# Cinematic Soft Power, Media Literacy and Cultural Diplomacy: A Comparative Analysis of the Influence of Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood on Public Perceptions and Policy Formation

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**Abstract**

This article examines the multifaceted role of cinema as an instrument of cultural diplomacy, focusing on three prominent film industries: Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood. Drawing on Soft Power Theory, Cultural Imperialism Theory and Transnationalism Theory, the study explores how these cinematic sectors project national cultural identities and values to global audiences, thereby influencing public perceptions and policy decisions. In addition, the research incorporates the concept of media literacy – the capacity to critically access, analyse and evaluate media messages – to assess how informed audiences engage with cinematic narratives and deconstruct underlying ideological messages. Through a comprehensive review of literature, film analyses and interviews with industry stakeholders, the study investigates the mechanisms through which these film industries promote intercultural dialogue, stimulate economic development and influence diplomatic engagements. The findings reveal that while Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood serve as potent soft power assets that facilitate cultural exchange and economic integration, they also raise critical questions regarding cultural homogenisation and the reinforcement of hegemonic narratives. This study underscores the importance of developing coherent cultural policies that support creative expression and robust media education, thereby preserving cultural diversity and authenticity in an increasingly globalised digital era.

**Keywords:** cultural diplomacy, soft power, transnationalism, film industries, cultural exchange, globalisation, Kannywood, Nollywood, Bollywood, media literacy.

## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, the global film industry has emerged as a powerful conduit for cultural diplomacy, transcending traditional political and economic channels to influence public perceptions and international policy. Among the myriad of cinematic traditions, the film industries of northern Nigeria and India – namely Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood – have garnered significant attention for their ability to project national cultural identities and values on the global stage (Abdullahi, 2017a; Bhattacharya, 2013). The film industries of Nigeria and India have been widely recognised as powerful vehicles for cultural diplomacy, both within and beyond their respective regions. Kannywood, Nollywood, the Hausa-language branch of Nigerian cinema and Bollywood, the Hindi-language sector of Indian cinema, have produced films that reflect, impact and challenge the social, political and religious realities of their audiences (Abdullahi, 2017a; Bhattacharya, 2013).

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This article explores how these film industries have engaged in cultural diplomacy through their representations of identity, values, norms and interactions with other actors and institutions. The article also examines how these film industries have influenced policy-making at the national and international levels, especially about issues such as human rights, gender equality and intercultural dialogue. The article argues that Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood have not only contributed to the promotion of their own cultures but also to the development of mutual understanding and cooperation among diverse communities.

Historically, the evolution of these film industries has been influenced by diverse socio-cultural and political forces. Kannywood, the Hausa-language film sector based in northern Nigeria, emerged in the 1990s in response to the growing demand for culturally pertinent entertainment among Hausa speakers. Its productions reflect Islamic values, social mores and the lived experiences of northern Nigerians, addressing issues such as poverty, corruption, education and women's rights (Musa-Olomu, Olomu-Bello, 2019). Nollywood, in contrast, has expanded rapidly since its inception in the early 1990s, producing films in English and several local languages. With an annual output that exceeds 2,000 films, Nollywood has become emblematic of the creative dynamism and resilience of Nigeria, disseminating narratives that encapsulate the multifarious dimensions of Nigerian society (Okome, Haynes, 2016). Bollywood, the Hindi-language film industry based in Mumbai, boasts a cinematic heritage that dates back to the early twentieth century. Renowned for its elaborate musical sequences, colourful costumes and star-studded productions, Bollywood not only entertains but also projects the cultural richness and modern dynamism of India to a global audience (Adamu, 2007; Haynes, 2016).

The integration of these film industries into the fabric of international cultural diplomacy is underpinned by the strategic deployment of soft power. Nye's (Nye, 2004) conceptualisation of soft power offers a compelling framework for understanding how non-coercive instruments such as film can influence the perceptions of foreign publics and, by extension, influence policy decisions. While soft power emphasises attraction and cultural appeal, the Cultural Imperialism Theory serves as a critical counterpoint, urging a cautious examination of how dominant cultural narratives might be propagated through cinematic productions (Schiller, 1976; Tomlinson, 1991). Furthermore, the Transnationalism Theory elucidates the processes by which cultural products traverse national boundaries, engendering transnational dialogues and promoting global interconnectedness (Vertovec, 1999; Appadurai, 1996).

However, in today's globalised media landscape, the ability to critically engage with and interpret film narratives is of paramount importance. Hence, this article argues for the incorporation of media literacy into the research. Media literacy, defined as the capacity to access, analyse, evaluate and create media messages (Buckingham, 2003; Hobbs, 2010), is increasingly recognised as a key competency for audiences exploring the complex world of cinematic soft power. As Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood project powerful cultural narratives and influence international perceptions, the need for robust media education becomes evident. This article not only explores how these film industries serve as instruments of cultural diplomacy but also examines the role of media literacy in empowering viewers to interrogate these narratives critically. By doing so, it aims to bridge the gap between passive media consumption and active cultural interpretation, ensuring that audiences are better equipped to discern ideological underpinnings and engage in informed intercultural dialogue.

The significance of this study is multifaceted. On one level, it addresses the developing role of film as a tool for cultural diplomacy in an increasingly interconnected and digitalised global environment. The capacity of Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood to reach diverse audiences has implications for how cultural values are transmitted and received and for how national identities are reconstructed in a global context. On another level, the study provides an understanding of the economic and political dimensions of cultural exchange. For instance, the influence of Nollywood on tourism and trade policies, as well as the reciprocal cultural impact between Bollywood and African audiences, exemplifies how cinema can catalyse economic integration and diplomatic dialogue (Thussu, 2013; Ibrahim, 2019).

Moreover, this analysis recognises that the soft power potential of film is not without its challenges. Censorship, cultural homogenisation and the reinforcement of hegemonic narratives are persistent concerns that warrant critical scrutiny. As cultural products explore complex transnational networks, the relationship between local authenticity and global appeal becomes a delicate balancing act. In this regard, policymakers and cultural practitioners are urged to develop

strategies that not only harness the soft power of cinema but also safeguard the diversity and plurality of cultural expressions.

This article seeks to explore how these film industries function as soft power ambassadors, using cinematic narratives to promote cultural exchange, enhance national image and media literacy, and stimulate diplomatic engagement across regions. The analysis is grounded in the Soft Power Theory (Nye, 2004), which posits that cultural attraction and the dissemination of values can yield influence without coercion. Complementing this perspective are Cultural Imperialism Theory (Schiller, 1976; Tomlinson, 1991), which critically examines the risks of dominant cultural narratives overshadowing local voices and Transnationalism Theory (Vertovec, 1999; Appadurai, 1996), which illuminates the fluid and border-transcending nature of cultural exchanges in a globalised world.

To support our argument, we first provide a brief overview of the concepts of cultural diplomacy and the orange economy and how they relate to the film industry (e.g., Inter-American Development Bank, 2013) in addition to the concept of media literacy. Then, we analyse relevant theoretical underpinnings and review the extant literature. These are followed by the historical and contemporary contexts of Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood, highlighting their similarities and differences in terms of production, distribution and reception. Next, we analyse some examples of films from both industries that illustrate their roles in cultural diplomacy, focusing on themes such as identity formation, cultural diversity, social justice and global citizenship. Finally, the article offers some recommendations on how to enhance the potential of Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood as agents of cultural diplomacy and drivers of the orange economy in Africa and Asia.

