

## **THE IMPERATIVE OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT THROUGH THEATRE AND FILM ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE NIGERIAN CREATIVE INDUSTRY**

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**Abstract:** *This article underscores the need for a systematic developmental program for young theatre and film practitioners in production, administration, and entrepreneurship. It advances the phrase catch them young in a rapidly changing world where youths confront challenges such as a lack of self-discovery and self-actualization, unemployment, limited opportunities, restricted access to resources, inadequate avenues for self-expression, and the lure of vices. Addressing these issues requires engaging young people in theatre and film, as these fields provide innovative solutions and meaningful alternatives. Theatre and film serve as vital platforms for nurturing creativity, building skills, and fostering economic empowerment. They enable young talents to express their voices on pressing social issues while, through entrepreneurship, contributing significantly to national and global economies. The paper explores the multifaceted role of theatre and film in youth empowerment, highlighting their transformative impact on individuals and communities. Methodologically, the study adopts the qualitative paradigm, with case study design and comparative analysis of individuals who began theatre and film entrepreneurship at a young age and later achieved global recognition. The findings reveal that early involvement allows young people to accumulate diverse experiences, positioning them for indubitable impact within the cultural sector.*

**Keywords:** *Creative Industry, Cultural Sector, Theatre and Film Development, Youth Empowerment, Youth Entrepreneurship.*

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### **Introduction**

The problem of vices among young people has become a serious national concern, escalating into restiveness and violence. Most troubling is that the current fame and flamboyance of so-called “Yahoo boys”, which seem to attract many members of Generation Z. This disturbing phenomenon raises profound concerns about the future of the nation Nigeria. Akpokighe and Ejovi (2020) argue that youth restiveness is driven largely by widespread

unemployment, poverty, and idleness. Many Nigerian youths are deprived of basic amenities such as schools, hospitals, and roads in their communities, making it difficult for them to live comfortably or access essential resources. The absence of adequate infrastructure, recreational facilities, and community centers has contributed to young people turning to nefarious activities such as joining ethnic militia groups, cultism, kidnapping, armed robbery, and social unrest. This destructive

cycle has had devastating consequences for the country, further weakening its social fabric and obstructing progress. The concentration of Nigeria's political leadership on the primitive accumulation of wealth" has also distracted leaders from addressing the strategic imperatives of youth development and empowerment. Consequently, the absence of appropriate infrastructure and opportunities prevents countless young people from realizing their potential. Therefore, rather than becoming engines of growth and innovation, many fall into desperation, seeking wealth through crime. This unfortunate reality aligns with Salifu's (2023) analysis of the "Yahoo Yahoo" phenomenon, which he identifies as the product of poor governance, persistent unemployment, materialism, and weak institutional responses. He emphasizes the urgent need for the government to create employment opportunities while urging parents and religious leaders to inculcate moral values grounded in African traditions, Christianity, and Islam. However, no matter how much moral instruction is given, without viable economic opportunities such efforts will ultimately prove futile, as unemployed youths remain vulnerable to criminal temptations.

The problem of unemployment is not unique to Nigeria. The International Labour Organization (2022) reports that youth unemployment remains a global crisis, with over 73 million young people unemployed worldwide, and millions more underemployed or trapped in informal, insecure work. Sub-Saharan Africa faces the fastest-growing

youth population globally, yet its economies have failed to generate corresponding job opportunities (UNDP, 2021). Countries that have successfully mitigated youth restiveness such as South Korea, India, and Brazil have done so by strategically investing in education, skill acquisition, and cultural industries (Chatterjee, 2019; Kim, 2016). Nigerias failure to follow this path leaves it vulnerable to rising insecurity and wasted demographic potential. Akpokighe and Ejovi (2020) further elucidate that as young people transition from childhood to adulthood, they undergo multiple transformations, including the recognition of the importance of socialization and collaboration in achieving community goals. The United Nations (2019) similarly notes that young people, regardless of educational attainment, are eager to secure meaningful work to sustain themselves financially. Yet, in Nigeria, the rapidly growing youth population has outpaced the availability of decent jobs, creating high dependency rates and driving many into desperation. Youths, by nature, are enthusiastic and energetic, but without proper direction, such energy can easily be misapplied. This makes it imperative to harness their vitality, skills, and creativity as assets for national development. Indeed, when young people make positive contributions to society, they not only drive progress but also foster cohesion, innovation, and sustainable growth. Stating the immense contribution of young people to communities, Akpokighe and Ejovi (2020)

explain that they bear responsibilities that include maintaining social order, safeguarding cultural heritage, participating in politics, spearheading initiatives, and engaging in cultural practices such as festivals, sports, and community rituals. These activities promote both personal development and collective welfare. Yet, in the absence of state-led structures to guide these energies productively, many youths gravitate toward unproductive or destructive paths.

