

***Africa Frontiers of Innovation* series sheds light on studying African cinema & media**

The Covid-19 pandemic has indisputably reshaped the current reality of businesses, industries and professions globally. The crisis's undeniable impact has caused major disruption bringing forward an unprecedented reality of the 'new normal'. A new reality that is full of complexity, ambiguity and opportunities.



Source: www.unsplash.com

In yet another thought-provoking session of its *Africa Frontiers of Innovation* series, Canon brought together a prestigious panel of accomplished African women from the arts and film background to discuss the pandemic's impact on the African film industry, current trends, road to recovery and scope of opportunities in the future. Moderated by the award-winning journalist Victoria Rubadiri, the session involved Nse Ikpe-Etim, Azza Elhosseiny and Dr. Zippora Agatha Okoth.

Perils of the pandemic

According to the latest edition of the *ILO Monitor*, 114 million jobs were lost in 2020, which resulted in working-hour losses approximately four times as high as during the global financial crisis in 2009. The African film industry has been no exception to the pandemic's dreadful impact, with small businesses and independent film-makers bearing most of the brunt. Closure of sets, rescheduling of shoots, and abrupt termination of film-production triggered huge financial losses for the industry.

Azza Elhosseiny, a filmmaker based in Egypt and the executive director of Luxor African Film Festival, dubs the pandemic as a major disruptor. Citing that the impact has been felt by the grower (film producers) and the reapers (film-watchers) alike, she highlights the monetary repercussions faced by the industry today. With limited funding opportunities, filmmakers are currently writing a grim chapter in the art of cinema-making.

Elhosseiny said, “The entire experience from making a film to watching a film has been lost, it is certainly a huge blow to producers and audiences alike and one that will bring in many reforms in terms of how content is created and consumed in Africa. It will be interesting to see how the younger talent in the industry navigates through this crisis with their creative innovations.”

While the thrill of watching cinema in a hall with big crowds remains unparalleled, Dr. Zippora Agatha Oktoth, who is a film and arts lecturer as well as the founder of the lake international Pan-African film festival, said, “Cinema is not just about watching a movie, it is an amalgamation of different experiences and emotions that result from the entire process. The absence of that human element of connection has somehow stolen the magic from movies and also denied us all the direct opportunity of receiving valuable feedback from verbal and non-verbal cues made by the audience during the premier of films.”

Offline to online

The lockdown ushered in a new trend of online film-festivals, making a transition from on-ground festivals. Elhosseiny said, “A step in the right direction for sure but it is not quite the same experience.” The idea of meeting, connecting, networking and celebrating with new people get diluted in the online version of film festivals, according to festival-goers.

Dr. Zappora acknowledges the loss of physical connection although she perceives the integration of off-line and on-line mediums to be the solution for the future. She also highlights the importance of maintaining a balance between staying safe and continuing our jobs, accentuating the need to reinvent ways for people to watch movies, visit festivals and consume content whilst being safe.



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Science has kept us alive, art has kept us sane

Nse Ikpe-Etim, an award-winning actress, sheds light on the pandemic's distressing impact on the Nigerian film industry, Nollywood, despite being the second-largest movie producing industry in the world. “It has been hard for all of us and especially actors to adjust to the new normal, following social distancing norms and doing tests every week takes some sort of an invisible mental toll on you and exposes you to the fear of unknown. It is totally remarkable to see raw human emotions coming out when we are faced with the fear of something unknown. But like everything else in life, we have to sail through the storms and look out for that silver lining.”

Stressing on the need to prioritize our mental health, Nse urges people to look within to stay sane during these unpredictable times pointing out that while science will keep us alive, it is art that keeps us sane. She said, “Resilience, co-operation and creative collaboration is the mantra to sail through this storm.”

Collaboration is cure

The pandemic has propelled a need for re-invention, with artists and filmmakers looking out at alternate ways to tell their stories. The Egyptian Centre for Economic Studies states in a report that the film industry in Egypt employs at least half a million people, 40% of whom are contract workers. As a result, there is a big pool of young talent rendered jobless after the

pandemic who are now looking at newer and unique ways to churn out content. Elhosseiny said, “All you need is a small crew, a great camera and a brilliant idea to be a filmmaker in today’s day and age.” She encourages the youth to explore different creative outlets such as writing, photography, documentary-making to navigate through these tough times while keeping the artist in them alive.

Counting on collaboration is key to win in a small-scale film industry like Kenya, according to Dr. Zappora. She said, “Effective collaboration during a crisis and sharing resources to create a final output as one team has become the go-to strategy for many in Kenya amidst the Pandemic. That said, there are still costs that need to be incurred in the production stages such as logistics, operations and maintenance, hence it is imperative to not only find different avenues of creating content but also to find different revenue generating streams.” Finding ways to collaborate with international producers and brands is essential for film-makers world-wide.



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Distribution - a digital disruption

Distribution of content in countries like Kenya remains a key problem as Dr. Zappora puts the spotlight on this issue, claiming that 90% of the country’s original content remains undistributed. However, the advent of services like private online streaming and video on demand seem to be saving the face, providing a ray of hope to content creators especially during the pandemic. The change in content consumption patterns has positively given a boost to social media platforms and unlocked different avenues of monetization for artists and creators worldwide.

Private streaming services like Netflix and Showmax have altered the game and created a disruption like never before. According to a recent study, in 2020, Netflix added 36.6 million subscribers as lockdown forced people to stay at home, the highest increase in a year. Consequently, content creators are looking up to streaming and social media platforms like YouTube and TikTok for active monetization.

Vocal for local

Corporate communications and marketing services director of Canon CNA, Mai Youssef, said, “Cinema as an art-form has touched millions of hearts all over the world, changed lives, and also predicted the behavioural patterns from one generation to another. It is not just an industry but a mind-set, a trend-setter, a model of bringing about change and a way of celebrating human emotions and experiences. Canon has always been at the forefront of innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship, all of which are inherent characteristics of the film industry.”

The up tick of local content consumption has also inspired content-creators around the globe to tell heart-warming local stories rather than solely focusing on Hollywood trends. The pandemic presented a unique opportunity for creators to share authentic stories from their communities and culture, invoking a wave of change. On a closing note, the panelists encouraged African content creators and film makers to produce authentic content that is close to home and heart, to be proud of the African history and heritage and to showcase that same spirit in their stories.

“The session gave us an opportunity to get up, close and personal with frontiers from the film industry giving invaluable insights and learnings about the growing trends in the industry. The platform of cinema is also a platform for making a difference, encouraging the young talent through such sessions remains our priority for where there is creativity, there is Canon.” said Youssef.

Canon’s Africa Frontiers of Innovation will continue to explore contemporary challenges with African thought-leaders every month through 2021. To be part of the conversation follow Canon on [Facebook](#) or [LinkedIn](#).

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