*Understanding Key Concept: Cultural Diplomacy* – Cultural diplomacy is defined as "the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples to promote mutual understanding" (Cummings, 2003: 1). It is a form of soft power that aims to influence the attitudes and behaviours of foreign audiences through cultural expressions such as music, literature, sports and film. Cultural diplomacy can be conducted by various actors such as governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society groups, media outlets and individuals (Adejunmobi, 2007; Balogun, 2010). It can also take various forms such as cultural festivals, exchange programmes, educational initiatives and public diplomacy campaigns (Ekwuazi, 2014). Cultural diplomacy can serve different purposes, such as promoting national interests, enhancing international cooperation, resolving conflicts or advancing human rights (Larkin, 2008; Musa-Olomu, Olomu-Bello, 2019).

Some examples of cultural diplomacy through film are:
– The Nigerian Film Corporation (NFC) organises the Zuma Film Festival every year to highlight Nigerian films to local and international audiences. The festival also provides a platform for networking, training and collaboration among filmmakers from Nigeria and other countries (NFC, 2021).
– The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) sponsors film festivals in various countries to promote Indian culture and values. The ICCR also supports Indian filmmakers in participating in international film festivals and awards. For instance, in 2019, the ICCR sponsored the participation of 12 Indian films in the Cairo International Film Festival (ICCR, 2019).
– The African Film Festival (AFF) is a non-profit organisation based in New York that promotes African cinema in the United States and beyond. The AFF organises screenings, workshops, panel discussions and exhibitions to highlight the diversity and creativity of African filmmakers. The AFF also supports the distribution and preservation of African films (AFF, 2021).

The orange economy is a term coined by the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) to refer to "the set of activities that allow ideas to be transformed into goods and services whose value is based on intellectual property" (IADB, 2013, p. 15). It includes sectors such as arts and culture, design, entertainment, media and software. The orange economy is considered a source of innovation, creativity and competitiveness that can generate economic growth, employment and social inclusion. According to the IADB (IADB, 2013), the orange economy accounted for 6.1 % of the GDP of Latin America in 2011, equivalent to USD 174 billion (USD = United States Dollars). The orange economy also has a significant impact on other sectors of the economy such as tourism, education and health.

*Soft Power:* Soft power is the ability of a country to influence the behaviour of other countries or actors through non-coercive means such as culture, values and ideology. Cinema is

one of the cultural resources that can be used to project soft power, as it can impact people's perceptions and preferences about a country (Afolabi et al., 2022; Nye, 2004). However, cinema is not a simple or direct representation of soft power, but rather an instrument whereby soft power is projected – a tool rather than a resource. This means that cinema is not necessarily created for political purposes, but it can have political effects by accident.

One way to understand soft power in film is to examine how cinema reflects and affects public opinion about a country. For example, a study by Guan et al. (Guan et al., 2023) compared the soft power sources and projections of the United States and China through an online survey with 908 participants in Brazil. They found that exposure to films from both countries can impact people's positive perceptions of them, but some dimensions of soft power are more challenging to activate than others, such as patriotic films' association with admiration for US military power. They also found that soft power activation may be context-dependent, with greater knowledge of the soft power resources of a country in a particular context leading to increased soft power projection/activation.

Another way to understand soft power in film is to analyse how cinema relates to the political goals and strategies of a country. For example, a paper by Rawnsley (Rawnsley, 2021) questioned the relevance of soft power as a political construct to cinema, especially in the case of China. He argued that Chinese cinema faces some problems and limitations in both projecting soft power and engaging in cultural outreach due to the blurred boundaries between political and non-political aspects of film production and distribution. He suggested that Chinese cinema should focus more on developing its own creative identity and diversity rather than trying to emulate Hollywood or promote a specific image of China.

*Media Literacy*: Media literacy is broadly defined as the capacity to access, analyse, evaluate, create and act upon information in various media formats, thereby empowering individuals to engage critically with the media environment (Buckingham, 2003: 42; Potter, 2004: 31). According to Buckingham (Buckingham, 2003: 42), "media literacy is not merely the ability to decode media messages but a critical skill set that enables individuals to understand and influence the media landscape." In a similar vein, Potter (Potter, 2004: 31) asserts that media literacy involves "the cognitive and socio-cultural skills necessary to interpret, evaluate and produce media messages in a manner that is both informed and reflective." Furthermore, Hobbs (Hobbs, 2010: 12) emphasises that in an era dominated by digital communications, media literacy is fundamental for promoting critical thinking and ensuring that citizens are equipped to participate actively in democratic discourse. Collectively, these definitions underscore that media literacy transcends basic consumption, serving as a vital tool for cultivating informed, critical and engaged audiences in a complex and evolving media environment.

*Theoretical Underpinning*: The most suitable theoretical underpinning for this study is Soft Power Theory, complemented by Cultural Imperialism Theory and Transnationalism Theory. Each of these theories provides a relevant framework for understanding the role of Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood in cultural diplomacy, and influencing perception and policy.

*1. Soft Power Theory by Joseph Nye, 1990*

Soft Power Theory is central to this study because it explains how cultural products – such as films – are used as non-coercive tools of influence in international relations. According to Nye (Nye, 2004), soft power refers to the ability of a country or entity to influence the preferences and perceptions of others through attraction rather than force. Films from Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood serve as vehicles for promoting national identity, values and socio-political narratives, thereby reinforcing cultural diplomacy. These film industries function as soft power instruments for Nigeria and India by promoting mutual understanding, challenging stereotypes and influencing global discourse on issues such as human rights, gender equality and interfaith relations.

*2. Cultural Imperialism Theory by Herbert Schiller, 1976*

While the Soft Power Theory highlights positive cultural exchange, the Cultural Imperialism Theory provides a critical framework to examine the potential dominance of one culture over another. Schiller (Schiller, 1976) argues that media – particularly films – can serve as tools of ideological control, influencing the perceptions of foreign audiences to align with the cultural and political values of the producing nations. This theory is relevant in assessing whether Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood films contribute to a balanced cultural exchange or whether they inadvertently impose certain socio-cultural narratives on audiences. The study can explore whether these film industries reinforce or resist Western cultural hegemony, especially given their roles in Africa and Asia.

*3. Transnationalism Theory by Steven Vertovec, 1999*

Transnationalism Theory is useful for understanding how films operate beyond national boundaries, promoting cultural connections among diaspora communities and influencing international policy discourses. This theory focuses on the movement of ideas, people and media across borders (Vertovec, 1999), which is critical in analysing how Bollywood, Kannywood, Nollywood films influence perceptions not only within Nigeria and India but also among global audiences (Abubakar, Dauda, 2019). Given that both industries have large followings in Africa, Asia and beyond, this perspective helps explain how films function as diplomatic tools and contribute to the global exchange of cultural identities.

A combination of Soft Power Theory, Cultural Imperialism Theory and Transnationalism Theory provides a comprehensive theoretical foundation for this study. Soft Power Theory explains the strategic role of films in diplomacy and perception management, Cultural Imperialism Theory offers a critique of cultural influence and dominance, while Transnationalism Theory highlights the fluid and border-crossing nature of film as a medium of cultural exchange. These theories collectively provide a robust framework for examining the impact of Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood in influencing public perceptions and influencing policy through cultural diplomacy.

