



Film, Propaganda, and the “New Nigeria” National Philosophy: Deconstructing the Latent Socio-Political Themes in Bright Obasi’s Film “*If I am President*”

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Abstract

This qualitative research examined the utility of film for political propaganda purposes and behavioral change objectives. It critically assesses how film, as a communication medium, has been optimized in constructing a national rebirth philosophy tagged “New Nigeria” political constructs. The objectives of the study were to demystify the political propaganda strategies adopted by the filmmakers in propagating the “new Nigeria” national philosophy and to unearth the latent and manifest socio-political propaganda themes embedded in the film that reinforce the ‘new Nigeria’ political philosophy.

In ascertaining the potentials of film in projecting propagandists’ ideologies, the film “*If I am President*” (Bright Obasi, 2018) was thematically deconstructed using the qualitative content analysis research design. The “New Nigeria” political constructs content-analyzed were placed into discourse paradigms, and discussions were attempted using the critical discourse analytical method.

A deconstruction of the latent socio-political themes in the film revealed the filmmakers’ subtle utilization of mental conditioning, mental provocativeness, ‘scapegoatism’, psycho-emotional articulation, appeal to socio-political action, and entertainment-education political propaganda strategies in projecting the “New Nigeria” national philosophy for social action through behavior change.

The dominant “New Nigeria” political philosophies expressed in the film included, but were not limited to, leanings suggesting national rebirth, nation-building, socio-political egalitarianism, youth activism, digitization of national politics, techno-democracy, zero tolerance for corruption, and tolerance across racial, religious, tribal, ethnic, and political lines. These philosophies are the ideals suggested in the film as cardinal constructs and conditions for the rebirth of a new nation, thus, “New Nigeria”.

Keywords

Film; Propaganda; Politics; Poli-medium; Deconstructing; New Nigeria; National philosophy; Socio-political themes; Bright Obasi; “*If I am President*”



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Фильм, пропаганда и национальная философия «Новой Нигерии»: деконструкция скрытых социально-политических тем в фильме Брайта Обаси «Если я стану президентом»

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Аннотация

В данном качественном исследовании рассматривается полезность фильма для целей политической пропаганды и коррекции поведения. В нем критически оценивается, как фильм как средство коммуникации был оптимизирован для построения философии национального возрождения под названием «Новая Нигерия». Целями исследования были демистификация стратегий политической пропаганды, принятых создателями фильма для распространения национальной философии «Новой Нигерии», и выявление скрытых и явных социально-политических пропагандистских тем, встроенных в фильм, которые усиливают политическую философию «Новой Нигерии». Для выяснения потенциала фильма в проецировании идеологии пропагандистов, фильм «Если я стану президентом» (Брайт Обаси, 2018) был тематически деконструирован с использованием качественного контент-анализа. Проанализированные политические конструкты «Новой Нигерии» были помещены в парадигмы дискурса, и была предпринята попытка их обсуждения с использованием метода критического дискурс-анализа. Деконструкция скрытых социально-политических тем в фильме выявила тонкое использование создателями фильма ментальной обусловленности, ментальной провокативности, «козла отпущения», психоэмоциональной артикуляции, призыва к социально-политическим действиям и развлекательно-просветительских стратегий политической пропаганды в проецировании национальной философии «Новой Нигерии» для социальных действий через изменение поведения. Доминирующая политическая философия «Новой Нигерии», выраженная в фильме, включала в себя (но не ограничивалась ими) идеи национального возрождения, государственного строительства, социально-политического эгалитаризма, молодежного активизма, цифровизации национальной политики, технодемократии, нетерпимости к коррупции и толерантности по расовым, религиозным, племенным, этническим и политическим направлениям. Эти философские принципы являются идеалами, предложенными в фильме в качестве кардинальных конструкций и условий для возрождения новой нации, таким образом, и «Новой Нигерии».

Ключевые слова

фильм; пропаганда; политика; полимедиа; деконструкция; «Новая Нигерия»; национальная философия; социально-политические темы; Брайт Обаси; «Если я стану президентом»



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Introduction

Film is a politico-propaganda medium. It has politico-propaganda colouration and value. There is hardly a film that does not seek to advance a political stance, philosophy or ideology by using propaganda, whether overtly or covertly (Andrew, Murphy, Manvell, Sklar & Stephenson, 2022). This suggests that film, as a visually-illustrative and dramaturgically-appealing medium of communication, is not in short supply of portrayals, images, projections, and reflections about socio-political realities with tints of propaganda. Hence, film, propaganda, and politics go hand in hand. It is insinuated that when one comes across the portrayal of politics in films, one is likely to come across propaganda as well. The two inseparable concepts are often 'cultured' and 'trans-marketed' to the public domain through the instrumentality of the film. These expressions simply buttress the idea that every film is political (Schoenbrun, 2016; von Bock, 2008; Wayne, 2001; Zimmer & Leggett, 1974).

However, the portrayal of political issues, concerns, realities, circumstances or situations have been the mainstay of socio-politically-conscious films. The justifications are not far from the intent to circumvent, enculturate, manipulate or acculturate the target audience with specific political culture, ideology or philosophy. Film, in this regard, has been considered to have a major influence or impact on how citizens view or perceive politics, especially, government (Pautz, 2015). This makes it preemptive to say that the principal route to achieving desired political intent is to use the tool of filmic propaganda in changing, altering, persuading, modifying, repositioning, or manipulating the behaviours or attitudes of the target audience to conform or align with the core intents of the propagandists.