It is therefore imperative for the Nigerian government to establish comprehensive systems, infrastructure, and enabling environments for positive youth engagement. Such initiatives, if effectively implemented by relevant ministries and agencies, would maximize the potential of young people as the backbone of the nation. Identifying and nurturing talent early allows young people to acquire valuable experiences that prepare them for long-term impact. History shows that many global figures, including Michael Jackson, Charlie Chaplin, Steven Spielberg, and Peter Brook, achieved prominence because of early talent recognition and supportive environments. Unfortunately, Nigeria lacks the structures to provide similar opportunities for its youths. Although the cultural industry, particularly theatre and film offers one of the most viable avenues for youth empowerment and engagement, its vast potential has not received adequate government attention. At a time when creative industries are thriving globally, and when the motion picture

sector is recognized as one of the fastest-growing industries worldwide (UNESCO, 2021), Nigeria cannot afford to neglect its cultural assets. Nollywood already stands as the worlds second-largest film industry in terms of output, employing over one million people (Haynes, 2016). Harnessing this success for youth empowerment could transform not only individual lives but also the national economy. Given Nigerias demographic advantage and the digital creativity of its youth, especially on social media platforms, creating enabling environments for theatre and film practitioners could redirect youthful energy from crime to innovation and from vices to value creation.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts the qualitative paradigm of research, which is suitable for exploring complex social issues. Unlike the quantitative methods, qualitative inquiry prioritizes depth of meaning and contextual interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The article employs the case study design to provide detailed analysis of individuals who began careers in theatre and film entrepreneurship at a young age and achieved significant impact. Case study research allows for a holistic understanding of specific contexts and contributes to theoretical building through concrete illustrations (Yin, 2018). The research relies predominantly on secondary data sources, including scholarly literature, policy documents, organizational reports, and credible

media materials, selected purposely for their relevance and authority in addressing youth restiveness, unemployment, cultural industries, and creative entrepreneurship. Comparative insights are also drawn between Nigerian experiences and global practices, thereby enriching the analysis. To enhance credibility and trustworthiness, the study applies triangulation by consulting diverse and authoritative sources. While the absence of primary data limits firsthand perspectives, this is mitigated by the breadth and depth of the literature consulted.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study anchored on the theory of constructivist, which emphasizes the subjective nature of reality and the ways individuals and groups construct meaning from their lived experiences (Schwandt, 1994). Constructivism posits that knowledge is not passively received but actively built through social interaction, reflection, and engagement with one's environment. This framework is especially relevant to theatre and film, as these art forms thrive on collaboration, storytelling, and interpretation, all of which rely on shared meaning-making processes. Applied to youth empowerment, constructivism provides a lens for understanding how young people, when engaged in cultural practices, construct identities, values, and entrepreneurial mindsets. Theatre and film become spaces where youths reinterpret their realities, challenge social norms, and project alternative futures. Early involvement in these creative spaces allows them to

transform individual potential into collective empowerment, as their work resonates within communities and contributes to broader socio-economic development. Thus, by adopting constructivism, this study acknowledges the multiplicity of perspectives that can shape empowerment through the arts. It recognizes that the success of youth in theatre and film is not merely a product of innate talent but of interactive processes between individuals, their communities, and the cultural environments that nurture them. This framework therefore situates theatre and film not only as artistic endeavors but also as dynamic platforms for building meaning, agency, and empowerment.

### **A Review of the Cultural Sector**

The cultural sector, also referred to as the creative and entertainment industries, has increasingly been recognized as a vital driver of economic growth, social cohesion, and cultural diplomacy in the contemporary global economy. Globally, this sector encompasses industries such as film, theatre, music, publishing, fashion, advertising, architecture, design, crafts, cultural heritage, tourism, and digital media. It is widely acknowledged as one of the fastest-growing sectors in terms of revenue generation, employment, and international trade (UNESCO, 2021). In 2011, for example, the United States Bureau of Economic Analysis and the National Endowment for the Arts reported that the creative industries, led by

Hollywood, contributed approximately \$504 billion to the U.S. economy, accounting for 3.2 percent of the nation's GDP. This underscores the seriousness with which developed nations integrate cultural industries into their economic planning and development strategies (Towse, 2019). The global value of the cultural sector is also well documented by international organizations. According to UNCTAD (2018), trade in creative goods and services has become a dynamic component of the world economy, with an estimated annual growth rate of 8.7 percent. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development notes that the creative economy contributes around 3.4 percent of global trade. Such data highlights the immense potential of the sector not only for wealth creation and employment but also for addressing social issues such as inequality, poverty alleviation, and intercultural understanding.