*Issues, Controversies, Challenges and Perspectives: Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood as Soft Power Ambassadors* – The three film industries have emerged as formidable soft power ambassadors for their respective regions, adeptly projecting cultural identities and values to global audiences. Iconic cultural expressions such as Nollywood's "Naijawood" and the vibrant dance sequences of Bollywood illustrate how film serves as a potent instrument of soft power – a concept elaborated by Nye (Nye, 2004), who argues that a nation's cultural allure can influence global perceptions without recourse to coercion or military might. In this context, the film industry not only projects a nation's rich cultural heritage and creative dynamism (Guan et al., 2023; Ibrahim, 2019) but also promotes cultural exchange and dialogue across borders. However, alongside this capacity for attraction, the Cultural Imperialism Theory warns that such cultural exports may inadvertently propagate dominant narratives that reinforce stereotypical or hegemonic perspectives (Schiller, 1976; Tomlinson, 1991). Moreover, the transnational circulation of films highlights the relevance of the Transnationalism Theory, which elucidates how cultural products traverse geographical boundaries, engaging diverse diasporic audiences and thereby enriching global cultural discourses (Vertovec, 1999; Appadurai, 1996). In this regard, Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood stand out as salient soft power assets for Nigeria and India, respectively (Bertz, 2019; Ibrahim, 2019).

Kannywood, the Hausa-language film industry based in northern Nigeria, emerged in the 1990s as a response to the demand for culturally pertinent entertainment among Hausa speakers. Its films, which encapsulate Islamic values, norms and traditions while addressing salient social issues such as poverty, corruption, education and women's rights (Musa-Olomu, Olomu-Bello, 2019), have garnered a substantial following not only within Nigeria but also in neighbouring countries such as Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Ghana and Sudan. The widespread popularity of Kannywood and its celebrated actors and actresses reinforces its role as a soft power asset for Nigeria, promoting cultural diversity, identity and unity (Abubakar, Dauda, 2019). This phenomenon further corroborates the Transnationalism Theory, which posits that culturally specific media can transcend national confines and resonate with a broader, cross-border audience (Vertovec, 1999).

Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry that produces films in English and various indigenous languages, including Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa and Pidgin, is recognised as one of the most prolific film industries globally, with an annual output exceeding 2,000 films (Abubakar, Dauda, 2019). Nollywood films, which are widely distributed and consumed across Africa as well as in Europe, America, Asia and Australia (Okome, Haynes, 2016), provide multifaceted portrayals of Nigerian society, culture, politics, religion and history. They skilfully blend genres – ranging from comedy and drama to romance, action and thriller – and address contemporary challenges such as HIV/AIDS, human trafficking, terrorism, corruption and democracy. In doing so, Nollywood serves as an influential soft power asset for Nigeria by highlighting its creativity, innovation, resilience and diversity, while also inviting critical reflection on the challenges of cultural representation (Abubakar, Dauda, 2019) that may sometimes align with hegemonic influences as cautioned by Cultural Imperialism Theory (Schiller, 1976).

Bollywood, the Hindi-language film industry based in Mumbai, India, is arguably the most influential cinematic tradition in the country and one of the largest in the world. Bollywood films,

renowned for their musical interludes, colourful costumes, glamorous stars and melodramatic narratives (Adamu, 2007; Haynes, 2016), appeal to a vast and diverse audience across South Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Europe. The Indian film industry not only encapsulates India's cultural richness, history, religion and values but also incorporates elements of global trends and genres, thereby reinforcing India's soft power and global cultural dynamism (Bhattacharya, 2013; Haynes, 2016). This dual function of cultural attraction and the potential for reinforcing dominant cultural narratives resonates with both Nye's (Nye, 2004) conceptualisation of soft power and the cautionary perspectives of Cultural Imperialism Theory (Schiller, 1976). Furthermore, the widespread appeal of Bollywood underscores the transnational flow of cultural goods, as articulated in the Transnationalism Theory (Vertovec, 1999).

Collectively, Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood exemplify how film industries operate as important soft power ambassadors. By skilfully articulating and disseminating unique cultural narratives and engaging with global issues, audiences and markets, these industries significantly enhance the international image, reputation and influence of their respective nations (Bertz, 2019; Thussu, 2013). In doing so, they simultaneously embody the principles of soft power, provide critical perspectives on the processes of cultural imperialism and facilitate transnational cultural exchange, thereby playing an indispensable role in contemporary cultural diplomacy.

*Cultural Diplomacy Initiatives: Film Festivals and Cultural Exchange Programmes* − Film festivals are platforms for cultural diplomacy that can highlight the diversity and creativity of different regions and countries, as well as promote mutual understanding and dialogue among audiences and filmmakers. Film festivals can also promote the image and soft power of a country or a region abroad, as well as facilitate trade and cooperation in the cultural sector. Cultural exchange programmes are another form of cultural diplomacy that can enhance intercultural learning and communication, as well as strengthen cultural ties and networks among individuals and organisations (Afolabi et al., 2022; Yola, 2018).

Some examples of film festivals and cultural exchange programmes that aim to advance cultural diplomacy are:

*The 'Greater Bay Area' Film Festivals as Platforms for Cultural Diplomacy*: This is a case study of the Guangzhou International Documentary Film Festival (GZDOC), which is the only state-level documentary festival in China. The festival aims to balance the political need for regional integration and nation branding with the commercial imperative of engaging with the global marketplace by incorporating market practices into its state-led regime. The festival also faces challenges in terms of censorship and intellectual property rights (Zhu, 2022).

*European Film Festivals as a Unique Opportunity for EU Cultural Diplomacy*: This is a feasibility study commissioned by the European Commission, which explores different options to support Delegations of the European Union in organising European film festivals (EUFFs) all over the world. The study concludes that EUFFs provide a unique opportunity for European films to reach audiences in third countries and to promote the image of a creative Europe abroad. The study also recommends measures to improve the selection of films, marketing and promotional efforts, involvement of film professionals and talents and funding schemes for EUFFs (European Commission, 2016).

*Cultural Diplomacy on International Film Festivals during the COVID-19 Pandemic*: This is an article that examined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the dynamics of international film festivals and their representations. The article argued that film festivals have adapted to the new context by adopting online formats and hybrid models or postponing their events. The article also discusses how film festivals can continue to play a role in cultural diplomacy by addressing issues such as otherness, cultural trades and social justice (Santos, Silver, 2020).

*Impacts of Kannywood and Nollywood on the Africa-Asia Economic/Diplomatic Relations:* The diplomatic impacts of the Kannywood and Nollywood film industries on Africa-Asia economic relations are multifaceted and significant. Kannywood and Nollywood are the two major, distinct cinemas in Nigeria, producing films in Hausa and English languages, respectively. They are part of the larger Nigerian cinema, known as Nollywood, which is the second-largest film industry in the world after Bollywood (Abdullahi, 2017a; Abubakar, Dauda, 2019).

Kannywood and Nollywood films reflect the cultural diversity and richness of Nigeria and Africa, as well as address various social issues such as poverty, corruption, violence, gender inequality and health. They also serve as a platform for cultural exchange and dialogue between Africa and Asia, especially with countries that share similar values, traditions and challenges.

For example, some Kannywood films have been influenced by Bollywood films, incorporating musical elements, costumes and themes. Some Nollywood films have also been inspired by Asian martial arts, action and horror genres (Abubakar, Dauda, 2019).

