



Beyond Entertainment: A Critical Analysis of Hausa Films' Impact on Cultural Practices

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Abstract: This study examines the socio-cultural impact of Hausa films on language, fashion, and social behavior within Hausa society, analyzing how cinematic portrayals influence real-world practices. Employing a qualitative methodology, the research combines content analysis of 16 influential Hausa films (1980–2020), in-depth interviews with filmmakers and cultural experts, and observational fieldwork documenting the adoption of film-inspired trends in daily life. The findings reveal that while Hausa films serve as important vehicles for entertainment and social messaging, they increasingly incorporate foreign cultural elements, leading to a dilution of authentic Hausa traditions. The study identifies significant film-induced trends, including the hybridization of fashion styles, the normalization of new linguistic expressions, and the imitation of both constructive and destructive on-screen behaviors. Critically, the paper highlights the paradoxical nature of these influences - while some foster cultural innovation and economic opportunities, others risk eroding moral values and social cohesion. Based on these findings, the study recommends greater collaboration between filmmakers, cultural custodians, and academics to ensure films balance creative expression with cultural preservation. It further advocates for policy measures to promote socially responsible content and media literacy programs to cultivate critical audience engagement. Ultimately, this research emphasizes the need to harness the transformative potential of Hausa film industry while mitigating its unintended negative consequences on cultural identity and societal norms.

Keywords: *Finafinai* (films), *Al'ada* (Culture), Hausa, Cultural Influence, Language Change, Fashion Trends, Social Behavior, Kannywood, Media Impact, Nigerian Cinema.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This study briefly traces the history of theatrical performances before examining the emergence of modern drama in Hausaland and the beginnings of Hausa filmmaking. Several researchers have investigated the origins of Hausa cinema, though their findings vary slightly due to gaps in historical records. Scholars who have commented on

the evolution of Hausa films in their works include Yimi (1981), Gidan Dabino (2001), Ali (2004), and others. Additionally, this paper highlights certain cultural shifts attributed to Hausa films. The aim is to document these changes without passing judgment on their merits. Furthermore, the study reviews the impact of Hausa films (alongside other modern Hausa

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literary genres such as drama and written poetry) on the Hausa people.

2.0 The Emergence of Film in Hausaland

The origin of drama, in general, is often traced back to the beginnings of human existence. According to Danjuma (2004), the first recorded instance of dramatic performance occurred during the time of Prophet Adam. The account tells of two brothers who quarreled over a woman, leading to one killing the other. As the murderer struggled with how to dispose of the body, divine intervention came through angels disguised as crows. When one crow killed the other and buried it by digging a hole, this symbolic act served both as instruction and inspiration. According to Danjuma, this primordial event not only introduced the human practice of burial but also represents the earliest form of theatrical imitation where vital lessons were conveyed through dramatic reenactment.

Kiyawa (2013) explains film as an art form of moving images that captures visuals of people (men, women, children, adults, or even non-human subjects) recorded using specialized equipment. It allows individuals to engage in performative or other activities within a set timeframe, conveying a specific message related to entertainment, moral lessons, sermons, love, history, or similar themes to a global audience.

The history of Hausa films (an industry largely rooted in Kano, hence the name, Kannywood) is directly linked to the broader history of Nigerian cinema (Ali, 2004). In fact, filmmaking in Nigeria predates the country's amalgamation. The first film in Nigeria was produced under the supervision of Herbert Macaulay in 1903 (Alfred, 1979). Meanwhile, the Northern and Southern regions were not amalgamated into a single entity (Nigeria) until 1914, and the country gained independence in 1960 (Isichei, 1997; Douglas, 2004). Between 1903 and 1970, numerous film productions emerged, which Ali (2004) categorizes as the "first wave of post-independence films." Key figures in these early films included Nuhu Ramalam and Adamu Halilu. Later, production companies took the lead in creating more films, such as *Shehu Umar*, *Amadi*, and *Salla Durba*.

