclusion

This study has provided a comprehensive comparison of two distinct filmmaking approaches in Nigerian cinema – namely, the conventional, professional method exemplified by *Elesin Oba: The King’s Horseman*, and the experimental, resourceful approach demonstrated by *Sabbath*. The core findings reveal significant insights into how technological tools influence production quality, artistic expression, and cultural representation.

The study found that the two films adopted unique technological approaches which yielded unique Outcomes. *Elesin Oba* was produced using high-end

digital cameras and sophisticated filmmaking equipment, which facilitated the achievement of high technical standards. The resultant visuals exhibit sharp resolution, vibrant colors, controlled lighting, and detailed framing, all contributing to a polished cinematic aesthetic. These technical qualities align with industry standards for professional filmmaking and are instrumental in conveying cultural rituals, traditional values, and emotional nuances effectively.

In contrast, *Sabbath* was shot primarily using an iPhone 15 Pro Max. This choice reflects an experimental and resource-conscious approach that emphasizes spontaneity, authenticity, and social realism. The visuals are softer, with a grainier texture, and may lack the crispness associated with high-end equipment. However, these visual characteristics serve an artistic purpose – they evoke intimacy, immediacy, and a raw depiction of social realities. The deliberate aesthetic reinforces the film’s thematic focus on authenticity, community life, and cultural resilience.

The study also found that filmmaker perspectives and technical mastery shaped the two films analyzed in this study. O’Fresh’s interview reveals that his decision to use a Smartphone was motivated by the desire for flexibility, experimentation, and immediacy. He emphasizes that with targeted training on Apps and post-production software, image quality, color grading, and

stabilization can be enhanced, effectively bridging the perceived quality gap. This indicates that technical limitations of Smartphone can be mitigated through skillful post-production work, challenging traditional notions that only expensive equipment guarantees cinematic quality.

The study further observed that filmmaking approach impacts on artistic and cultural narratives. The contrasting approaches highlight that technological choices are intertwined with artistic intent and cultural storytelling. *Elesin Oba ...*'s high production values reinforce its formal, traditional aesthetic, aligning with a cultural preservation narrative. Conversely, *Sabbath*'s looser aesthetic and mobile filmmaking techniques support its themes of social realism, immediacy, and grassroots storytelling, thus democratizing cinematic expression.

These findings have broader theoretical implications. They support McLuhan's Technological Determinism Theory, which suggests that technology shapes societal and cultural practices. The evolution from traditional film camera to Smartphone exemplifies this phenomenon, influencing how stories are told, who can tell them, and how audiences engage with visual content. The proliferation of affordable mobile devices has lowered barriers to entry, enabling a more diverse range

of voices, especially from resource-constrained environments.

Based on the findings of this study, the study therefore recommends the following:

Need to Encourage Technological Diversification and Skill Development: Filmmakers should be encouraged to embrace both high-end equipment and innovative mobile cinematography techniques. Training programs and workshops should be expanded to include modules on Smartphone filmmaking, post-production editing, color correction, stabilization, and sound integration using accessible tools and applications. Such capacity-building initiatives will empower filmmakers to exploit the full potential of affordable technology, thereby democratizing film production and broadening creative horizons.

Promotion of Hybrid Production Models: Industry practitioners should consider adopting hybrid production approaches that combine the strengths of traditional cinematic equipment with the flexibility and immediacy of the Smartphone. For instance, high-budget productions can utilize professional cameras for scenes requiring high resolution and aesthetic finesse, while leveraging Smartphone for spontaneous, social documentary segments or logistical convenience. This

integrated approach can optimize resource allocation, enhance storytelling diversity, and foster innovation.

Call to Revise Industry Standards and Accreditation: Industry regulators and film certification bodies should revisit standards to recognize and validate the artistic and cultural legitimacy of films produced with Smartphone and other low-cost devices. This includes developing guidelines that focus on creative storytelling, technical competence, and cultural authenticity rather than solely on equipment specifications. Such recognition will encourage emerging filmmakers to experiment without fear of being marginalized for their choice of technology.

Foster a Culture of Research and Innovation: Academic institutions, research organizations, and industry bodies should collaborate to conduct ongoing research on the evolving role of technology in filmmaking. This includes exploring how emerging tools such as AI-powered editing, 4K Smartphone, and affordable stabilizers can enhance production quality. Additionally, case studies and best practices should be documented and disseminated to inspire innovative approaches within the industry.

Need to Support Policy Frameworks for Resource-Constrained Filmmakers: Policymakers should prioritize policies that facilitate access to affordable filmmaking technologies, training, and distribution channels.

Establishing grants, subsidies, and equipment leasing schemes for small-scale filmmakers will help mitigate resource constraints and foster grassroots creativity. Such support will ensure that technological democratization translates into meaningful artistic and cultural expression.

Cultivate a Discourse on Artistic Standards and Innovation: Industry forums, film festivals, and academic conferences should serve as platforms for dialogue on the evolving standards of cinematic quality, artistic expression, and technological innovation. Such discourses will help redefine perceptions of professionalism, emphasizing creativity, cultural relevance, and emotional impact over equipment specifications.

Need to Recognize and Celebrate Diverse Filmmaking Approaches: Finally, the industry should establish awards, festivals, and platforms that celebrate both polished, high-budget productions and raw, socially realistic works produced with Smartphone. Recognizing diverse aesthetic styles will foster an inclusive environment that values artistic innovation, cultural authenticity, and technical experimentation equally.

These recommendations advocate for a balanced and inclusive approach to technological adoption in Nigerian filmmaking. By fostering skill development, redefining

industry standards, and promoting innovation and cultural authenticity, stakeholders can ensure that Nigerian cinema continues to thrive as a dynamic, diverse, and globally relevant art form. On the whole, the study illustrates that technological choices are not merely technical decisions but strategic artistic tools that influence the narrative, aesthetic, and cultural dimensions of filmmaking. Both approaches – conventional and experimental – are valid and contribute uniquely to the richness of Nigerian cinema.

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Filmography

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