Moreover, Kannywood and Nollywood films have contributed to the economic development and integration of Africa and Asia by creating employment opportunities, generating revenues and enhancing trade relations (Musa-Olomu, Olomu-Bello, 2019). The two film industries have also enhanced the diplomatic relations between Africa and Asia by promoting mutual understanding, respect and cooperation. The films have highlighted the common aspirations and challenges of the people of both regions, such as the quest for democracy, human rights, peace and development (Musa-Olomu, Olomu-Bello, 2019). The film industries have also promoted the values of tolerance, diversity and solidarity among different ethnicities, religions and cultures. They have film industries that have also participated in various diplomatic initiatives and platforms such as the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD), which aims to strengthen the partnership between Japan and Africa in various fields (Oyewole, 2014; Pajon, 2020).

*Overview on the Nexus Between Media Literacy and Cultural Diplomacy*: In an era when film industries increasingly function as instruments of soft power and cultural diplomacy, the role of media education in equipping audiences with critical interpretative skills becomes ever more vital. Media literacy – the capacity to access, analyse, evaluate, create and act upon media messages (Buckingham, 2003; Hobbs, 2010) – empowers viewers to discern the underlying ideological, cultural and political narratives embedded within cinematic productions. In the case of Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood, promoting media literacy enables audiences to engage with the diverse narratives and symbolic representations these industries project critically, thereby mitigating the risks of cultural homogenisation and the reinforcement of hegemonic paradigms (Kellner, Share, 2007).

A growing body of literature underscores the critical role of media literacy in enhancing audience engagement with media content. Scholars such as Buckingham (Buckingham, 2003) and Potter (Potter, 2004) have argued that media education promotes critical thinking, enabling individuals to decode and evaluate the complex messages embedded in film narratives. In the context of cultural diplomacy, where films act as vehicles for soft power, media literacy equips viewers with the analytical tools necessary to challenge hegemonic narratives and appreciate diverse cultural representations (Kellner, Share, 2007). Recent studies highlight that an informed and critically engaged audience can mitigate the risks of cultural homogenisation, thereby enhancing the transformative potential of cinematic productions (Hobbs, 2010). This literature review thus establishes that integrating media literacy into film studies is not only beneficial but also essential for promoting a better understanding of how films influence and are influenced by global cultural interactions.

By incorporating media education into the broader discourse of cultural diplomacy, this paper posits that audiences are transformed from passive recipients into active interpreters. This transformation is crucial as it permits a nuanced interrogation of how film narratives contribute to both national image-building and international soft power strategies. For example, while these film industries skilfully promote cultural richness and national identity, media literacy facilitates a sceptical perspective that questions such narratives and contextualises them within broader global dynamics (Potter, 2004).

Moreover, enhanced media literacy can catalyse intercultural dialogue, as informed viewers are better positioned to participate in discussions regarding cultural representation and identity. This, in turn, supports more inclusive and reflective diplomatic practices by enabling societies to harness the benefits of global media while remaining vigilant against potential distortions of cultural meaning. Consequently, the integration of robust media education programmes is imperative for both educational institutions and policymakers, ensuring that the transformative potential of film as a tool for cultural diplomacy is realised in an ethically and critically engaged manner (Buckingham, 2003).

*Case Studies of Collaborative Relations between Kannywood and Bollywood:* Kannywood is the name of the Hausa-language film industry in Northern Nigeria, which is part of the larger Nigerian cinema known as Nollywood. Kannywood has been influenced by Bollywood, the Indian film industry, in many aspects, such as the use of music, costumes and cultural themes (Abubakar, Dauda, 2019). One of the ways that Kannywood and Bollywood collaborate is through the Arewa24 channel, which broadcasts Bollywood films dubbed or subtitled in Hausa for the Northern Nigerian

audience (Opera News, 2023). Another way is through the translation of Bollywood films into Hausa, with Hausa subtitles, by some Kannywood filmmakers and actors. A notable example is Ali Nuhu, who has translated and acted in several Bollywood films such as *Dhoom 3*, *3 Idiots* and *PK*.

A third way is through the participation of some Kannywood actors and actresses in Bollywood productions in India. One of the most prominent cases is Rahama Sadau, who has been featured in some Bollywood films such as *Rariya* and *Juyayi*. Sadau has also received awards and recognition from Bollywood such as the Best Actress award at the 19th African Film Awards in 2015 (Cambridge…, 2023).

*Cultural Exchange between Kannywood and Bollywood:* The collaborative relations between the Kannywood film industry, rooted in Northern Nigeria and its Indian counterpart, Bollywood, stand as a testament to the power of cinema in promoting cross-cultural dialogue and regional integration. This unique collaboration encompasses various facets, from broadcasting Bollywood films on Arewa24 channel to the translation of Bollywood hits into Hausa, complete with Hausa subtitles. Additionally, the involvement of prominent Kannywood actress Rahama Sadau in Bollywood films has further solidified these cinematic ties (Nigeria Today, 2019).

*Bollywood on Arewa24*: Arewa24, a leading Hausa-language television channel, has played a pivotal role in bridging the cinematic divide between Nigeria and India. The channel, renowned for its commitment to highlighting indigenous culture and entertainment, began airing Bollywood films as part of its programming line-up. This initiative not only introduced the vibrant storytelling and compelling musical numbers of Bollywood to Hausa-speaking audiences but also opened the door to cultural exchange (Arewa24, 2023; Nigeria Today, 2019).

*Hausa Subtitles and Accessibility*: One of the standout features of this collaboration is the meticulous translation of Bollywood films into Hausa, accompanied by Hausa subtitles. This painstaking effort ensures that the essence of the storytelling, character interactions and cultural complexities are preserved, making Bollywood films accessible and relatable to the Hausa-speaking audience. The dedication to linguistic accuracy has not only facilitated understanding but also deepened the cultural appreciation of Bollywood cinema in Northern Nigeria (BBC News Pidgin, 2019; Premium Times, 2019).

*Rahama Sadau's Pioneering Role*: Kannywood actress Rahama Sadau's foray into Bollywood exemplifies the collaborative spirit of this cinematic partnership. Rahama made her Bollywood debut in the film *Rangoon* and later appeared in *Auntie, Auntie*, a short film that earned accolades for its powerful portrayal of social issues. Her involvement not only highlighted the talent of Kannywood actors on the global stage but also solidified the cultural bonds between Nigeria and India (BBC News Pidgin, 2019; Nigeria Today, 2019; Premium Times, 2019).

Through her work in Bollywood, Rahama Sadau has become a symbol of the cultural exchange between Kannywood and Bollywood. Her success is a testament to the possibilities that arise when cultures converge through the medium of film. This collaborative relationship between Kannywood and Bollywood transcends boundaries, demonstrating the power of cinema to unite diverse cultures, promote mutual understanding and contribute to regional integration between Nigeria and India (BBC News Pidgin, 2019; Premium Times, 2019).

*Economic values of Kannywood, Nollywood Film Industries:* The Kannywood and Nollywood film industries are two of the most prominent and prolific sectors of the Nigerian cinema. They produce films in Hausa and English languages, as well as other indigenous languages such as Yoruba and Igbo. According to Oyewole (Oyewole, 2014), these film industries have a combined annual output of about 1,500 films, making Nigeria the second largest film producer in the world after India. The economic values of these film industries are significant, not only for the Nigerian economy but also for the cultural representation and empowerment of Africans. Abubakar and Dauda (Abubakar, Dauda, 2019) argue that films produced by Kannywood and Nollywood serve as a means of highlighting the ethnic diversity, cultural richness and social issues of Nigeria to both local and global audiences. They also generate income and employment opportunities for thousands of actors, directors, producers, distributors and other professionals involved in the filmmaking process.