In Nigeria, the cultural sector has demonstrated significant economic and social viability, though it has not always been given the institutional and financial support it deserves. The Nigerian Creative Economy Report (2013) confirms that the creative industries contribute substantially to economic development through job creation, human capital development, and cultural exchange. Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry, is particularly emblematic of this growth. By 2016, the International Labour Organization (ILO) reported that Nollywood had become the second-largest employer of labour in the country after agriculture,

with over 300,000 direct employees. Its annual revenues, estimated between US\$500 million and US\$800 million, account for approximately 2 percent of Nigerias GDP (Haynes, 2016). Nollywood also produces over 2,000 movies annually, with an audience of over 200 million across Africa and the diaspora, thereby strengthening Nigerias soft power and cultural influence (Okome, 2019). Nigerias music industry has also emerged as a leading cultural export. Generating approximately US\$150 million annually, it is considered Africas largest and most globally visible music market, propelled by Afrobeats artists who dominate international charts and streaming platforms (Omoniyi, 2021). Together, Nigerias film and music industries not only contribute to economic growth but also shape global perceptions of African creativity, resilience, and innovation. The Skills Initiative for Africa (2019) estimates that the total employment generated by Nigerias cultural sector exceeds 3.2 million, spanning diverse industries such as film, television, radio, performing arts, festivals, carnivals, dance, comedy, music, animation, visual arts, tourism, fashion, literature, publishing, advertising, and architecture. Despite this diversity theatre and film remain central to the Nigerian creative ecosystem.

Historically, theatre has served as a training ground for most of Nigerias successful filmmakers, actors and producers and other fields of the creative industry. But the relevance of theatre is



undermined, hence there is a decline. Though decline of live theatre in Nigeria, started with economic hardship, poor infrastructure, and inadequate investment has added to it and this has its limited visibility compared to Nollywood. Yet, theatre continues to play a pivotal role in nurturing young talent, offering opportunities for self-discovery, creativity, and civic engagement (Barber, 2018). This is because government interventions have intermittently boosted the film sector. For instance, following the launch of the Nigerian Creative and Entertainment Industry Stimulation Loan Scheme by President Goodluck Jonathan in 2010, valued at US\$200 million, the film industry recorded substantial growth. Nigeria became the third-highest global player in entertainment revenues, after the United States and India, employing over one million people, particularly youths (African Report, 2014). Such initiatives reveal the sectors enormous potential for national development if adequately harnessed, but this initiative did not capture theatre. However, despite these gains, the Nigerian cultural sector remains underdeveloped relative to its potential. Challenges such as piracy, weak intellectual property enforcement, inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and insufficient government policies hinder its growth. In comparison, countries such as South Korea which have demonstrated how deliberate state investment in cultural industries (e.g., K-Pop and Korean cinema) can transform a sector into a global economic powerhouse (Kim,

2016). Nigeria, with its youthful population and vibrant artistic base, has the demographic advantage to achieve similar feats if structural support is provided.

If properly invested in, theatre in Nigeria could once again thrive as it does in advanced countries where cultural institutions and policies are robust. The Nigerian cultural sector is vast and dynamic, with theatre and film serving as crucial engines of creativity and youth empowerment. Strategic investment, policy reforms, and youth-centered initiatives could enable the sector to address pressing challenges such as unemployment, poverty, insecurity, and governance deficits, thereby positioning culture not merely as entertainment but as a transformative tool for national development.

### **The Relevance of Youth Empowerment for Entrepreneurship Development**

Youth empowerment occupies a central place in contemporary discourses on sustainable development, as young people represent both the most dynamic demographic group and the most vulnerable to socio-economic exclusion. In the context of entrepreneurship, empowerment refers not only to equipping youth with technical and managerial skills but also to enabling them to recognize and harness their creative capacities. Within the cultural industries, especially theatre and film, youth empowerment has proven to be a catalyst for innovation, self-expression, and socio-

economic transformation (UNESCO, 2021). One of the foremost arguments for empowering youth through entrepreneurship in film and theatre lies in the opportunities these fields offer for artistic self-discovery and professional growth. The arts function as a medium of expression through which young people articulate their identities, aspirations, and social concerns. Research by the National Endowment for the Arts (2012) has demonstrated that young people who engaged in creative activities tend to perform better academically, display stronger interpersonal skills, and exhibit higher levels of civic participation. These outcomes underscore the developmental role of the arts as a preparatory ground for entrepreneurship, where creativity is complemented by organizational, financial, and leadership competencies (Essig, 2015).

Entrepreneurship in theatre and film also strengthens the broader cultural economy by diversifying narratives and expanding representational horizons. Young entrepreneurs frequently challenge dominant cultural forms, disrupt conventional storytelling, and create new platforms for marginalized voices (De Beukelaer, 2015). In Nigeria, for example, the success of Afrobeats driven largely by young musicians illustrates how youthful innovation can achieve global visibility and economic impact (Omoniyi, 2021). Similarly, young Nigerian filmmakers and theatre practitioners are reimagining indigenous stories for global audiences, thereby strengthening

cultural diplomacy and national branding. Such ventures illustrate how youth empowerment intersects with cultural entrepreneurship to foster not only personal advancement but also collective identity and pride. A further dimension of relevance is the role of digital technology in amplifying youth-led entrepreneurship. The proliferation of online services such as YouTube, and Facebook has created new markets for localized and experimental content for Nigerian content creators. This digital environment reduces barriers to entry, allowing young entrepreneurs to bypass traditional gatekeepers and directly engage global audiences (Lobato, 2019). Hence a lot of Nigerian youths have engaged themselves with these online outlets which has become means of livelihood and innovative test grounds for them.