The propagandists' political philosophies, being adapted into film constructs, presupposes that characters are assigned specialised roles to play in bringing out the intended message. The metaphors, imageries and anecdotes created as a result of the conflicts introduced, dialogues engaged and denouement suggested, become more vivid, interesting and forceful. The intensity, intimacy, ubiquity, particularity, and realism associated with film place it above other media forms and structures (Andrew, *et al*, 2022).

The film is instrumental in enforcing propagandists' messages in this regard, because, above all things, it is an audio-visual, dramatic, action-filled, artistic, dialogue-based, emotive and illustrative medium. So, propagandists' political philosophies projected through the medium of film are likely to leave a lasting impression on the minds of its viewers.

So many reasons account for this, but the principal reason is that film is a supplemental medium (Nkana, 2006). For being a supplemental medium, the propagandists' political philosophies projected to the public permeate other screen media as consequential softwares (contents) that, apart from filling the film form, aim subliminally at the viewers' intellect using entertainment approach. This is



validated given the entertainment-education appeal associated with screen-mediated contents where the audience can be persuaded to take considerable actions using the play and learn approaches. Using the entertainment-education appeal, political constructs are seamlessly projected in a relaxed, entertaining and less-intrusive manner with the intent to instill the leanings of the constructs in the audience's subconscious in order to bring about behaviour change among the target (Ashong, 2021; Ojiambo-Hongo, Mugubi, & Nyaole, 2017; Singhal, Cody, Rogers & Sabido, 2003; Singhal & Rogers, 1999).

The film '*If I am President*' (Bright Obasi, 2018) is a propaganda political film produced to acculturate a 'new Nigeria' political sentiments, culture and ideologies similar to those in Western civilisation and developed nations of the world. The film strongly advocates for the rebirth of a nation already in political, social, cultural, and economic ruins. The reason for using the film medium is not far from the envisaged potentials of film to simulate socio-political conditions in ways that the average mentality of the citizens are stimulated and their consciousness awakened to the realities besetting them so that their cravings, yearnings, quests and demands for a change in the status quo can be sustained. Film, exploited in this dimension, is to instigate a political movement, revolution and an intellectual front to institutionalise good governance. It is against the background of attempting to thematically analysed how Bright Obasi's film '*If I am President*' has been utilised as propaganda tool to advance the 'new Nigeria' political constructs that this research was undertaken.

Statement of the Research Problem

Film is a major medium of mass communication often deployed for the dissemination of vital information with the intent of bringing about positive changes in the society (Umar & Mathew, 2014; Rasit, Hassan, Osman & Ali, 2011). It uses entertainment approach to galvanise education, enlightenment, socialisation, mobilisation, information and social action. These are made possible because of its unique nature, characteristic, feature and form. Contents portrayed through the film are audio-visually appealing, dramatic, dialogically-interesting, emotive, animated and consequential. Film enhances or reinforces the semblance of realism (Rogers, 2013).

Hence, using a film to communicate an idea, accord such idea an entertainment-education appeal where the target audience are bound to be entertained but are subliminally exposed to informational and educational supplements for behaviour change. It is on this premise that Bright Obasi seems to have explored, exploited and utilised the potentials of film to influence behavioural change. Hence, film can be used to promote political propaganda.

Though film, being a propaganda tool with communication potentials can encourage behavioural change, it is uncertain whether the film - '*If I am President*' has served its political communication role. It is also not known the propagandists'



ideologies inherent in the film. Research and knowledge gap also exist on the kinds of “new Nigeria” political constructs expressed in the film – ‘*If I am President*’.

The uncertainties and gaps in research and knowledge about the prevalence of propaganda, political themes and ‘new Nigeria’ political constructs inherent in Bright Obasi’s film ‘*If I am President*’ prompts the question: does the film ‘*If I am President*’ project and reflect ‘new Nigeria’ national philosophy? What are the diversified ‘new Nigeria’ political constructs reflected in the film – ‘*If I am President*’?

Theoretical Framework

The variables of this study are hinged on the theoretical underpinnings of the **Ideational Theory of Meaning** as advanced by John Locke in 1690 and **Behavioural Theory of Meaning** advanced by B.F. Skinner in 1957. The Ideational Theory of Meaning, according to Axtell (1968), cited in Nicolas (2017), is the idea that the meaning of words is the idea with which it is regularly associated or for which it represents. In Locke’s perspective, the use of words serves to represent ideas. Hence, language is not treated as being independent or in isolation of thoughts but as a means through which thoughts are expressed or conveyed.

The Behavioural Theory of Meaning assumes that there is no internal structure or innateness that determine the view of meaning; rather, it is pragmatic responsive participation to events, circumstance, situations or realities in the society that form the basis for understanding mental life (Skinner, 1957 cited in Nicolas, 2017).

The two theories are concerned with constructed meaning and audience’s cognitive response to the constructed meaning. In the case of the political propaganda film – ‘*If I am President*’, the theories become relevant as they seek to explicate the existing footholds and nexus between film, propaganda and constructed political meanings aimed at influencing the behaviour of target viewers. The theories seek to establish and relate abstract forms that are expressed in the film as ‘new Nigeria’ political constructs to tangible objects (political realities that exist in the country). Hence, as ‘new Nigeria’ national philosophy is constructed by the film makers and expressed through texts displayed in the film, spoken words of lead characters and dialogues among characters in the film, it behoves the mind to inquire whether such meanings are relatable by the target audience for the desired behaviour change to be achieved.