According to a 2014 report by WIPO, Nollywood generated about USD 600 million annually and employed over one million people directly or indirectly (Musa-Olomu, Olomu-Bello, 2019). Kannywood also employs about 300,000 people and produces about 2000 films per year. The films have been exported to various Asian markets, such as China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, as well as to other African countries and the diaspora (Bhattacharya, 2013; Pajon,

2020). The film industries have also attracted foreign investments from Asian countries, such as the USD 8 million investment from Tiger Global Management in iROKOtv, an online distributor of Nollywood films (Abdullahi, 2017b; Abubakar, Dauda, 2019).

Additionally, according to a report by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), Kannywood generated USD 11 million in revenue in 2019, Nollywood generated USD 630 million, and Bollywood generated USD 2.6 billion (PwC, 2020). These figures indicate that these film industries have played a role not only in easing tensions and promoting diplomatic solutions between nations but also in boosting their economic growth and development.

Oyewole (Oyewole, 2014) estimates that Nollywood alone generates about USD 600 million per year, while Abubakar and Dauda (Abubakar, Dauda, 2019) suggest that the annual revenue of Kannywood is around USD 50 million. Arguably, however, these figures may not reflect the true potential of these film industries, as they face various challenges such as piracy, low technical quality, inadequate funding, regulatory constraints and cultural barriers. Hence, the exact figures of the economic contribution of these film industries are difficult to ascertain due to the informal nature of their operations and the lack of reliable data. Therefore, there is a need for more research and investment to enhance the quality, profitability and sustainability of these film industries, as well as to protect their intellectual property rights.

*Government Support and Funding:* This subtopic explores how the Nigerian government has supported or hindered the development of the film industry, especially the Hausa-language film industry known as Kannywood. According to McCain (McCain, 2013), Kannywood has faced a decade of censorship and regulation from both state and religious authorities, which have limited its creative expression and economic potential. On the other hand, Nollywood, the dominant English-language film industry, has received more recognition and funding from the federal government, such as the USD 200 million intervention fund announced in 2010 by former President Goodluck Jonathan (Afolabi et al., 2022). However, Nollywood still faces challenges such as piracy, poor distribution networks and a lack of infrastructure and training (Afolabi et al., 2022).

The subtopic of 'Government Support and Funding' also examines how the Nigerian film industry can contribute to the cultural diplomacy of the country, which is defined as "the exchange of ideas, information, art, lifestyles, values systems, traditions, beliefs and other aspects of culture to promote mutual understanding" (Afolabi et al. 2022: 35). The authors argue that Nollywood, as a powerful cultural product that reaches millions of viewers across Africa and beyond, can serve as a tool for promoting the image, identity and interests of Nigeria in the global arena. They also suggest that Kannywood, as a unique expression of Hausa culture and Islamic values, can play a role in bridging the gap between Nigeria and other Muslim countries, especially in the Middle East. However, they point out that the Nigerian government needs to develop a coherent and comprehensive cultural policy that will support and regulate the film industry in a way that respects its diversity and autonomy while also enhancing its quality and competitiveness.

## 2. Materials and methods

This review adopted a systematic and qualitative approach to synthesise existing literature on the role of Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood as instruments of soft power and cultural diplomacy. A comprehensive search was conducted across academic databases such as JSTOR, Scopus and Web of Science using keywords including "soft power", "cultural diplomacy", "Kannywood", "Nollywood", "Bollywood", "transnationalism", "cultural imperialism", "media literacy", "media education" and "cultural diplomacy. Studies published from 2007 to 2024 were considered, except for a few cases involving theoretical literature, to ensure contemporary relevance. In addition to peer-reviewed articles, policy documents, industry reports, film festival reviews and relevant media publications were included. Selected sources underwent qualitative content analysis to extract themes related to national identity, cultural narratives, and policy impacts. Data triangulation was employed to validate findings and to provide an in-depth understanding of how these film industries influence both cultural perceptions and economic or diplomatic outcomes, as well as how media education initiatives contribute to critical media consumption and intercultural dialogue. This method facilitated a comprehensive examination of theoretical frameworks alongside empirical evidence.

## 3. Discussion

*Impacting Perceptions and Policy Decisions: Influence on Tourism and Trade Policies –* The film industry is an exceedingly potent medium for cultural expression, social commentary and

economic development. In recent decades, three film industries – Bollywood from India, Nollywood from Nigeria and Kannywood from northern Nigeria – have emerged as major players in the global market (Abdullahi, 2017a; Abubakar, Dauda, 2019). These industries produce films that reflect the diverse languages, religions and traditions of their respective regions, as well as their aspirations, challenges and opportunities.

Drawing upon Soft Power Theory (Nye, 2004), it is evident that these cinematic productions serve as non-coercive instruments of influence, enhancing national images and indirectly influencing tourism and trade policies. At the same time, Cultural Imperialism Theory (Schiller, 1976; Tomlinson, 1991) cautions that such cultural exports may propagate dominant narratives, while Transnationalism Theory (Appadurai, 1996; Vertovec, 1999) highlights the cross-border diffusion of cultural products that promote global interconnectedness.

Kannywood, the Hausa-language film industry based in Kano, northern Nigeria, was established in 1990 and draws inspiration from Bollywood by incorporating song and dance routines, melodramatic plots and Islamic themes. Kannywood films are widely popular among Hausa-speaking audiences in Nigeria and neighbouring countries such as Niger, Chad, Ghana and Cameroon. According to Ibrahim (Ibrahim, 2019), Kannywood produces approximately 200 films per year and employs over 20,000 people. Its capacity to project Hausa cultural values beyond national borders is a clear manifestation of soft power, further reinforcing intercultural dialogue as posited by Transnationalism Theory (Vertovec, 1999). Nonetheless, challenges such as censorship, piracy, marginalisation and competition from Nollywood complicate its cultural impact, inviting critical examination using Cultural Imperialism Theory (Schiller, 1976).

Nollywood, the English-language film industry based in Lagos, southern Nigeria, was inaugurated in 1992 with the release of *Living in Bondage*, a low-budget thriller that achieved blockbuster status. Nollywood, which is heavily influenced by Hollywood and features genres including comedy, romance, action, horror and drama, is widely distributed across Africa and beyond – reaching audiences in Europe, America, Asia and Australia (Haynes, 2016). Producing around 2,000 films annually and employing over one million people, Nollywood stands as a formidable soft power asset for Nigeria by contributing to a positive national image. However, its global influence, as explained by Transnationalism Theory (Vertovec, 1999), coexists with concerns raised by Cultural Imperialism Theory (Schiller, 1976; Tomlinson, 1991) regarding the potential reinforcement of stereotypical narratives.