Modern Hausa films, as they are recognized today, began between 1980 and 1984 in Kano (Gidan Dabino, 2001). According to Fage (2011), Hausa films (often referred to as Kannywood productions) gained widespread acceptance by the 1990s. During this period, three major film associations emerged in Kano: (i) Gwauron Dutse, (ii) Karate, and (iii) Gyaranya. The earliest films produced under these groups were *Hukuma Maganin 'Yan Banza*, *Yan Daukar Amarya*, and *Bakar Indiya*. The pioneering

producers behind these works were Alhaji Hamisu, Muhammad Gurgu, and Sani Lamma as Ali (2004) explains.

Hausa films have become deeply rooted in the Hausa society. Over time, filmmaking has become an integral part of communal life (Fage, 2004; Gidan Dabino, 2001). The film industry has evolved into a lucrative trade, providing livelihoods for many. Notably, a wide range of professionals benefit from this sector, including singers, actors, photographers (both still and video), makeup artists, cassette vendors, mobile content distributors, and others. In short, the film industry has significant economic influence as highlighted by Aminu (2004) and Larkin (2004).

On one hand, Hausa films and Hausa culture are deeply intertwined, as the films often attempt to reflect traditional Hausa customs. On the other hand, these films also reshape Hausa culture, introducing new norms and behaviors (Bunza, 2002; Iyan-Tama, 2004; Ibrahim, 2004). This influence is evident when examining how films impact societal lifestyles, often popularizing new trends.

2.1 Discourse on Hausa Films

When examining the debates among scholars and researchers regarding the benefits and drawbacks of films, it can be said that Hausa films has been a double-edged sword. Some aspects are worth retaining, while others should be discarded. Indeed, films contribute to society in multiple ways. Ali (2004) argues that, over the past two centuries, the emergence of Hausa films has been the most significant economic development for the Hausa people. However, scholars such as Iyan-Tama (2004) and Alkanawy (2000) contend that Hausa films have also had negative consequences for the Hausa society. This study examines both perspectives as follows:

2.1.1 The Benefits of Hausa Films

The emergence of Hausa films has contributed significantly to societal development across multiple domains. Scholars including Malumfashi (2002), Chamo (2004), Yakub (2004), and Ali (2004) have documented the multifaceted benefits of these films. Their researches highlight several key areas where Hausa films have made positive contributions, demonstrating how this medium serves as both an entertainment platform and a vehicle for social progress.

1. **Job Creation:** Numerous professionals benefit from the film industry, including filmmakers, scriptwriters, cinematographers, video vendors, and other tradespeople. Undoubtedly, this represents socio-economic progress for the Hausa community.

2. **Cultural and Literary Development:** Films serve as a medium for promoting Hausa cultural artifacts, as well as their literature. Notably, they play a crucial role in exporting Hausa traditions to non-Hausa audiences within Nigeria, where it is predominantly spoken, and by extension, to the international world.
3. **Awareness Campaigns:** Films effectively raise public consciousness on various issues. Many Hausa films address themes such as the dangers of jealousy, the consequences of hypocrisy, the harms of false accusations, diseases, and other societal concerns.
4. **Fostering Relationships:** Hausa films help strengthen bonds, particularly among actors, and by extension, to the larger society. Additionally, some films emphasize the importance of unity and mutual respect.
5. **Moral Education:** Some Hausa films focus on ethical upbringing, encouraging obedience to parents (e.g., *Linzami da Wuta*), marital fidelity (e.g., *Aljannar Mace*), and similar values as exemplified by Chamo (2004) and Yakub (2004).
6. **Entertainment:** Hausa films are a source of leisure. Many are purely entertainment-driven, with the late Rabilu Musa (popularly known as Dan Ibro or just Ibro) standing out as a legendary figure in comedy. Others include Suleiman Ibrahim (popularly known as Boshu), Ado Isah Gwanja (Gwajnja), and Aminu Baba Ali (Baba Ari), among others.

2.1.2 Criticisms of Hausa Films

As the saying goes, there's no rose without a thorn. This aptly applies to Hausa films, which despite their entertainment value and economic benefits, have drawn significant criticism from scholars, religious leaders, and cultural custodians. These critics argue that while the film industry has grown exponentially, its content often undermines the very cultural fabric it claims to promote. The key criticisms can be categorized into several concerning trends that threaten traditional Hausa values and social structures.