However, the theories are burdened with how ordinary abstract political forms can be organised to make meaning and how the meanings relate to the political objects, circumstances, events, situations and happenstances in the real world (Nicolas, 2017). Hence, the ‘new Nigeria’ political constructs or meanings created, expressed, reflected or projected via the film are mental representations of what an ideal Nigerian political system should be like and the Behavioural Theory of Meaning suggests that tangible efforts or actions can be instituted to bring such mental representations to concrete or tangible reality.



Conceptual Review

The Synopsis of the Film – ‘If I am President’

The film ‘If I am President’ is written, directed and produced by Bright Wonder Obasi. The film was officially released on November 9, 2018 in Nigeria. It is a political drama that tells a story of Zinachi Ohams (Ayoola Ayolola), the presidential candidate of the Nigerian Rebirth Party (Internet Movie Database – IMDb, 2022). The story is set in the present – day political terrain, landscape and discourses in Nigeria (IMDb, 2022). Centred on the presidential ambition of Zinachi Ohams (Ayoola Ayolola) of the Nigerian Rebirth Party, – a new political party made up of young political idealists, – the film reveals the political struggles the group make to push through the murky, rough, oligarchical, clandestine, corruption-laden, tense and aggressive political terrain to achieve their mandates (IMDb, 2022). The group, being armed with nothing more than their ideals, commitments, strategies, perseverance, doggedness and optimism, wades through the challenges of nasty politically-engineered attacks, betrayals, violence, assassination attempts, blackmails, mudslinging, calumny, and frustrations to emerge as the party with a candidate to beat in the upcoming presidential elections (IMDb, 2022).

If I am President is a political propaganda screen play supported by the MacArthur Foundation to influence behavioural change in politics, governance and civic engagements in Nigeria. The film is a satire produced with the intent to condemn and discourage Nigeria’s current political tragedies, travails, and travesties. The film is aimed at inspiring patriotism, stimulating public consciousness around corruption and reflecting the effect of bad governance in Nigeria (Daily Trust, November 7, 2018).

Film: The Propagandist ‘Poli-Medium’

Film is a *poli-medium*, that is, political medium, characterised as that because of its clout to tell stories of politics with visual vividness, aesthetics, and artistic dexterity. Beyond its communication (entertainment, education, information, mobilisation, consensus building, advocacy, etc.) value, it is a tool of propaganda (Andrew, *et al.*, 2022). Thus, it is a medium often utilised by political propagandists for the projection, portrayal, reflection, and reinforcement of political ideologies. Film is not only an instrument of communication but an organ of propaganda used to build and project certain political images and its core objective lies in the advancement of some philosophies, sentiments, biases and ideologies (Mustafa, Nourreen, & Jabeen, 2020; Merrill, Lee & Friedlander, 1997). Given its potentials and broad appeals necessitated by its nature, characteristics, features and artistic form, it readily becomes propagandists’ delight.

Few reasons buttress this idea. First, film creates an impression on its viewers owing to its audio-visual, dialogue, action-based and motion appeals. The second reason is that film uses the entertainment approach to educate, influence, inform, sensitise, advocate, mobilise, build consensus, galvanise public opinion and manipu-



late perception, worldviews or standpoints. These uniqueness place it at a vantage point of being exploited by whoever has a story to tell, narratives to sell, meanings to construct and ideologies to reflect, project, portray or reinforce.

Political messages disseminated through the film medium are acted out and are accompanied with diverse dramatic technicalities for believability to be achieved.

Propaganda and Politics: The Nexus

Whether one sees politics as a science, public affair, social science or an art, the idea that cannot be taken away from the concept is the fact that it has to do with power, power struggle, governance, and allocation of power and resources within a given polity. This is the thrust upon which the Aristotelian concept of politics is hinged.

In a broader and more technical perspective, the term 'politics' encompasses the exercise of power, exercise of authority, the making of collective decisions, the allocation of scarce resources, the practice of deception and manipulation (Modebadze, 2010; Heywood, 1997). It also connotes public administration, that is, the management of national resources (Osieja, 2021).

Propaganda, on the other hand, is "any technique, action or omission that attempts to influence the emotions, attitude, or behaviour of any person or group in order to benefit the sponsor" (Agbanu, 2014, p. 13). It utilises persuasive approaches, techniques or strategies to change or reinforce existing attitudes and opinions (Agbanu, 2014). Propaganda is a manipulative, circumventive, or persuasive tool that has often been used to control and cajole the target to conform to dominant social power and political ideologies (Fitzmaurice, 2018). It is the "deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perception, manipulate cognitions and direct behaviour to achieve response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandists" (Agbanu, 2014, p.13).

Koppang (2009) cited in Fitzmaurice (2018, p. 64) states that "propaganda works by circumventing individual reasoning and rational choice and distracts individual from making personal assessments of biases in propagandist's reasoning and message." In this regard, it attempts to manipulate individual's acceptance of a political cause, idea or ideology by preying on an individual's emotions such as fear, anger, grief, guilt and revenge (Koppang, 2009 cited in Fitzmaurice, 2018).

In order to encourage, coerce, manipulate, persuade, or intellectually circumvent the citizens towards political causes and actions, governments and political actors engage propaganda. Such engagement is done in the light of manipulating and enforcing the behaviour, attitude and perception of the citizen in accordance with their philosophy and ideology. This is done so as to coerce target audience to uphold and support propagandist's contrived images, narratives and state of affairs in which they seek to portray (Koppang, 2009 cited in Fitzmaurice, 2018).