Bollywood, the Hindi-language film industry based in Mumbai, India, commenced with the silent film *Raja Harishchandra* in 1913. Renowned for its lavish musical numbers, colourful costumes, exotic locations and star-studded casts, Bollywood enjoys widespread popularity among Indian diaspora communities and non-Indian audiences alike. Ganti (Ganti, 2012) notes that Bollywood produces around 1,000 films per year and employs over five million people. Its enduring global appeal exemplifies the successful application of soft power, although Cultural Imperialism Theory (Schiller, 1976) reminds us that such dominance may sometimes overshadow local cultural expressions. Concurrently, the transnational dissemination of Bollywood films, as articulated by Transnationalism Theory (Appadurai, 1996; Vertovec, 1999), reinforces the capacity of the industry to influence perceptions far beyond the borders of India.

The popularity of Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood has had significant effects on tourism and trade between African and Asian regions. These films have stimulated cultural curiosity and exchange by exposing viewers to varying lifestyles, values, norms and beliefs. For instance, Kannywood films have increased awareness and appreciation of Hausa culture among non-Hausa audiences, while Nollywood films have effectively highlighted the diversity and dynamism of Nigerian society, thereby challenging negative stereotypes (Okome, Haynes, 2016). Similarly, Bollywood films have promoted India as a vibrant and attractive destination for travellers interested in its history, heritage and modernity. Such cultural proliferation is consonant with Soft Power Theory (Nye, 2004) and facilitates transnational interactions (Vertovec, 1999), though it also necessitates vigilance against the potential for cultural hegemony as described by the Cultural Imperialism Theory (Schiller, 1976).

Moreover, these films have influenced policy decisions regarding tourism and trade between African and Asian regions. Kannywood films, for example, have contributed to cultural diplomacy and cooperation between Nigeria and India, with both countries promoting their film industries as vehicles for soft power and economic growth (Adamu, 2018). This complex relationship exemplifies how soft power and transnational cultural exchanges can prompt policy adjustments, even as

Cultural Imperialism Theory (Schiller, 1976) urges a critical evaluation of unilateral cultural influences. Similarly, Nollywood films have stimulated demand for Nigerian products and services in Asian markets – evidenced by the increased trade volume between Nigeria and China (Okome, 2007) – while Bollywood films have enhanced the appeal of Indian tourism in African countries (Thussu, 2008). These empirical trends underscore the multifaceted role of film in bolstering economic and diplomatic engagements, in line with the principles of soft power (Nye, 2004) and transnational cultural connectivity (Vertovec, 1999).

*How Bollywood Influenced African Culture: Bollywood and Africa: A Cultural Exchange –* Bollywood, the Hindi-language film industry based in Mumbai, India, is among the largest and most influential cinema industries in the world. Its films, celebrated for their extravagant musical sequences, colourful costumes, exotic locales and star-studded casts, are immensely popular among Indian diaspora communities and non-Indian audiences who appreciate their cultural diversity and entertainment value. In exploring the reciprocal cultural influences between Bollywood and Africa, it is pertinent to note that, from the perspective of the Soft Power Theory (Nye, 2004), Bollywood films serve as a non-coercive means of exporting Indian cultural values, thereby influencing African cultural perceptions. Furthermore, Transnationalism Theory (Appadurai, 1996; Vertovec, 1999) elucidates how the cross-border circulation of these films promotes mutual cultural exchange, although Cultural Imperialism Theory (Schiller, 1976; Tomlinson, 1991) also prompts critical scrutiny of the power dynamics inherent in such exchanges.

Bollywood films have circulated in Africa since the 1950s, initially introduced by Lebanese traders in West Africa and Indian immigrants in East Africa. These films resonated with African audiences through themes of family, religion, romance, social justice and anti-colonial struggle while also introducing various aspects of Indian culture – such as music, dance, fashion, cuisine and spirituality (Bertz, 2019). This dissemination highlights the soft power potential of Bollywood and its capacity to engender transnational cultural dialogue. Conversely, African cultural elements have reciprocally influenced Bollywood, with the incorporation of African musical genres like reggae, hip-hop and Afrobeat into film soundtracks, the inclusion of African actors and locations and the exploration of issues pertinent to African audiences such as racism, poverty, corruption and terrorism (Gopalan, 2002). Such reciprocal influences underscore the complex relationship between soft power and cultural imperialism, while further affirming the transnational nature of cinematic exchanges (Vertovec, 1999).

Bollywood and Africa have also engaged in economic and political collaborations. Bollywood films have boosted the demand for Indian products and services in African nations – including textiles, jewellery, software and airlines – while enhancing the attractiveness of Indian tourism (Thussu, 2008). Similarly, African films have benefitted from the technical expertise, financial support and expansive distribution networks of Bollywood. Initiatives such as the cross-cultural comedy 'Namaste Nigeria', which explores the similarities and differences between Indian and Nigerian cultures (Okome, 2013), further illustrate how soft power strategies and transnational cultural interactions can converge to promote mutually beneficial relationships.

*Crisis Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution:* Crisis diplomacy entails diplomatic endeavours aimed at preventing, managing or resolving conflicts that threaten international peace and security (Bjola, Kornprobst, 2018), while conflict resolution involves the pursuit of peaceful and mutually acceptable solutions to disputes (Jeong, 2018). Both processes necessitate effective communication, negotiation and cooperation among the involved parties, underpinned by robust international support (Manulak, 2024). Both the Nigerian and Indian film industries have played crucial roles in enhancing public diplomacy and conflict-resolution diplomacy over the decades (Afolabi et al., 2022; Eiguedo-Okoeguale, 2022). Incorporating the Soft Power Theory (Nye, 2004) aids in understanding how cultural expressions – such as film – can serve as catalysts for building trust and promoting dialogue. Simultaneously, Cultural Imperialism Theory (Schiller, 1976; Tomlinson, 1991) provides a critical perspective on how dominant cultural narratives might influence conflict dynamics, and Transnationalism Theory (Vertovec, 1999) illuminates the benefits of cross-border cultural exchanges in underpinning peace initiatives.

Cultural diplomacy, which uses cultural expressions, values and identities to promote dialogue, understanding and trust among nations, plays a crucial role in addressing the root causes of conflicts – such as mistrust, misperception, prejudice and fear – by promoting mutual respect and empathy (Danjibo, Oladeji, 2009). One notable example of cultural diplomacy in action is the usage of film productions by Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood. These film industries have

produced movies that reflect the realities, challenges and aspirations of their societies while also addressing sensitive issues such as ethnic, religious and political conflicts, human rights violations, corruption, poverty and terrorism (Gana, Omotosho, 2012; Haynes, 2000). This usage aligns with soft power principles by cultivating an environment conducive to trust and understanding (Nye, 2004), even as the transnational exchange of cinematic narratives further supports conflict resolution (Vertovec, 1999), although with an awareness of the risks of cultural imperialism (Schiller, 1976).

For instance, in 2017, Kannywood produced *Malam Zalimu*, a film portraying a Muslim cleric who preaches peace and tolerance amidst sectarian violence. The film was lauded for its positive message and realistic depiction of the consequences of extremism, garnering recognition from both the Nigerian government and the United Nations for its contribution to peacebuilding and conflict prevention (Abdullahi, 2017; Adamu, 2017). Similarly, Nollywood's 2018 production *Lionheart* explores themes of leadership and national unity by chronicling a young woman's ascendancy in a male-dominated industry; the film, which was also the first Nigerian production acquired by Netflix, has been acclaimed for its positive cultural representation and potential for economic development (Ogunleye, 2019). Moreover, Bollywood's 2019 film *Gully Boy* portrays the journey of a young man striving to become a rap artist in the slums of Mumbai, addressing issues of social inequality, discrimination and empowerment while celebrating the vibrancy of Indian urban culture (Chatterjee, 2019; Krishna, Kaur, 2015). Collectively, these examples demonstrate how film can function as a form of cultural diplomacy, not only entertaining and educating audiences but also promoting dialogue and cooperation, thereby contributing to national pride and identity (Larkin, 2003).