2.1.2.1 Cultural Erosion

Hausa films can be likened to the Hausa proverb: "*Ana yabon ka salla ka kasa alwala*" (Everyone hails the ship, but it sinks at shore.). This metaphor captures the contradiction between films' purported cultural promotion and their actual effects. The erosion manifests in three primary ways:

- a. **Language:** The pervasive use of "Inghausa" (Hausa-English code-switching) has created a hybrid linguistic environment where pure Hausa is increasingly marginalized. This

linguistic shift particularly affects youth who emulate their screen idols' speech patterns.

- b. **Dress:** Costume choices increasingly favor Western jeans over traditional Hausa dress, and Indian-style saris over authentic Hausa attire, creating generational divides in fashion sensibilities.
- c. **Setting:** Urban landscapes in films often mimic foreign cities rather than showcasing authentic Hausa architectural and environmental aesthetics, fostering cultural dissociation as learned by Chamo (2004).

2.1.2.2 Distraction from Productive Endeavors

The immersive nature of film consumption has raised concerns about time management and priorities. Al-Kanawy (2004) and Iyan-Tama (2004) note that excessive film-watching competes with religious practices, educational pursuits, and economic activities, particularly among youth. The phenomenon of "film addiction" has become prevalent, with some viewers prioritizing new releases over vocational responsibilities.

2.1.2.3 Promotion of Immorality

The concept of *fandarewa* (indecent) has become central to critiques of film content. This manifests through:

- a. Actors' public personas that often contradict Islamic modesty standards, creating confusion about appropriate conduct. This is so because the social environment where Hausa contents are mostly created and utilized are predominantly set and concentrated by Islamic cultural practices and values.
- b. Normalization of previously taboo behaviors like public displays of affection, which critics argue blur moral boundaries.

2.1.2.4 Unrestricted Gender Mixing

The depiction of *cuɗanya tsakanin maza da mata* (casual gender mixing) represents one of the most heated controversies. Iyan-Tama (2004) documents how film narratives increasingly show unchaperoned male-female interactions that contravene traditional Islamic guidelines, potentially influencing real-world social norms.

2.1.2.5 Overuse of Music

The ubiquity of musical scores and soundtracks has drawn particular ire from religious scholars. The comparison to "*gishiri a cikin miya*" (salt in soup) emphasizes how musical elements have become an inescapable (and to some, problematic) component of film production, despite theological debates about music's permissibility in Islam.

2.1.2.6 Broader Cultural Degradation

The cumulative impact extends beyond specific elements to fundamental cultural transformation:

- a. Dangambo (2013) warns of "cultural hollowing," where films retain Hausa language but little authentic cultural substance.
- b. Guibi & Bakori (2013) trace declining respect for elders to film portrayals of generational conflicts.
- c. Kiyawa (2013) identifies seven dimensions of cultural corrosion, from weakened marital bonds (*barna*) to dangerous materialism (*dogon buri*) that prioritizes flashy displays over substance.

This chorus of criticism unites diverse voices including Mwani & Kankara (2013), Mai'aduwa (2013), and Inuwa (2013), who collectively argue that unchecked film influences threaten to rewrite Hausa cultural identity in problematic ways. The debate continues as the industry balances creative expression with cultural preservation.

2.2 METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to investigate the socio-cultural impact of Hausa films on language, fashion, and social behavior. The methodology combined documentary analysis, interviews, and observational techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Hausa cinema influences society. A descriptive-analytical framework was employed to trace the historical evolution of Hausa films while critically examining their contemporary effects. The research analyzed 16 influential Hausa films produced between 1980 and 2020, focusing on their linguistic content, visual aesthetics, and thematic messages. These films were selected through purposive sampling based on their cultural significance, popularity, and measurable societal impact.

