

# DOCUMENTARY FILM AS AN ALTERNATIVE STORYTELLING FORM IN A PANDEMIC

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## **Abstract**

This article is hinged on the fact that it usually takes a little more time to produce a documentary film, depending on the storyline. One can come up with a good production at the end of the day. Looking at the corona virus pandemic era, the movement of large cast and crew could be inimical to the health of those involved. However, a small cast and crew, as it applies, could equally come up with a good story and message for the viewers. Using the qualitative methods of direct observation and content analysis of three selected documentary films, the researchers situated the essay on the Auteur film theory. The selected films are Ge Yunfei's *The Lockdown: One Month in Wuhan* (2020); Jack O'Donoghue's *Virus* (2020); and Femi Odugbemi and Kadaria Ahmed's *Unmasked* (2021). The researchers found that documentary film producers needed to wield a lot of influence in their productions in order to have full control over the production. Among others, they found that the documentarist must also try as much as possible to reduce the number of the film cast, if necessary, and crew, especially during a pandemic era. The researchers recommended that a documentarist should be very mindful of the protocol for the management of any disease or pandemic and be very cautious in choosing a subject because of the locations that the dictates of the script might take them.

**Keywords:** Documentary film, Storyteller, Pandemic, Auteur, Nigeria.

## **Introduction**

Storytelling has been an age long tradition in African societies and elsewhere in the world. Everyone loves a good storyline and enjoys an in-depth amazing plot. A story could be an event in pictures and images. This is

called motion picture story. A good motion picture story usually needs little or no words to be able to communicate, inform, entertain and educate. Like it is often said, *a picture is worth a thousand words*. This tells us that pictures can deeply connote several words and phrases in just one glance; pictures can indulge our minds like words; they can engage us intellectually and bring out certain needed facts and answers to various subjects and things in the society.

One outstanding feature about storytelling is that everyone is a storyteller. It is not linked to a particular place, season or time because right from when we could gather our thoughts and mutter something about our day, feelings, likes and dislikes we have told a story. Fundamentally, storytelling in Africa has helped to keep records of information and various activities from time immemorial through the use of word of mouth. Some stories are being twisted to suit stereotypes and favour particular interests, which Chimamanda Adichie in a popular Technology, Entertainment and Design (TED) talk show in 2009 termed *The Danger of a Single Story* (Adichie TED). Spaulding adds succinctly that:

Storytelling is a form of giving. It can be used to impose ideas, but that is something else. You can preach with a story or sell with a story or teach with a story, but true storytelling should be a gift, with no demands that the story be interpreted in a particular way. (8)

In other words, true storytelling should give information, give morals, give advice, give instructions, give explanations and most importantly comprise all the basic elements that make up storytelling such as the narration of the events. Every story has a narration or narrative attached to it. Beard defines narrative as the showing or telling of these events and the various methods used to do this showing. The idea of knowledge is useful when we look at the way narrative works. The origin of the words 'narrative', 'narrator' and so on comes from the Greek word, gnarus, which means 'knowing'. A narrator, then, is someone who knows, and the process by which that knowledge is communicated is the narrative (33). The narration of events for a story is very important. Stories are narrated and should be narrated out of the immersed knowledge of the storyteller. The storyteller should have the details concerning the story and should be able to give a vivid narration of the story out of a well-defined and crafted true position. The storyteller should have adequate knowledge of the subject being discussed. Like in the case of the corona virus, someone narrating the story on the pandemic should have researched on what a pandemic is; he or she should have first-hand knowledge of the whole pandemic twists and turns as well as the probable aftermaths of its management. Documentary storytelling, as defined by Curran:

Involves a range of creative choices about a film's structure, point of view, balance, style, casting, and more. No matter what your specific role – producer, director, writer, editor, cinematographer, researcher, commissioning editor, or executive producer – decisions about storytelling will confront you throughout your career. Storytelling lies at the heart of most good documentaries: strong characters, compelling tension, a credible resolution. It's a must for many, if not most, programmers and financiers, especially those seeking to reach national or international audiences. (1)