From a developmental perspective, youth entrepreneurship in theatre and film has far-reaching socio-economic implications. It generates employment, reduces dependency ratios, and mitigates the risks of youth restiveness by redirecting their energies from destructive activities toward constructive engagement (ILO, 2016). Empowerment in this sense is multidimensional, encompassing economic independence, social recognition, and psychological confidence. By nurturing entrepreneurial skills in cultural industries, young people gain the capacity to shape their own destinies while simultaneously contributing to the creative and economic vitality of

their societies (Flew, 2019). Moreover, theatre and film serve as pedagogical and transformative spaces. Theatre, in particular, emphasizes collaboration, discipline, and resilience, qualities essential to entrepreneurship. Performances foster empathy and dialogue, equipping youth to engage with social issues critically and creatively (Barber, 2018). Film, with its expansive reach, allows young entrepreneurs to influence public opinion, contest stereotypes, and construct new cultural imaginaries. Empowered youths, therefore, do not merely consume culture; they actively produce and reconfigure it, positioning themselves as agents of change.

The relevance of youth empowerment for entrepreneurship development in cultural industries also aligns with global policy frameworks. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize the need for inclusive growth, decent work, and reduced inequalities. By equipping young people to become entrepreneurs in theatre and film, societies address these imperatives while fostering innovation-driven economies (UNCTAD, 2018). African governments in particular must recognize that a vibrant cultural sector led by empowered youth can diversify national economies away from dependence on extractive industries, thereby ensuring resilience in an era of global uncertainty. Empowering youth for entrepreneurship in theatre and film is therefore not merely a cultural aspiration but a socio-economic

necessity. Empowered youth entrepreneurs have the potential to transform the cultural economy into a robust engine of growth, identity, and social transformation.

### **Difficulties and Constraints in Youth Entrepreneurship Development**

Entrepreneurship is widely recognized as a critical driver of economic growth and social transformation, yet youth-led enterprises within Nigerias film and theatre industries face numerous structural and systemic obstacles. Although, young people possess the creativity, energy, and ambition to thrive in entrepreneurial ventures, a combination of financial, educational, institutional, and infrastructural barriers often impedes their progress. Addressing these difficulties is essential for harnessing the full potential of the creative industries as engines of youth empowerment and national development. The primary challenge amongst these is the limited access to finance. Starting and sustaining a theatre or film venture requires significant capital investment in equipment, facilities, marketing, and distribution. However, Nigerian youths face considerable barriers to securing credit and venture funding. The World Bank (2018) reports that only 40 percent of young entrepreneurs in Nigeria have access to formal financial services, with many unable to meet collateral requirements or navigate the bureaucratic loan processes of commercial banks. The absence of tailored financial instruments for creative enterprises exacerbates this challenge, forcing



many young entrepreneurs to rely on personal savings or informal networks, which are often insufficient for scaling their businesses. Starting a proper theatre and film business is capital intensive therefore without the proper support mechanism many young people become discouraged.

Equally significant is the deficit of entrepreneurial knowledge and business skills. Many young Nigerians entering film and theatre are equipped with raw talent but lack formal training in entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and business management. The International Labour Organization (2017) notes that only 20 percent of young entrepreneurs in Nigeria have received structured training in entrepreneurship. This skills gap leads to high failure rates among youth-led enterprises and limits their competitiveness in a rapidly evolving creative economy. Moreover, there is the problem of lack of adequate mentorship. According to Nwakanma & Ofoegbu, (2020) inadequate mentorship opportunities mean that emerging entrepreneurs often lack guidance in navigating the complexities of production management, intellectual property rights, and global distribution networks. The importance of mentorship cannot be overstated as proper mentorship will help young entrepreneurs navigate these and other tough challenges they may encounter in the business with ease. More over mentors serve as confidants, guardians and solace to mentees.

Again, the broader Nigerian business environment presents additional constraints. High levels of corruption, infrastructural deficits, and policy inconsistencies create a climate of uncertainty that discourages entrepreneurial ventures and innovation for young people. Nigerias ranking of 146 out of 180 in Transparency Internationals Corruption Perceptions Index highlights the lofty pervasive influence of corruption in business transactions, which disproportionately affects young entrepreneurs who lack the financial resources to negotiate corrupt systems (Transparency International, 2019). Furthermore, inadequate infrastructure such as unreliable electricity, limited access to modern production studios, and poor internet penetration poses significant barriers to innovation in film and theatre (Akinyoade, 2021). Without these fundamental supports young creative, they struggle to achieve the technical quality and distribution scale required to compete locally and globally.