To complement the film analysis, the study conducted in-depth interviews with 10 key stakeholders, including filmmakers, cultural experts, and sociologists, who provided insights into the intentionality behind film content and its reception. Interviews were semi-structured, allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives regarding the industry's influence. Additionally, observational fieldwork documented real-life manifestations of film-inspired trends, such as the adoption of catchphrases in everyday communication and the replication of on-screen fashion styles in local markets and salons. Case studies of specific incidents, like the reported imitation of destructive behaviors from films, were also examined to assess the tangible effects of cinematic portrayals.

Data analysis involved thematic coding of film content and interview transcripts to identify recurring patterns and cultural shifts. The study employed triangulation to cross-verify findings across different methods, ensuring robustness and reliability. For instance, linguistic trends identified in films were compared with their usage in public settings, while fashion styles popularized on-screen were traced to their real-world adoption. Ethical considerations included protecting the anonymity of interviewees who requested confidentiality and maintaining cultural sensitivity in the interpretation of findings.

3.0 Cultural Trends Influenced by Hausa Films

Hausa films have introduced several new cultural trends adopted by Hausa society. These trends can be categorized into three main areas:

3.1 Fashion Trends

Hausa cinema has popularized unique clothing styles for both men and women. In an interview conducted for this research with U. Usman (2016) among others, a film critic from Sokoto, the following fashion trends were highlighted as originating from Hausa films:

3.1.1 Women's Styles

- a. **Wasila:** Named after the film *Wasila*, this style features a blouse with slits and four distinct cuts at the hem. Many Hausa women adopted this design, now commonly referred to as the *Wasila* (Wasila top).
- b. **A'isha/Bubu Combination:** Derived from the film *A'isha*, this outfit consists of a long gown with a shuban/shugo (a fitted upper piece) paired with a shadda (loose skirt). Actresses Samira Ahmad and Hadiza Kabara popularized it.
- c. **Jamila da Jamilu:** A long gown with asymmetrical sleeves - one long, one short - inspired by the film *Jamila da Jamilu*, starring Jamila Nagudu.
- d. **Tsamiya:** Introduced in the film *Salma* by actress A'isha Aliyu Tsamiya, this style involves a draped hijab covering the chin, paired with a necklace-worn eyeglass chain looped around the head. Many women now replicate this look.
- e. **Fati Muhammad:** A head scarf style (*daurin dankwali/kallabi*) featuring a circular head scarf (*dankwali*) with an exposed center, popularized by actresses Fati Muhammad and Maijidda Abdulkadir in the film *Mujadala*.

3.1.2 Men's Styles

- a. **Cinko:** A distinct men's outfit popularized by actor Adam A. Zango in the film *Abban Sadiƙ*. Many young men now emulate this style.

- b. **Babban Yaro:** A fitted short-sleeved top paired with tight trousers, inspired by Adam A. Zango's outfit in the film Babban Yaro.
- c. **Ali Nuhu:** A signature look involving draped fabric (*rawani* or *kyalle*) over the shoulder, popularized by actor Ali Nuhu in films like *Jarumin Maza* and *Sai Watarana*.

3.2 Behavioral Trends

Hausa films have introduced various behavioral trends that have permeated social interactions and daily life. These trends, which range from linguistic patterns to interpersonal dynamics, reflect the powerful influence of cinematic portrayals on audience behavior. The following sections will examine specific examples of these behavioral shifts in greater detail, highlighting their origins in popular films and their adoption within Hausa society.

A - *Sai Bayan Kwana Biyu* (Just Wait Two More Days)

- **Origin:** This phrase gained popularity from the comedy film *Na Mamajo*, where a mentally unstable character humorously deflects all requests by saying, "Ooo, *sai bayan kwana biyu!*" (Oh, just wait two more days!).
- **Cultural Adoption:** The expression is now widely used to playfully postpone obligations or dismiss persistent requests. Its humor lies in its absurdity, implying an indefinite delay.

Example in Context:

- **Friend A:** "Can you repay the ₦1,000 I lent you last week?"
- **Friend B (grinning):** "Ooo *sai bayan kwana biyu!*" (Oh, just wait two more days!)