Consequently, political expediency necessitates the use of propaganda in politics. It is on such basis that the nexus between politics and propaganda can be



established. Thus, propaganda and politics are strongly interconnected and interdependent. One can hardly function properly without the other. Hardly does politics, in all its entanglements, become successful without the creative and subtle application of propaganda tools. Through propaganda, political actors and promoters can drive home their ideologies, philosophy, sentiments, biases, beliefs, creed and idiosyncrasies in a less forceful but persuasive and manipulative ways. So, there is no political cause, movement, ideology, philosophy and creed sponsored by political actors without the element of propaganda, whether white, black or gray.

Film, Propaganda and Politics: Does Film Construct Meaning or Reflect Existing Reality?

The debate as to whether or not film is a reflector, projector or enforcer of dominant political ideologies, themes, constructs, realities or meaning is an intensified and unending ferment. The debate can not recede to the background given sacrosanct sociological issues that fan the embers of the argument.

In addressing the issue, it is pertinent to ask few pertinent questions. First, where does the inspiration for film production come from? Secondly, are the issues projected via film inherent or palpable in the society or just figment of imagination imported from the moon? The third question is: do the themes or ideologies projected through film aid in the construction of new meaning or merely reflecting an existing reality in society? Between society and film, what is responsible for the content projected and reflected as well as the meanings constructed afterwards?

The answer one may attempt to turn to in this controversy, – film and society coexist symbiotically in the meaning construction, projection and reflection (Obong, 2019). Within the society there is a domiciled quantum progression of realities that the film medium can project or reflect back to society. So, in this perspective, film reflects society's realities back to society and reinforces meanings and constructs that already exist in society. This is the dominant views expressed by the reflective-projective media theorists who argue strongly that the screen media, in our context, film, is an ambiguous mirror that reflects society for society (Loevinger, 1968). This implies that film reflects the dominant themes, images and realities already existing in society to society. This is a presupposition that film represents society's attitudes and values as it simultaneously project idealised versions of the society, and individuals, upon exposure to the versions of society represented through the film, then interpret those reflections in line with their own images and realities in the society (Nwokedi, 2018). Hence, any content that is projected beyond society's frame of reference, perception, worldview and intellection is considered alienistic and may, under benign circumstances, be discarded for lacking in context.

The onus here is that the film only reflects or beams back society to society. This is done to the extent that meaning is shaped, reinforced or constructed. This view does not override the figment of imagination and fictitious constructs that may be created by film production crew and which, when considered holisti-



cally, may either distort society's realities or create new sets of meanings or constructs that differ from existing realities. In this perspective, Nwokedi (2018, p. 2) observes that the proliferation of film "is a major threat to creating narratives that truly represent the society."

At whatever perspective one may take in this discourse, it should be re-emphasised that film, as medium of communication, replicates or showcases society. The replication or showcasing come in terms of reflecting on society's culture towards predetermined ends. Proponents of cultural norms and mainstreaming theories are of the opinion that through selective presentation and tendentious emphasis on certain political philosophies and ideologies, the screen media such as film creates an impression among its viewers that such political philosophies and ideologies are part of the political culture and climate of society (Van den Bulck, 2003; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli & Shanahan, 2002; Shrum & Bischak, 2001; Shanahan & Morgan, 1999; Folarin, 1998; Shanahan, 1998; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1980; 1982).

On political culture, propaganda and ideology transmission function of the film, the theoretical positions and dominant views expressed by the Frankfurt School and British Cultural School are critical to this discourse. Proponents of these schools of thought such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Stuart Hall, etc., would agree that politically-conscious films are produced primarily by the propagandists (who are mainly the elites) to justify and support the status quo at the expense of ordinary people. This theoretical position gave impetus to what later became the Critical Cultural Theory. Drawing heavily from the tenets of the Neo-Marxist Theory, the proponents of the Critical Cultural Theory believe that people are oppressed, manipulated or circumvented by those who control the culture, the superstructure, in other words, the mass media, in this context, film (Baran, 2004).

Hence, with film in the hands of few political propagandists, the tendency to foist their dominant political philosophies with the aid of propaganda on majority of ordinary people in society through film projections abound. Foisting their propagandistic political philosophies through film on members of society is to help institutionalise the propagandists' (elites') political dominance in society.

On the whole, the society serves as the social ambience in which film (and its crews and story ideas) is domiciled. To think that film can break free from the social matrices and complexities cobwebbing its activities is in itself unthinkable. Both exist symbiotically: film projects society by reflecting its dominant themes while society defines the social boundaries for film practice and serves as marketplace of ideas for film production and operations. Propaganda and politics are by-products of society and film, in projecting and reflecting society, project politics using tool of propaganda.



Conceptualising the 'New Nigeria' National Philosophy

The 'new Nigeria' national philosophy connotes new sets of political ideologies, ideas, ideals, sentiments, opinions, expressions, concepts, and conjectures aimed at mentally re-branding and politically repositioning Nigeria as a utopian and egalitarian nation. It is a sentimental movement within the socio-political sphere to disrupt the conventional or status quo in order to birth and sustain a great nation that every citizen yearns for, seeks or envisaged.

The 'new Nigeria' national philosophy is a propagandist's attempt to use every available opportunity, media, and situation to influence behavioural change within the political space. The attempt, in all intents and purposes, is to inspire, motivate, compel, persuade, coerce, cajole, circumvent and push the electorate to ask pertinent questions concerning how they are being governed in respect to their common wealth, patrimony, collective well-being, economic fortune, infrastructural development, human development, wealth distribution, power struggle, accountability, transparency, electioneering, elections, electoral processes and social welfare. The essence is to collectively canvass for behavioural change in the political sphere.