Furthermore, regulatory and bureaucratic hurdles additionally complicate youth entrepreneurship in cultural industries. Piracy remains a rampant impediment in Nigeria, undermining the profitability of creative works and discouraging investment in the sector (Haynes, 2016). Complex licensing processes, opaque tax regulations, and administrative inefficiencies often deter aspiring entrepreneurs. The absence of clear policies that recognize the specific needs of creative enterprises creates an uneven playing field, where informal

operators dominate and formal growth is stifled (UNCTAD, 2018). Simplified regulatory frameworks, coupled with targeted government incentives, would go a long way in creating a supportive ecosystem for youth entrepreneurs in film and theatre. The marginalization of live theatre, which continues to serve as a training ground for many actors and filmmakers, limits opportunities for young entrepreneurs to refine their skills in performance and production (Barber, 2018). Without deliberate investment in cultural infrastructure such as theatres, rehearsal spaces, and film academies, the capacity of young people to build sustainable careers in these industries will remain constrained.

While Nigerian youth demonstrate extraordinary potential in film and theatre entrepreneurship, their efforts are curtailed by financial exclusion, inadequate training and mentorship, weak infrastructure, corruption, and regulatory inefficiencies. These challenges highlight the urgent need for multi-stakeholder interventions involving government, private sector, and international organizations to create an enabling environment for youth empowerment. Without structural reforms and sustained investment, the transformative promise of youth entrepreneurship in cultural industries will remain unrealized.

### **Global Icons in Theatre and Film Entrepreneurship with Stories of Early Rise and Enterprise**

Theatre and film, as cultural industries, are uniquely positioned to nurture youthful creativity and channel it into socially transformative enterprises. Both sectors serve as platforms for the development of artistic talent, entrepreneurial acumen, and cultural innovation. To illustrate this transformative potential case studies of select global icons who began their careers early and went on to shape the trajectories of their industries are examined. By analyzing the lives and careers of select figures, we can draw lessons about how personal ingenuity, institutional support, and entrepreneurial experimentation intersect to produce lasting global influence. This approach is consistent with the constructivist theoretical framework, which posits that knowledge and meaning are not passively acquired but actively constructed through lived experiences (Vygotsky, 1978; Schunk, 2012). The lives of youth who later became industry leaders illustrate how creative engagement at an early stage can build the symbolic and practical resources necessary for global impact. This synoptic study therefore examines four figures; Peter Brook, Steven Spielberg, Ayo Makun (AY), and Funke Akindele, whose careers exemplify the role of youth theatre and film entrepreneurship in shaping not only personal success but also broader cultural landscapes. Brook and Spielberg provide insights from the Global North, demonstrating how institutional infrastructures and technological innovations facilitated their careers. AY and Akindele illustrate the adaptive creativity of

Nigerian youths navigating under-resourced contexts to achieve both national and global prominence.

### **Peter Brook: Youthful Experimentation and the Transformation of Theatre**

Peter Brook (1925– 2022) represents one of the most striking examples of how youthful engagement in theatre can evolve into a lifetime of innovative cultural leadership. Born in London, Brook directed his first major production, *Doctor Faustus*, at the age of 18 in 1943. By 20, he had established himself in the British theatre landscape, directing professionally during the difficult years of World War II (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2022). His meteoric rise illustrates what Bourdieu (1993) describes as the accumulation of cultural capital: Early exposure to practice, reinforced by institutional validation, builds the symbolic resources necessary to sustain long-term influence. Brooks early career coincided with a period of profound experimentation in post-war British theatre, where directors and playwrights were seeking to redefine theatres role in society. Brook positioned himself at the forefront of the avant-garde movement, rejecting theatrical naturalism in favour of experimental forms. His groundbreaking production of *Marat/Sade* in 1964, with the Royal Shakespeare Company, earned him international acclaim and the Tony Award for Best Director. In this productions his radical style challenged the audiences perception of theatre as mere

entertainment, transforming it into a site of political and philosophical engagement (Kustow, 2005).

Beyond *Marat/Sade*, Brooks philosophy was crystallized in his seminal work *The Empty Space* (1968), in which he argued that theatre can be created anywhere as long as there is an actor, a space, and an audience. This minimalist conception of theatre was itself a product of youthful experimentation, an insistence that innovation need not depend on elaborate infrastructure but on the courage to reimagine conventions. Here, Brooks career aligns with constructivist principles: rather than accepting pre-given meanings, he actively constructed new theatrical vocabularies from his lived experience as a young director confronting post-war cultural anxieties. Brooks global outlook further distinguished his career. From the 1970s onwards, he engaged with diverse performance traditions in Africa and Asia, incorporating them into his productions while also contributing to the circulation of global theatre. His intercultural collaborations underscore the entrepreneurial dimension of his practice: Brook not only directed plays but also built institutions such as the International Centre for Theatre Research in Paris, which became a hub for experimental performance (Kustow, 2005). In this sense, Brook was both an artist and a cultural entrepreneur, leveraging his early opportunities into structures that nurtured future generations of theatre-makers.