A - *Kara'i* (Living it up)

- **Origin:** From the film *Kara'i*, which depicted characters stubbornly insisting on their flawed choices before facing consequences.
- **Social Resonance:** The term is now used to justify reckless behavior, often with a tone of resigned defiance. For instance, a young person might say, "*Kyale ni na yi kara'i kafin lokacina ya wuce!*" (Allow me to live up before it is too late for me – to enjoy life), to dismiss warnings about their actions.

B - *Wuta Sallau!* (Fire, Sallau!)

- **Origin:** This behavioral trend originated from Rabilu Musa Ibro's comedy film *Wuta Sallau* ('Fire, Sallau!'). In an iconic scene, Ibro's car catches fire, and while people desperately called his attention by shouting "*Wuta Sallau!*" (Fire, Sallau!), he mistakenly interprets their panic as praise and admiration. By the time he realizes the actual danger, the situation has already escalated beyond control.

- **Modern Usage:** This phrase is now sarcastically directed at someone who ignored warnings and is now suffering the consequences of their actions - akin to saying: 'Now you see what happens when you don't listen!'

C - *Basaja* (The Art of Deception)

- **Origin:** Coined from the film *Basaja*, starring Adam A. Zango as a charming but cunning trickster.
- **Nuanced Meaning and Usage:** The term carries connotations of clever deception, describing someone who outmaneuvers others - whether playfully or maliciously. In everyday usage, people might say "*Basaja aka yi masa*" ('He's been outsmarted') to describe the victim of such trickery, or "*Dan basaja ne*" ('He's a sly one') to characterize someone known for their cunning ways.

D - *Gwaska* (The Outlaw Hero)

This trend originated from the film *Gwaska*, featuring Adam A. Zango as a notorious yet philanthropic thief who targeted corrupt individuals while leaving his signature (the word "*Gwaska*") at crime scenes. The character's antihero appeal led to real-world imitation in the Hausa communities, particularly among schoolchildren who would playfully "steal" classmates' belongings and leave "*Gwaska*" notes as calling cards.

E - *Su gayyar sodi mun gode* (Thank You, Gatecrashers)

In Ibro's film *Mai Ciki*, there's a memorable scene where Ibro addresses a crowd that gathered to celebrate the birth of his child, "*Dan Baba*" with the expression "*Su gayyar sodi mun gode*" meaning 'Thank you for the unsolicited attendance.' His expression in that moment later became a sarcastic retort, often used to mean "Thanks for the unsolicited advice." When someone interrupts a conversation with irrelevant or unnecessary input, others may dismiss them with this line - a humorous way of saying, "Mind your own business."

F - *Dan Baba* (Daddy's Boy)

Also from *Mai Ciki*, this term reflects Ibro's obsessive desire for fatherhood. In the film, he affectionately calls his unborn child "*Dan Baba*" (Daddy's Boy), which entered popular usage as a term for eagerly anticipated or pampered children, often used humorously for unborn babies.

3.3 Mimicry of Social Behaviors

Hausa films have inspired specific behaviors that have been adopted in real life, with some becoming surprisingly widespread. S. Yahaya (2016), a film critic from Zamfara now based in Sokoto, highlighted several notable examples:

- a. **Bridal Room Vandalism:** The controversial scene from *Dakin Amarya* (The Bride's Room), where co-wife Halima Atete destroys her rival A'isha Tsamiya's bridal chamber on the wedding night, was shockingly recreated in real life. Documented cases occurred in Zamfara and Sokoto's Mabera district (2016), showing the dangerous power of on-screen actions.
- b. **Mai Zabo (The Guinea Fowl Style):** This distinctive haircut - with shaved sides and a central strip of hair (imitating guinea fowl's head) - became a youth trend after Adam A. Zango featured it in a Hausa film, *NASS*.
- c. **A'isha Tsamiya (The A'isha Tsamiya Necklace):** Actress A'isha Aliyu Tsamiya's signature necklace in the romance-based film *So* (Love) sparked a styling revolution. Women across northern Nigeria began requesting the "Tsamiya necklace" at jewelry shops, making it one of the most imitated fashion accessories.
- d. **Jamila Sitayil (Jamila Style):** This is a type of braided hairstyle worn by Jamila Nagudu in the film *Jamila da Jamilu*. The hair is parted into two sections, and each section is braided toward the back.