The constructs that made up the 'new Nigeria' national philosophy are blatant affronts to bad governance, corruption, visionless leadership, weak institutions, looting, poor health administration, nepotism, tribalism, political violence, political assassination, oligarchy, undue perpetration in power for selfish interest, godfatherism in politics, skewed resource management, misplaced political and economic priorities, unprecedented economic hardship, depreciating standard of living, poverty amidst plenty, electoral malfeasance, vote buying, election rigging, ballot snatching, colossal debt burdens, politics of bitterness, human rights abuses, and diversion of public funds for personal use palpable in Nigeria. They are aimed at instigating and stimulating the consciousness of the citizenry towards national re-birth for good.

Hence, the constructs encourage spirit of patriotism and patriotic attempts, attitudes, reactions, actions, movements, and socio-political mobilisation to salvage the Nigerian polity from the ruins of bad governance and skewed political administration. They aim to re-awaken and sensitise the socio-political consciousness of Nigerians to protest and to resist the status quo by collectively joining the rescue mission to prevent the nation from drifting to the precipice. On a whole, the 'new Nigeria' national philosophies are aimed at institutinalising or engendering a new national mentality where every citizen works towards ensuring that the current state of affairs that are inimical to the progress of the nation no longer obtain.

Thus, they ('new Nigeria' national philosophies) seek to inspire the re-modelling, re-birthing, re-branding, and re-positioning of Nigeria in the league of prosperous, egalitarian and developed nations. The 'new Nigeria' national philosophies strongly echo the presupposition that "nothing will change in Nigerian political terrain until ordinary Nigerians begin to use their mind to think and stand up for



positive changes right from their families, to communities and the nation” (Daily Trust, Nov. 7, 2018).

Objectives of the Study

This study aims at ascertaining how a Nigerian film reflect or treat political propagandists’ ideals, ideologies, philosophies or constructs. In attempting to realise the aim of the study, the study sets out to:

- i. demystify the political communication and propagandists’ strategies inherent in Bright Obasi’s film – ‘*If I am President*’.
- ii. unearth the ‘new Nigeria’ political constructs inherent in the film – ‘*If I am President*’.

Methodology

This research adopts the qualitative research method.

Qualitative research is a kind of methodology in research that is deployed to particularly study the nature of phenomena especially the context in which they appear or the perspectives from which they can be perceived (Philipsen & Vernooij-Dassen, 2007). The justification for using the qualitative research method was based on the fact that the study concerns explanation, description, and thematic analysis of the film contents as observed by the researchers and was not interested with quantification (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen & Walker, 2014; Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). To this end, qualitative content analysis design was adopted to analyse the manifest political constructs, themes and latent meanings inherent in the film ‘*If I am President*’ so as to provide the basis for critical content discourse. The design pays close attention to unique manifest and latent themes that illustrate the range of the meanings, intentions, contexts, and patterns of a phenomenon (Rose, Spinks & Canhoto, 2015; Zhang & Wildemuth, n.d.; Nachmias & Nachmias, 1976). Qualitative analysis of media contents interfaces observation methods and the actual content analysis (Prasad, 2008). It is a method of observation in the sense that instead of asking people to respond to questions, it takes the film contents that people have produced and ask questions of the film contents (Prasad, 2008; Kerlinger, 1986). Critical content discourse or analysis was adopted to place the thematic analysis into perspective. The essence of deploying the critical discourse analysis was to unveil patterned mechanisms of Bright Obasi’s film features that contribute to the fabric of ‘new Nigeria’ constructive discourse in which dominant political ideologies are projected and reflected and in which competing and contradictory political ideologies coexist (Tenorio, 2011). The content categories comprised text, dialogues, actions, diegetic and non-diegetic music that suggest ‘new Nigeria’ political philosophies or constructs.



Results and Discussion

The thematic analysis of the film *'If I am President'* reveals the prevalence of propagandist's ideals, ideologies, philosophies, or constructs aimed at instilling attitudinal and behavioural change among the Nigerian electorate towards the rebirth of Nigeria as a nation already in ruins. The results of the thematic analysis yielded the following thematic preoccupations for critical discourse:

Critical Discourse One:

What are the political communication and propagandist's strategies inherent in Bright Obasi's film – 'If I am President'?

A thematic and descriptive evaluation of the manifest and latent meanings embedded in actions, dialogues, scenes, conflicts, denouement, and suspense in the film reveal the following propagandist's political communication strategies:

- i. **Mental Conditioning and Provocativeness:** The film, as a propagandist's tool, aimed at influencing the political behaviour and attitude of the Nigerian electorate. It aims at achieving its manipulative objective by conditioning the mind and psychology of the electorate so as to stir their mental alertness to the current state of the nation's political affairs. The intent is to provoke the sensibilities of the citizens to rise up and rescue the nation from the hands of selfish, wicked and corrupt-minded politicians whose major concerns for occupying public offices are to loot, plunder and divert the common wealth of the nation for personal use while the nation lie in waste. In doing this, the film suggests that the citizens of Nigeria are *'mugus'*, that is, idiotic, insensible, stupid, mindless, zombies, and insensitive set of people who care less about their politically-inflicted plights. This political communication strategy aims at provoking an average citizen to think of a revolution, an uprising, civil demonstrations, or civil protests to overhaul the faulty political system and structure of the country in view of repositioning the country in the right direction. Using this strategy, Bright Obasi's film attempts to stimulate the mentality of the citizen by creatively deploying characters, dialogues, narration, and screen aesthetic elements that result in a dialectic between the citizen's affective dissonance and arousal to socio-political movement (Thomas, 2012).
- ii. **Scapegoatism:** Scapegoating, in the film, implies a social mechanism involving the utilisation of linguistic constructs to engage the viewer with archetypal political narrative (Viertmann, 2018). This is another psycho-motivated and psycho-active political propagandist's strategy used to communicate the philosophy of Nigeria's politics as that which makes its citizens experimental guinea pigs in the theatre of political absurdities. Scapegoatism, as used in the film, suggests that when something, anything and everything go wrong within the Nigerian polity, it is the poor masses who face the brunt and made to suffer consequences from actions that are not of their own