For Nigeria, Brooks trajectory highlights several lessons. First, it demonstrates the value of early exposure to theatre and structured opportunities for young directors. Brook was able to experiment as a youth because Britain possessed a robust cultural infrastructure, including theatres, arts councils, and universities, that legitimized and supported youthful creativity. Nigerian youths, by contrast, often lack comparable opportunities; while talent abounds, the absence of institutional support limits experimentation. Second, Brooks insistence on theatres minimal requirements resonates with Nigerias resource-constrained context. His philosophy of the empty space” demonstrates that innovation is possible even with limited infrastructure, provided there is vision, mentorship, and recognition. Third, his global entrepreneurship underscores the importance of situating Nigerian youth theatre within transnational networks. As Brook demonstrated, engagement with global traditions and markets can amplify local creativity into global influence. Brooks story is not merely one of individual brilliance but a case study of how youthful experimentation, institutional support, and entrepreneurial vision intersect to produce lasting cultural legacies. From a constructivist perspective, his meaning-making practices illustrate the power of youth theatre entrepreneurship to transform personal experience into global cultural capital. For Nigeria, Brooks legacy is both an inspiration and a challenge: inspiration because it shows what youth can achieve with support, and a challenge because

it underscores the infrastructural gaps that must be addressed if Nigerian youth are to realize their full potential in theatre and film.

### **Steven Spielberg: Youthful Passion and the Institutionalization of Global Filmmaking**

Steven Spielberg (1946- ) provides one of the most compelling illustrations of how youthful passion, nurtured by persistence and institutional opportunity, can evolve into a career that fundamentally transforms the global film industry. Spielbergs trajectory demonstrates the significance of technological innovation, mass audiences, and entrepreneurial vision in constructing a new cinematic order. His life underscores how the intersection of youthful enthusiasm, access to evolving media technologies, and institutional validation can create not only personal success but also systemic transformation of the creative economy. Spielbergs fascination with cinema emerged early in his childhood. By the age of 12, he was already experimenting with his fathers 8mm camera, producing rudimentary war films with neighborhood friends as actors (Barson, 2017). At 16, his short film *Escape to Nowhere* won first prize at a state film competition, a formative recognition that affirmed his creative instincts. Such early exposure exemplifies the constructivist principle that learning and identity are shaped through active engagement with ones environment (Schunk, 2012). Spielberg did not simply consume cinema; he constructed meaning by producing his own

films, thus laying the foundation for his identity as a filmmaker.

His entry into Hollywood also reflects the role of institutional networks in amplifying youthful creativity. In 1968, after producing the 22-minute short film 'Amblin, Spielberg secured a contract with Universal Studios, becoming the youngest director ever signed to a long-term deal with a major Hollywood studio (Baxter, 1996). This transition illustrates Bourdieu's (1993) notion of field positioning: early achievements, when validated by established institutions, enable young creators to gain legitimacy and access to symbolic and material resources. Spielberg's talent was undeniable, but it was Universal's recognition that transformed him from an aspiring filmmaker into a professional entrepreneur within the global cultural field. Spielberg's breakthrough came with *Jaws* (1975), a film that not only broke box office records but also redefined the economics of cinema by pioneering the modern blockbuster model. The film's release strategy wide distribution supported by massive television advertising set new industry standards (Cook, 2000). From a youth empowerment perspective, this case demonstrates how innovation is often born from risk-taking. Spielberg, then only 28, insisted on shooting on location in the ocean rather than in controlled studio tanks, a decision that created production challenges but ultimately delivered unprecedented realism. The film's success demonstrated that youthful

boldness, when coupled with institutional resources, can yield transformative results.

Subsequent films such as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), and the *Indiana Jones* ()franchise further consolidated Spielberg's reputation as both a master storyteller and an industry entrepreneur. His films combined spectacle with emotional resonance, making them accessible to global audiences across cultural divides. This universal appeal reflects Appadurai's (1996) argument about the mediascape as a key site of globalization, where cultural products circulate transnationally and shape shared imaginaries. Spielberg's youthful imagination nurtured through early experiments in suburban America eventually influenced collective dreams across continents. In addition to his artistic achievements, Spielberg exemplifies entrepreneurial institution-building. He co-founded Amblin Entertainment in 1984 and later DreamWorks SKG in 1994, ventures that expanded his influence from directing into producing and distributing films. DreamWorks, in particular, positioned Spielberg not merely as a creative talent but as a global cultural entrepreneur, capable of shaping the infrastructures of media production and distribution (Schatz, 2009). This trajectory highlights the importance of viewing youth empowerment in film not only in terms of individual expression but also in terms of structural participation in the cultural economy.



From a constructivist perspective, Spielbergs career demonstrates how personal experiences are reconfigured into globally resonant narratives. Many of his films, such as *E.T.* and *Close Encounters*, drew from his own childhood feelings of alienation and longing for connection (Baxter, 1996). By transforming personal memory into cinematic storytelling, Spielberg illustrated the constructivist principle that meaning is actively constructed and shared through cultural production. His career therefore exemplifies how youthful subjectivities can become the raw material for collective cultural imagination. For Nigeria, Spielbergs trajectory offers several instructive lessons. First, it underscores the necessity of institutional support. Spielbergs rise was made possible not only by his talent but also by Universal Studios willingness to invest in a young, untested director. Nigerian youth filmmakers often lack equivalent institutional scaffolding, limiting their ability to take risks or to innovate at scale. Spielbergs story demonstrates that youthful creativity, when reinforced by institutional support and entrepreneurial vision, can fundamentally reshape global cultural industries.