4.0 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This study reveals that Hausa films have had a profound impact on Hausa society, influencing cultural practices, social behaviors, and even economic dynamics. While scholars differ slightly in their accounts of the origins of Hausa cinema (with variations attributed to gaps in historical documentation) there is consensus on its transformative role. The research traces the evolution of Hausa films from their early theatrical roots to their current status as a dominant cultural force, demonstrating how they reflect and reshape societal norms.

Key findings highlight that Hausa films have introduced new trends in language, fashion, and daily conduct. For instance, catchphrases like "*Sai bayan kwana biyu*" (Just wait two more days) and "*kara'i*" (living it up) have entered everyday speech, often used humorously or sarcastically. Fashion trends such as the "*wasila*" blouse and "*Babban Yaro*" fitted attire have been widely adopted, particularly among youth. These trends illustrate the films' power to set aesthetic standards and redefine cultural identity.

However, the influence is not uniformly positive. The study documents instances where on-screen behaviors (such as the vandalism of bridal chambers in *Dakin Amarya*) were replicated in real life, leading to social tensions. Similarly, the glorification of trickery (e.g., "*Basaja*") and petty theft (e.g., "*Gwaska*") has raised concerns about moral erosion, particularly among younger audiences.

Economically, Hausa films have created livelihoods for actors, scriptwriters, costume designers, and vendors, contributing to local entrepreneurship. Yet, critics argue that the industry's reliance on sensationalism and commercial appeal often overshadows its potential for educational or developmental messaging.

4.1 Recommendations for the Hausa Film Industry

The findings of this study highlight the significant cultural, social, and economic influence of Hausa films on society. To maximize the positive impact of this influential medium while addressing its shortcomings, the following strategic recommendations are proposed:

- a. Filmmakers and content creators in the Hausa film industry must recognize the profound responsibility they bear as cultural shapers. Given the demonstrated power of films to influence behavior, producers should intentionally develop storylines that promote moral values, social cohesion, and community development. Rather than prioritizing sensationalism or cheap comedy, scripts could incorporate themes of education, entrepreneurship, conflict resolution, and ethical dilemmas that reflect authentic Hausa cultural values. This shift would require collaboration with cultural experts and community leaders to ensure content remains both entertaining and socially beneficial.
- b. The academic community should take a more active role in shaping the direction of Hausa cinema. Universities and research institutions could establish partnerships with film producers to provide expert guidance on content development. Scholars in fields such as sociology, cultural studies, and communication could organize workshops for filmmakers, offering insights on how to balance entertainment with social responsibility. Additionally, establishing peer-review mechanisms or advisory boards composed of academics and cultural custodians would help maintain quality standards while preserving authentic Hausa identity in films.
- c. Government intervention through thoughtful policy frameworks could significantly elevate the industry's standards. Regulatory bodies should implement a balanced system of content evaluation that discourages harmful stereotypes while encouraging creative expression. This could involve establishing a film classification system, providing incentives for educational content, and

creating funding opportunities for socially conscious productions. Furthermore, government agencies could collaborate with the industry to develop training programs that enhance technical skills and ethical awareness among scriptwriters, filmmakers, and actors.

- d. Audience education must complement these industry-level changes. Media literacy programs should be introduced in schools and communities to help viewers, particularly youth who are critically engaged with film content. By teaching audiences to analyze and contextualize what they watch, these programs would foster more discerning viewership and reduce blind imitation of on-screen behaviors. Community screenings followed by discussions, public service announcements, and social media campaigns could further reinforce positive messaging from films while addressing problematic content.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The Hausa film industry stands at a crossroads where it can either perpetuate negative trends or transform into a force for cultural preservation and social progress. By implementing these recommendations (through the concerted efforts of filmmakers, academics, policymakers, and communities) the industry can fulfill its potential as an entertainment medium that educates, uplifts, and unites. The time has come for stakeholders to recognize cinema not merely as a business, but as a powerful tool for shaping the future of Hausa society. With thoughtful content, collaborative oversight, and audience empowerment, Hausa films can truly become a source of pride and positive transformation.

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