making. Also, it suggests that Nigerians, since independence, have suffered enough from the hands of the political class who, overtime, have diverted, plundered, abused, exploited, looted and wasted the common wealth of the nation for their personal aggrandisement. All through the film, the politicians are blamed for the nation's woes as they are depicted to have, endlessly, sucked the state institutions, sectors and structures that should have served the interest of the masses dry. The masses are left to suffer at the expense of the ruling class who live in affluence as a result of corruption and embezzlement. This political communication strategy is used to induce a social panic among the electorate. It intended to create a sense of fear and to switch the logic to a series of emotionally-based reactions to assertive political propaganda (Simons, 2019).

- iii. **Psycho-Emotional Articulation:** It is widely acknowledged that film spectators are emotionally affected by the films they watch (Armstrong & Cutting, 2022). Hence, "popular movies are constructed to control our attention and guide our eye movements across the screen" (Cutting, 2021, p.1). Bright Obasi uses the film '*If I am President*' to articulate the minds of an average citizen of Nigeria on the political status quo. The emotional and psychological articulation is made possible by using assertion propaganda such as framing, name-calling, prejudices and card stacking techniques to open the eyes of the Nigerian citizens to see how the politicians see them. The film suggests that the political class sees average Nigerian citizens as vulnerable, senseless, helpless, gullible, exploitable, mental slaves (who love their chains), powerful but powerless, easily-controlled, myopic, and voiceless. There is a presupposition running through the film that Nigerians cannot react, protest and rise up to their oppressors despite the power they possess. The film also suggests that Nigerian electorate are repulsive and lethargic toward political disposition and socio-political action and as such; they can do nothing within their powers to institutionalise the needed political change. Through the dialogues and narrations in the film, average Nigerian citizens who have seen the film can be mentally-provoked and charged to press for change. As film scholars have established the nexus between the mental schemata inherent in film audience, their cognitive construction of portrayed action and scenes in films and the intersection of film theory and the psychology of emotion (Armstrong & Cutting, 2022; Tan, 2018), this strategy is deployed to provoke the sensibilities of right thinking citizens of the nation to rise to the occasion of repositioning the nation for the better.
- iv. **Appeal to Socio-Political Action:** By using the mental conditioning, mental provocativeness, scapegoatism and psychological framing, the film '*If I am President*', through the portrayal of socio-politically-tensive actions, scenes, dialogues and other composite dramatic elements, seems to suggest the need for the citizen to engage in socio-political actions to rescue



the nation. The film, through its lead character, Zinachi Ohams (Ayoola Ayolola), calls for civic engagement, civil movement, active political participation by churches, mosques and other religious organisations, political mobilisation, voters registration, electioneering, political sensitisation campaigns, negotiations, voting during elections as well as protesting when things go wrong. All these are appeal to the electorate to take considerable socio-political action that would lead to change and national reformation.

- v. **Entertainment-Education Blend:** The film utilises and explores entertainment appeal, supplement, element and dimension to present, portray and reflect on the political realities of Nigeria with a view to educating the viewers on the recommended or approved political attitude, behaviour and action envisaged as requisites for the rebirth of a new Nigeria. Through this strategy, the viewers are enlightened, entertained, educated, sensitised, mobilised and encouraged to engage in political actions and activities that will give birth to a New Nigeria. This strategy is relevant as it engenders a pan-Nigeria spirit, Nigerian citizenship and political education in a relaxed approach while the viewers are mentally escorted through the various and significant political advocacy campaigns for a new Nigeria.

Critical Discourse Two:

What are those 'new Nigeria' political constructs inherent in Bright Obasi's film – 'If I am President'?

A thematic analysis of the film reveals the portrayal and reflection of the following 'new Nigeria' political constructs:

- i. **National Rebirth:** The cravings, yearnings, expressions, protests, aspirations, and agitations resonating throughout the film centre on the quest for the rebirth of the nation-Nigeria. Hence, the transformation or transmogrification of the nation from her current state of ruins into a nation state where every citizen's dreams can be achievable. Even the very political party of Zinachi Ohams (Ayoola Ayolola), the frontline canvasser for the rebirth of the nation is named "The Rebirth Party". Metaphorically, this implies a whole lot. The most obvious implication is that it expresses a transformist ideology to revamp the dilapidated nation where nothing seems be working into a vibrant economy. This construct, nevertheless, impinges on the minds of the masses the socio-political roles expected of them to play so as to salvage the country from the status of a failed state to its envious position of the giant of Africa and as the fastest growing economy among comity of nations.
- ii. **Nation Building:** Resonating throughout the film is the sentimental echo for nation building. In buttressing the need for nation building, it is suggested in the film that for Nigerians to have a nation of their dreams, every citizen must put their hands on deck in building the nation's failed economy, political



system, sectors and institutions. This explains vividly that to achieve a new Nigeria, there is a great need for collective and undiluted patriotism through selfless and corrupt-free civic action and public service to the nation. This underscores the need for the citizens to place the country first and above their selfish desires, aspirations and pursuits. It implores the citizens of Nigeria, as John F. Kennedy, in his 1961 inaugural speech urged Americans, to ask not of what the country can do for them but should rather ask of what they can do for their country. This is a challenge to every Nigerian to contribute in their unique ways towards public good.