### **Ayo Makun (AY): Youthful Creativity and the Globalization of Nigerian Comedy-Film Enterprise**

Ayodeji Richard Makun (b. 1971), known as AY, offers a distinctly Nigerian narrative of resilience, innovation, and cultural entrepreneurship. His

career illustrates how young talents can navigate structural constraints to achieve both national and international recognition, particularly within the rapidly evolving Nollywood industry. AYs beginnings in theatre and comedy during his time at Delta State University illustrate how Nigerian youth construct artistic identities within grassroots contexts (Igbokwe, 2015). His early recognition as “Most Creative Student” highlights the role of educational institutions in validating youth talent. His breakthrough came with *30 Days in Atlanta* (2014), a comedy film that became one of Nollywoods highest-grossing productions and earned recognition in the Guinness World Records (Ogunleye, 2017). By blending Hollywood-style romantic comedy structures with Nigerian humor and diasporic themes, AY localized global cinematic forms, aligning with Appadurais (1996) concept of cultural flows. AYs entrepreneurship extends beyond acting and directing. He has built *AY Live*, a comedy franchise that doubles as a platform for mentoring emerging talents. This practice reflects Ndemo and Weiss (2017) notion of “entrepreneurial bricolage,” where African entrepreneurs creatively assemble limited resources to build viable enterprises.

Nevertheless, AYs trajectory also reveals the structural barriers facing Nigerian youth, including piracy, lack of financing, and weak institutional support (Haynes, 2016). His resilience underscores the capacity of Nigerian youths to innovate in spite of systemic challenges, while also affirming the

need for stronger policy frameworks to institutionalize youth empowerment in the cultural industries.

### **Funke Akindele: Gendered Narratives and the Localization of Global Film Practices in Nollywood**

Funke Akindele (b. 1977), widely recognized as one of Nigerias most accomplished actresses and filmmakers, provides a gendered dimension to the discussion of youth empowerment through theatre and film entrepreneurship. Her trajectory illustrates how creative expression, when nurtured from youth, can evolve into a transformative career that bridges entertainment, social education, and entrepreneurship. Unlike Peter Brook and Steven Spielberg, who represent Euro-American institutionalized pathways, and AY who embodies the adaptive resilience of Nigerian comedic entrepreneurship, Akindeles story emphasizes how women in Nigerias cultural sector navigate patriarchal constraints to construct new spaces of empowerment for themselves and others. Akindeles early exposure to performance came through the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)-sponsored sitcom *I Need to Know* (1998– 2002), where she portrayed the character Bisi, a curious secondary school student navigating adolescence. The program was designed to provide sexual and reproductive health education for Nigerian youths, thus embedding Akindeles career within a developmental and educational framework

(Adegboyega, 2019). This early engagement with socially-oriented performance reflects the constructivist principle that meaning is formed through interaction between individual experience and social environment (Schunk, 2012). For Akindele, performance was not merely entertainment but a pedagogical tool that shaped her artistic identity.

Her breakthrough came in 2008 with the release of *Jenifa*, a film in which she played the titular character, an unrefined village girl attempting to navigate urban life. The films success was phenomenal, not only commercially but also culturally. It led to sequels and the long-running television series *Jenifas Diary*, which continues to attract millions of viewers across Nigeria and beyond (Okoro, 2019). The character of Jenifa became a cultural icon, representing the struggles, aspirations, and contradictions of young Nigerian women in urban spaces. Through satire and humor, Akindele constructed narratives that resonated with ordinary Nigerians, while also addressing issues of education, morality, and social mobility. Akindeles career reflects remarkable innovation in brand-building. She transformed *Jenifa* from a single film into a transmedia franchise that includes films, television series, merchandise, and social campaigns. This mirrors Henry Jenkins (2006) concept of convergence culture,” where stories flow across multiple media platforms and audiences are invited to engage with them in participatory ways. By converting a single narrative into a

multimedia brand, Akindele demonstrated the entrepreneurial potential of youth creativity in the Nigerian context.

Furthermore, her works embody the potential of Nollywood to localize global cinematic practices. While her films draw on universal themes of aspiration, identity, and morality, they are deeply rooted in Nigerian social realities inflected with local dialects, humor, and cultural references. This localization aligns with Robertsons (1995) concept of glocalization,” where global cultural forms are adapted to reflect local specificities. Akindele's Jenifa franchise, for instance, mirrors the global phenomenon of sitcoms but is uniquely Nigerian in tone, language, and thematic focus. In this way, she demonstrates how youth entrepreneurs in film and theatre can contribute not only to cultural preservation but also to the globalization of Nigerian narratives. Akindele's significance also lies in her role as a female filmmaker in an industry often dominated by male producers and directors. Nollywood has historically reflected broader patriarchal structures in Nigerian society, where women are often marginalized in leadership roles (Haynes, 2016). Akindele's success as both actress and producer challenges these norms, offering a model of female empowerment in cultural entrepreneurship. Her prominence provides younger Nigerian women with a visible role model, affirming that gender should not be a barrier to artistic or entrepreneurial success.