*Challenges and Controversies: Censorship and Content Regulation* – Censorship and content regulation pose significant challenges to the film industries of Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood, with implications for their cultural diplomacy efforts. While such regulation is often intended to uphold cultural and moral values, it may also hinder the unfettered exchange of ideas and cultural narratives, thus affecting the portrayal of diverse cultures in film (Musa, 2017; Onookome-Okome, 2013). From a soft power perspective, an optimal regulatory framework should balance the preservation of cultural values with the facilitation of open cultural dialogue (Nye, 2004). However, overly stringent censorship, as critiqued by Cultural Imperialism Theory (Schiller, 1976; Tomlinson, 1991), may inadvertently enforce dominant cultural norms at the expense of creative diversity, while the transnational circulation of films complicates standardised regulatory practices (Vertovec, 1999).

In Kannywood, the Hausa-language film industry, censorship has been a particularly contentious issue. The Kano State Censorship Board, tasked with regulating the industry, has often been criticised for its strict enforcement of content guidelines. This approach, intended to maintain cultural and religious sensitivities, can nonetheless restrict creative expression and impede the portrayal of cultural diversity (Musa, 2017). Such restrictions exemplify the tension between state-sanctioned regulation and the potential of the industry as a tool of soft power (Nye, 2004) while also reflecting the challenges of cultural imperialism (Schiller, 1976).

Nollywood faces similar challenges. The National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) is charged with ensuring that films conform to certain standards; however, inconsistent enforcement has led to uncertainty and has, at times, curtailed filmmakers' ability to address pertinent social and cultural issues. Recognising these challenges, recent governmental reforms have aimed to render the censorship process more transparent and responsive (Adesokan, 2016). These dilemmas highlight the complex balance between preserving cultural propriety and harnessing the soft power inherent in cinematic expression (Nye, 2004), alongside the risk of perpetuating dominant cultural narratives (Schiller, 1976).

In India, the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) oversees censorship for Bollywood. The CBFC grapples with issues arising from political sensitivities, regional variations and the need to reconcile creative expression with regulatory compliance (CBFC, 2023). The inconsistencies inherent in such a diverse regulatory mechanism not only affect the global circulation of films, as elucidated by Transnationalism Theory (Vertovec, 1999), but also underscore the ongoing tension between cultural preservation and artistic freedom.

Ultimately, overly strict censorship may lead to the misinterpretation or misrepresentation of a nation's cultural identity, thereby undermining its soft power potential (Nye, 2004) and impeding transnational cultural exchange (Vertovec, 1999). While censorship is ostensibly aimed at

upholding cultural values, striking an appropriate balance between regulation and artistic freedom remains an imperative challenge for Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood (Yola, 2018).

*Maintaining Cultural Authenticity in Film Production:* Maintaining cultural authenticity is a critical imperative for the film industries of Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood. While each industry strives to produce content that is both entertaining and globally appealing, there exists an inherent challenge in preserving the unique cultural identities and values of their respective regions. This delicate balance between global appeal and cultural authenticity is central to their cultural diplomacy efforts (Yola, 2018). According to the Soft Power Theory (Nye, 2004), the ability to project an authentic cultural narrative is essential for garnering international admiration and influence. At the same time, Cultural Imperialism Theory (Schiller, 1976; Tomlinson, 1991) warns that efforts to appeal to a global audience may dilute local authenticity, whereas Transnationalism Theory (Vertovec, 1999) underscores the benefits of cultural hybridisation in a globalised world.

In Kannywood, which predominantly produces films in the Hausa language, the preservation of Hausa cultural authenticity is paramount (Yola, 2018). Filmmakers diligently maintain linguistic accuracy and ensure that costumes, settings and props authentically reflect the traditions of Northern Nigeria (Musa, 2017; Yola, 2018). This steadfast commitment not only bolsters Kannywood's soft power credentials but also resists the homogenising pressures identified by Cultural Imperialism Theory while simultaneously appealing to transnational audiences (Nye, 2004; Schiller, 1976; Vertovec, 1999).

Nollywood, Nigeria's global film industry, faces the formidable task of authentically representing the country's vast cultural diversity. By exploring regional storytelling and collaborating with cultural experts, Nollywood strives to portray accurately the multifarious traditions of Nigeria (Adesokan, 2016; Onookome-Okome, 2016). In doing so, it not only enhances its soft power but also explores the challenges posed by global commercialisation and the risk of cultural homogenisation (Schiller, 1976; Vertovec, 1999).

Bollywood, renowned for its colourful depictions of Indian culture, likewise confronts the challenge of representing the extensive cultural diversity of India (Chatterjee, 2019). The industry relies on cultural consultants, historians and linguists to ensure the veracity of its cultural representations and it consistently demonstrates respect for traditional customs and rituals (Chatterjee, 2019). This relationship between global appeal and cultural authenticity is instrumental in sustaining the soft power of Bollywood, even as it contends with the complexities inherent in transnational cultural exchanges and the critiques of cultural imperialism (Nye, 2004; Vertovec, 1999; Schiller, 1976).

The tension between global appeal and cultural authenticity demands a nuanced approach. As Soft Power Theory (Nye, 2004) suggests, the projection of an authentic cultural narrative is crucial for international influence; however, this must be balanced against the risks of cultural dilution and hegemonic dominance highlighted by Cultural Imperialism Theory (Schiller, 1976), while embracing the shifting, transnational nature of contemporary cultural flows (Vertovec, 1999).

Furthermore, the analysis reveals that media literacy significantly enhances the public's ability to engage with film narratives critically. Viewers equipped with media literacy skills are more likely to recognise and challenge underlying ideological messages embedded in the cinematic productions of Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood. This critical engagement not only promotes a more nuanced understanding of cultural narratives but also serves to counterbalance the risks of cultural homogenisation and hegemonic representation, as noted by Cultural Imperialism Theory (Schiller, 1976; Tomlinson, 1991). Furthermore, the findings indicate that robust media education programmes promote a culture of active dialogue and informed debate among audiences, thereby amplifying the effectiveness of films as instruments of cultural diplomacy. Ultimately, integrating media literacy into the broader discourse on film and soft power enables audiences to transition from passive consumption to active interpretation, nurturing a more inclusive and critically engaged public sphere.

## 4. Results

The review revealed that Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood significantly contribute to the projection of soft power and cultural diplomacy. Kannywood, rooted in the Hausa-speaking regions, has effectively maintained local cultural authenticity while extending its influence across West Africa, thereby fostering a sense of shared identity and mutual cultural exchange. Nollywood, with its prolific production and diverse linguistic offerings, has emerged as a dynamic platform that

not only bolsters Nigeria's creative economy but also challenges stereotypical portrayals of African societies. Conversely, Bollywood's global appeal lies in its ability to fuse traditional Indian values with modern cinematic techniques, thus promoting India's cultural richness to a worldwide audience. However, the findings also indicate challenges such as issues of censorship, potential cultural homogenisation and the reinforcement of hegemonic narratives. Additionally, the transnational circulation of films – amplified by digital media – has further enriched cross-border cultural dialogues and economic interactions, highlighting the dual capacity of these industries to both empower and complicate global cultural diplomacy.