- iii. **Socio-Political Egalitarianism:** In realising the ‘new Nigeria’ political hypothesis and prognosis, the film strongly canvasses and roots for an egalitarian Nigerian society where every citizen has social equality: equal rights, equal privileges, equity and justice, and equal opportunities for success. This is to happen irrespective of the citizens’ social, political, economic, religious, educational or cultural background. This calls for the balancing of power between the masses and the capitalist, political or economic ruling class in order to achieve a Nigeria where everybody is treated equally and with human dignity.
- iv. **Regard for the Constitution:** Going by the ‘new Nigeria’ campaign, regard for the constitution as the superior legal instrument in the country is envisaged. It peeps into a Nigeria where the executive, legislature and the judiciary as well as the ruling political or economic class, law enforcement agencies, the military and paramilitary will have total regard and respect for the provisions of the constitution. Hence, abiding by the law and not acting above the law as is the status quo where laws of the land only bind the commoners.
- v. **Robust Infrastructural Development:** The film envisages and conjectures Nigeria where basic infrastructures are developed, maintained and sustained. It envisages a nation where all the institutions and sectors are vibrant, strong and productive instead of being moribund or defunct. The film canvasses for a Nigeria where every sector of the nation’s economy works lucratively.
- vi. **Youth Initiative and Political Activism:** The cardinal political construct in which the film ‘*If I am President*’ is based is the “not too young to run” concept. The concept is a wake-up call on the youth to be fully active in the political process of their nation and should contest for any elective position or political office of choice. Hence, they should stop considering themselves unqualified for political contest on the basis of age. This construct buttresses the ‘youth is the futures of any nation’ and ‘youths are the leaders of tomorrow’ maxims already on ground but lack materialisation. The film suggests that the youths can put themselves together and flush out old and corrupt politicians who keep rotating political offices since the nation’s independence. There is an insinuation that instead of being used



as political thugs, political assassins, election materials snatchers, bodyguards, personal assistants, errand boys, and political jobbers to corrupt politicians, the youth can take over reins of power of the nation and introduce fresh air to the nation's polity.

- vii. **Corruption-free National Mentality:** The film campaigns strongly against corruption and allied sharp practices. It suggests that to achieve a 'new Nigeria', corruption should be done with. It vividly buttresses that corruption is the bane of Nigeria and the chief factor for the current state of the country.
- viii. **Optimism for Igbo Presidency:** The film expresses optimism that for a 'new Nigeria' to emerge, an Igbo man or woman should also be allowed to be the president of the nation. It presupposes, though latently, the hope for an Igbo man to emerge as the president of Nigeria. The director makes this theme metaphoric as he creatively revolves his political constructivism of a 'new Nigeria' around a young presidential aspirant of Igbo extraction and tag him "Zinachi Ohams" (an Igbo name). This is not a coincidence but rather the propagandist's attempt to frame the mind of the viewer to see the possibility and need for an Igbo man as president. This is to address the issues of equity, justice, detribalism and fair play in Nigerian politics as well as discouraging tribal politics in the country.
- ix. **Digitisation of National Politics:** In the 'new Nigeria' arrangement, the film suggests the place of adopting and adapting digital platforms in political activities. It reflects that digital platforms and protocols can deliver on digital political marketing, digital voting, fund raising, canvassing support, political participation, political sensitisation, political socialisation, and voter's registration. Digitisation of Nigeria politics, as reflected in the film, is predicated upon the premise that it can deliver results with precision without human error, sentiments or biases. The film presupposes that digital platforms are fast, accessible, timesaving, spontaneous, dynamic, flexible, etc. compared to humanistic interface.
- x. **Techno-Democracy:** This connotes the use of technology in the art of governance. Hence, the film presupposes that technological adaptation is core in the administration of 'new Nigeria'. New Nigeria, according to the film, should be technologically-driven. The film propagate the sentiment that to gain an advantage in administering the country with respect to resource-based information, communication technologies should be explored, exploited and leveraged. So, a 'new Nigeria' should be driven by technological innovations; a presupposition of an information society.
- xi. **Accountability, Transparency, Self-less Leadership and Good Governance:** In the 'new Nigeria' political narrative, the film enforces the need for political office holders to be accountable, transparent and selfless in the respective



political leadership positions entrusted in their care. It campaigns against sharp and fraudulent practices such as financial misappropriation, looting and selfish financial aggrandisement and also against political hooliganism. The film calls for exemplary leadership from all cadres, strata, sectors and national institutions.

- xii. **Politics without Bitterness:** As exemplified by the character of Zinachi Ohams (Ayoola Ayolola), the film strongly condemns the idea of retaliating the opposition political parties and politicians with politics of mudslinging, character assassination, calumny and politics of bitterness by presupposing that such often sow the seed of discord and breed bad blood among politicians during electioneering. Through this attempt, the film condemns any conflicting situations that heat up the polity. In the film, Zinachi Ohams (Ayoola Ayolola) dares to be different and to root the political rebirth of 'new Nigeria' on a straightforward, peaceful, convincing, truthful, candour, and candid political campaigns rather than on fabricated, discordant, defamatory and baseless campaigns aimed at smearing the reputation of political opponents as evident in Nigerian dark politicking. This is a suggestion that 'new Nigeria' is achievable when politicians begin to base their political campaigns on rock-solid and people-centric manifestoes instead of focusing their energies on attacking their opponents. Hence, bolstering the need for fair play, spirit of sportsmanship, candour and camaraderie during political electioneering. It shows further that the manifestoes or proposed policies of the opponents should be attacked and counter-attacked and not the opponents themselves.
- xiii. **Free and Fair Elections:** The film stresses the need for credible elections where vote casting, vote counting, voters' accreditation, and vote announcement are done in an atmosphere of truthfulness, openness and fairness. The film stresses that election rigging, vote buying, electoral malfeasance and other sharp practices during elections are antithetical to the rebirth of a new nation. Hence, illegal electoral practices should be eschewed with immediate effect.
- xiv. **Crowd Funding for Political Campaigns:** The film portrays Nigerian electioneering as capital-intensive to engage in by credible candidates who do not have strong capital base. Hence, for credible candidates with low financial budget to scale through the electioneering, the film suggests that they should source for funds from the electorate. In this instance, the funds, free donations, financial gestures or supports extended to such candidates in this regard will show how popular they are, that is, their preference indices by the electorate. Crowd funding is recommended in order to discourage the direct funding of electioneering by corrupt and fraudulent cabals of political godfathers whose motives for political sponsorship is to perpetuate their political