From a constructivist angle, Akindele's career demonstrates how women reconstruct cultural narratives to make space for their agency, challenging dominant social discourses through performance and production. Her influence extends beyond entertainment into social development. Through her foundation, the Jenifa Foundation, she offers training and empowerment programs for young Nigerians in vocational skills and creative industries. This institutionalization of mentorship reflects the same principles observed in AYs initiatives, but with a stronger emphasis on gender inclusivity. It aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5 (gender equality) and Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth), by providing young people especially women with opportunities for self-empowerment (UN, 2019).

From a Nigerian perspective, Akindele's trajectory underscores three critical insights. First, it demonstrates that cultural entrepreneurship can serve as a powerful vehicle for women's empowerment in patriarchal contexts. Second, it shows that youth engagement in theatre and film can combine entertainment with education, thus addressing both cultural consumption and social development. Third, it affirms that Nollywood, when harnessed strategically, has the potential not only to entertain but also to build institutions that empower the next generation of Nigerian creators. Funke Akindele exemplifies the intersection of creativity, entrepreneurship, and social

empowerment within Nollywood. Her transformation from a youth actor in an educational sitcom to a global star, producer, and mentor illustrates the power of early exposure, narrative innovation, and resilience against structural barriers. By framing her work within the constructivist paradigm, we see how Akindele constructed meaning not only for herself but also for millions of viewers who engage with her narratives. Her story, like those of Brook, Spielberg, and AY, underscores the central thesis of this study: that youth empowerment in theatre and film entrepreneurship is both a personal journey and a collective cultural force with transformative potential.

### **Findings and Conclusion:**

We find that the early professional journeys of Peter Brook and Steven Spielberg in theatre and film vividly portray the effectiveness of nurturing young talent from the onset and the legacy such an approach can yield. Their rise to global prominence was not incidental but rather the outcome of being raised in environments conducive to creative growth. These environments being equipped with well-structured cultural policies, modern architectural infrastructures, and adequate amenities that collectively created the ambience necessary for sustained theatrical and cinematic development. Such enabling conditions not only facilitated their early start but also provided them with opportunities to garner experience, refine their

craft, and eventually establish themselves as global icons. When compared with the Nigerian artists studied alongside them, a notable disparity emerges in terms of the age at which careers began, the structural support available, and the resultant global impact. While Nigerian artists have made commendable contributions within their contexts, their development has often been hindered by systemic challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, ineffective policy implementation, and limited access to developmental programs. This contrast underscores the critical role of environmental factors in nurturing talent and fostering youth entrepreneurship in the creative sector.

The findings reveal that theatre and film hold significant potential as avenues for youth employment, thereby reducing the likelihood of negative indulgences such as crime, idleness, or social vices among young people. Moreover, the study emphasizes that individuals who begin their careers at an early stage stand a greater chance of achieving global recognition and exerting a lasting influence on the industry. However, the Nigerian context is characterized by challenges that inhibit such growth. The Nigerian Cultural Policy, though instituted and assigned to ministries and agencies responsible for cultural affairs, has largely been ineffective due to systemic corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and lack of political will. Consequently, adequate structures, facilities, and enabling conditions necessary for the holistic

development of theatre and film entrepreneurship remain underdeveloped. More broadly, entrenched corruption within the national system continues to undermine youth development efforts, creating a gap between the potential and actual contributions of young people to the creative industries.

In conclusion, the study highlights a critical paradox that; while Nigerian youth possess immense creative potential, the absence of a purposeful effective supportive institutional frameworks and enabling environments hampers their ability to thrive. The trajectories of Peter Brook and Steven Spielberg affirm that early exposure, structured mentorship, and infrastructural support are indispensable in producing global icons. Nigeria can achieve similar results if deliberate efforts are made to reform the cultural sector and provide developmental opportunities for emerging artists.

### **Recommendations**

- Ministries of Culture Tourism and National Orientation should rigorously the implementation of the Nigerian Cultural Policy, ensuring transparency and accountability in project execution.
- Investment in modern theatres, cinema halls, and production facilities should be prioritized across local government, state, and federal levels.

- An age grade National Theatre and Film Festival should be institutionalized to identify and nurture emerging talents.
- Partnerships between universities, cultural agencies, and industry professionals should integrate training, internships, and mentorship schemes into creative arts programs.
- Creative industry funds and youth-focused grants should be established to reduce financial barriers for young entrepreneurs.
- Opportunities for women and marginalized groups should be expanded to ensure equitable representation and enrich cultural outputs.
- Government should strengthen accountability systems to prevent diversion of cultural development funds and streamline regulatory procedures to reduce bureaucracy.
- International collaborations and co-productions should be encouraged, enabling Nigerian youth to access global markets and audiences

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