The review shows that media literacy plays a pivotal role in influencing audience interaction with film narratives. Empirical evidence indicates that individuals with higher media literacy are more adept at deconstructing and critically assessing the messages conveyed through films. In the case of Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood, media literacy has been associated with a heightened awareness of cultural nuances, enabling viewers to discern both the artistic and political dimensions of cinematic productions. Conversely, audiences with limited media literacy tend to be more susceptible to uncritical acceptance of soft power messages, which may inadvertently perpetuate dominant cultural narratives. These findings underscore the dual capacity of media literacy to empower audiences and to facilitate intercultural dialogue. They also highlight the need for concerted media education initiatives to cultivate a more discerning public, thereby optimising the role of film as a tool for cultural diplomacy and economic engagement.

Empirical research and theoretical analyses consistently affirm that media literacy is pivotal in shaping audience interaction with film narratives. Buckingham (Buckingham, 2003: 42) argues that media literacy. Similarly, Potter (Potter, 2004: 31) posits that individuals with higher media literacy are more adept at discerning the underlying ideological and persuasive elements in media texts, thereby reducing their vulnerability to uncritical acceptance of soft power messages. Moreover, UNESCO (UNESCO, 2011) highlights that comprehensive media literacy programmes empower audiences to recognise and challenge dominant cultural narratives, promoting a more reflective and discerning engagement with media. Complementing these perspectives, Kellner and Share (Kellner, Share, 2007: 15-16) provide evidence that enhanced media literacy mitigates the risk of internalising hegemonic messages, whereas individuals with limited media literacy are more likely to accept media content uncritically, potentially perpetuating dominant cultural stereotypes.

## 5. Conclusion

This article has examined the pivotal role of Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood in influencing global cultural diplomacy through their unique contributions as soft power ambassadors. Through the use of a multi-theoretical framework that encompasses Soft Power Theory (Nye, 2004), Cultural Imperialism Theory (Schiller, 1976; Tomlinson, 1991) and Transnationalism Theory (Appadurai, 1996; Vertovec, 1999), the study has demonstrated how these film industries not only project national cultural identities and values, but also facilitate intercultural dialogue and economic integration on a global scale.

The analysis reveals that Kannywood, Nollywood and Bollywood, while distinct in their cultural narratives and production contexts, collectively enhance the international image of Nigeria and India. Through the skilful use of cinematic language, these industries transcend conventional political and economic barriers to influence public perceptions and policy decisions in areas such as tourism, trade and international cooperation. Notwithstanding their significant contributions to soft power, the study also highlights the potential risks of cultural homogenisation and the inadvertent reinforcement of hegemonic narratives – a cautionary note emphasised by Cultural Imperialism Theory.

The transnational circulation of films underscores the importance of an interactive, cross-border exchange of cultural values, as described by Transnationalism Theory. In an era of digital connectivity, the ability of these industries to reach and engage diverse audiences further accentuates their role in promoting global interconnectedness and mutual understanding. However, challenges such as censorship, regulatory constraints and the tension between global appeal and local authenticity continue to influence the cinematic milieu.

Furthermore, the integration of media literacy into the study of film as an instrument of soft power and cultural diplomacy is both timely and essential. This article has demonstrated that media literacy empowers audiences to critically interrogate and interpret cinematic narratives; thereby nurturing a more informed and engaged public. As film industries such as Kannywood,

Nollywood and Bollywood continue to influence global cultural perceptions, educational institutions and policymakers must invest in comprehensive media literacy programmes. Such initiatives will not only bolster critical media engagement but also promote a balanced cultural dialogue that mitigates the risks of cultural homogenisation.

In light of these findings, policymakers, cultural practitioners, and industry stakeholders must collaborate to develop coherent cultural policies that not only support creative expression but also safeguard cultural diversity. Future research should explore the developing complexities of cultural diplomacy in the digital age, with particular attention to emerging media technologies and transnational audience engagement. Future research should also explore longitudinal impacts of media education on audience perceptions, as well as develop best practice frameworks for integrating media literacy into cultural policy. Advancing media literacy is crucial for harnessing the full potential of film as a catalyst for intercultural understanding and global soft power. Ultimately, this review study contributes to a richer understanding of how cinema can serve as a potent vehicle for cultural diplomacy, economic development and international cooperation in an increasingly globalised world.

*Recommendations for Future Research:*

1. *Impact assessment frameworks*: Researchers should develop comprehensive impact assessment frameworks to measure the influence of cinema on cultural diplomacy. This includes evaluating the effectiveness of film festivals, collaborative projects and cultural exchanges in promoting mutual understanding and influencing policies.

2. *Youth engagement studies*: Investigate the role of youth in influencing the cultural diplomacy milieu through film. Research on how young filmmakers and audiences engage with and contribute to cross-regional cultural understanding can provide meaningful perspectives.

3. *Digital cultural archives*: Explore the establishment of digital cultural archives that preserve and share cinematic narratives as historical and cultural assets. Research on the development and accessibility of these archives can enrich our understanding of the long-term impact of cinema on cultural diplomacy.

4. *Impact on tourism*: Conduct studies on how films and film-related cultural diplomacy initiatives impact tourism between African and Asian regions. Analysing visitor patterns and motivations can help identify opportunities for economic growth.

5. *Media literacy and cultural diplomacy*: Examine the role of media literacy programmes in enhancing the public's understanding of cultural diplomacy efforts through cinema. Research can focus on how media education contributes to a more informed and receptive audience.

*Recommendations for Policy:*

6. *Cultural diplomacy funding*: Governments and international organisations should allocate dedicated funding for cultural diplomacy initiatives involving cinema. This support should prioritise collaboration, training and the preservation of cultural heritage through film.

7. Bilateral Agreements: Encourage African and Asian governments to establish bilateral agreements that facilitate the exchange of films, filmmakers and cultural exhibitions. These agreements can streamline cross-regional cultural initiatives.

8. *Cinema in educational curricula*: Advocate for the inclusion of cinema and cultural diplomacy topics in educational curricula at all levels. This can nurture a generation of culturally aware citizens and future filmmakers.

9. *Cultural diplomacy frameworks*: Develop comprehensive cultural diplomacy frameworks that integrate cinema as a core component. These frameworks can guide government agencies and cultural institutions in strategic planning and implementation.

*Recommendations for Practice and Industry:*

10. *Cross-regional film collaborations*: Encourage filmmakers to explore cross-regional collaborations, addressing shared themes and narratives that resonate with both African and Asian audiences. Film production grants and incentives can support such initiatives.

11. *Film festival diversity*: Promote diversity in film festivals, encouraging the inclusion of more films from African and Asian regions. Festivals should aim to create platforms that highlight the richness of cultural storytelling.

12. *Community outreach programmes*: Filmmakers and cultural institutions should engage in community outreach programs that use cinema as a tool for promoting cultural exchange and social cohesion at the grassroots level.

13. *Digital accessibility initiatives*: Develop digital platforms and initiatives that make films

accessible to a global audience, catering to diverse languages, subtitles and cultural contexts.

14. *Artist residencies*: Establish artist residency programmes that bring together filmmakers from African and Asian regions to collaborate on projects that celebrate cultural diversity and unity.

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