influence, powers and firm grip on national treasury (from closed doors or behind the scene). Usually it is a situation where they put neophytes in power to serve their selfish political interests. So, by allowing the electorate to fund their choiced candidates during electioneering, the candidates are expected to be loyal to the electorate who supported them and thereby, serving their interests. This is a presupposed metaphor for popular democracy.

- xv. **Detribalism in Politics:** The film echoes the idea that the political problems and woes bedeviling Nigeria is not ethnocentric. Thus, it cuts across the various ethnicities, tribes, religions, cultures, etc. making up Nigeria. So, to solve Nigeria's political woes, there is need to approach it from a detribalistic perspective.
- xvi. **Women Participation in Politics:** The film – ‘*If I am President*’, as an attempt to conjecture the ‘new Nigeria’ political paradigm, emphasises the need for women to actively partake in the nation's political processes. Hence, the ‘women in politics’ construct is resonated to instill political consciousness among women and perhaps to inform, educate, sensitise and mobilise them to take politics seriously for the collective welfare of women and the entire nation.
- xvii. **National Security Plan:** National security is a key political construct inherently expressed in the film. Arguments, counter-arguments, and positions are rife in the film that for a ‘new Nigeria’ to be birthed, security of lives and properties of the citizens cannot be negotiated and thus, becomes sacrosanct. The idea latently expressed through the film is that there would be no ‘new Nigeria’ if the citizens are still not protected against clannish, ethnic, religious and politically-motivated killings orchestrated by political assassins, insurgents, terrorist organisations, bandits, jihadists and armed robbers.
- xviii. **Political Tolerance:** As the ‘new Nigeria’ political constructs projected throughout the film is likely to orchestrate a kind of nation that can be considered as a conglomeration of ethnic, religious, clannish, tribal and racial melting pots, the film stresses the need for tolerance across and among the various unifying components that would make up the ‘new Nigeria’ arrangement.

Summary and Conclusion

The critical discourses sustained in this research have resonated the idea of film being a *poli-medium*, that is, a political medium with vested clout to tell stories of politics with visual vividness, aesthetics, and artistic dexterity. Through the portrayals of political realities and the sublime or overt attempt to influence or change behaviour of its viewers, film has proven that beyond its communication



(entertainment, education, information, mobilisation, consensus building, advocacy, etc.) value, it is a tool of propaganda (Andrew, *et al*, 2022).

The dominant themes and constructs portrayed in films, beyond serving entertainment purposes, are to condition the mind of the viewers and mobilise them for social action. Hence, films, when critically assessed, scrutinised and evaluated, open the vista of the critic and the unsuspecting to their philosophical profundities in a multi-dimensional perspectives ranging from mental conditioning, psycho-emotional articulation, subtle appeals to emotions, edutainment blend and assertion propaganda in the sphere of politics.

The political economy of films has robust implications for their utilisation as propaganda tools to galvanise political thoughts and philosophies in attaining pre-conceived intents, desires and objectives of the propagandist. It can be established that films are propaganda means to political ends. This justifies the notion that every film is political.

This idea is further buttressed in our qualitative analysis of Bright Obasi's film '*If I am President*' where a thematic analysis of the film reveals substantial, vivid, plausible, and metaphorical political constructs envisaged by the filmmakers as cardinal principles and cornerstones for galvanising political thoughts in view of attaining a national rebirth philosophy tagged 'new Nigeria'. Those political constructs are portrayed as metaphorical narratives that, apart from creating the imagery of a 'new Nigeria', point a new direction for all Nigerians to toe paths that are expected to lead to an ideal and a utopian nation. To wit, the new Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the thematic analysis and critical content discourses attempted in this paper, the following recommendations were made that:

- i. Civic organisations, civil liberty organisations, pressure groups and non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) should resonate the thematic preoccupations of the film in their campaigns, negotiations, rallies and protests for an egalitarian Nigeria.
- ii. The federal, regional, state and local governments should organise political sensitisation campaigns on the 'new Nigeria' political constructs reflected in the film - '*If I am President*' to stimulate the minds of the constituents towards the attainment of a new nation.
- iii. Tertiary, secondary and primary schools should organise political sensitisation symposia for students or pupils in view of inculcating the thematic preoccupation of the film for collective actions at achieving a national rebirth.
- iv. The thematic preoccupation of the film should be introduced into the Citizenship Education curricula for primary, secondary and tertiary students in Nigeria. Here, the National Universities Commission (NUC), National Board



for Technical Education (NBTE) and States Education Board have to sit across board and amend the Citizenship Education curricula to reflect the 'new Nigeria' political ideology, ideal and philosophy.

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