The narrator should try not to assume to be a know-it-all person on the topic because other angles might be explored by other people differently. Keeping an open mind and welcoming other perspectives or other views, will make the narration of events all-inclusive in the sense that notables will not be left unturned. These notables cannot be overlooked in a production. Some of these notables include: theme, arc, plot and character, exposition, among others. In writing a story they serve as the elements/condiments that make the story come to life with a sizzling burst. These elements can also be likened to the ingredients that must be added in appropriate proportion in order to bring out the thrills and frills of a perfect story, they include,

- a. **The Theme:** Every story should have a theme; what the main discourse or subject is all about. The theme gives every story an angle of focus on the main idea; the theme can *hit the nail on the head*. The theme of a pandemic story will be safety, social distancing, alternative means of survival and other things that pinpoint directly and talk about the pandemic story.
- b. **The Arc:** This shows how several events in the story transform the characters in a story, film, or documentary at the end of the day, it showcases the internal change that the hero goes through. This can be negative or positive and it showcases the hero going through a revolutionary change that can affect their lives positively. Take for instance a doctor whose worth has not been appreciated in his hospital as compared to others, then comes the pandemic in which he works to give his best in saving lives of victims he becomes admired and applauded by all, being a laid back piece, he suddenly becomes the cynosure of all eyes.
- c. **Plot and Character:** Plot and character complement each other. The plot highlights the character and the character extends the plot that carries the reader or viewer through the events that unfold in the story. The plot gives a description of each scenario and event that takes place in the story. We get to know about the events that

happen in the story and the way each unfolds and leads to another. The exposition and causal relationships are brought to bear; we see the beginning, the middle and finally the end; but each gets synchronised for a harmonious finish. It is a chain that connects; and just like an interlinked chain, when one part is dislocated or cut off; we find a distort connection. Characters, on the other hand, bring the plot to life. The plot is like a bare land that requires the characters to cultivate it and bring the best out of it. The characters make the plot fertile and they cruise through the ideas bringing life and panache to the story and these stories should not be made up or scripted but should have an element of realism in them. Bernard Curran supports this assertion by observing that “documentarians work with fact, not fiction; we are not free to invent plot points or character arcs and instead must find them in the raw material of real life” (2).

- d. *The Exposition.* Edger Hunt, Marland John and Rawle Steven define exposition as “the means by which narrative information is relayed to viewers. This can be done visually but is often conveyed in dialogue, an ‘information dump’ or a super-villain ‘monologuing’” (125). The crux of the story/information gets dumped on the listeners and viewers who are consequently led into the information portal which they get serviced and acquainted with the subject matter.

Looking at the Covid-19 pandemic that was witnessed by people all over the world, notable features about it are the twisted narratives and innuendos attached to it. Some persons exaggerated, others downplayed it, while others used the opportunity to profit from the misery attached to it. Furthermore, some individuals, private organisations or government institutions saddled with the onus of meeting the various needs of the masses in cash or relief materials where found wanting, in the administration of the required palliatives that were meant to reach vulnerable people. Evidence abounds of the restraints placed on the distribution of these materials meant to reach the masses the government were supposed to serve. Many Nigerians saw warehouses that were packed full of the Covid-19 relief materials vandalised by angry masses that could not wait for their turn to be supplied the relief items. There were hoarded and later sold medical supplies utilised to create artificial scarcity that led to the automatic hike in prices of consumables and essential medical goods.

*Premium Times* report by Titilope Fadare on the 1st of September 2021 was captioned “Covid-19 Relief Fund: Nigerian Government pays N57 Billion

to over 1million people.” This claim was credited to the Minister of State, Federal Ministry of Trade and Investment, Mariam Katagum. In this instance most people were caught arguing over the failure of government to disburse the aid. Many people affirmed that they did not receive any aid but some claimed that they know someone, who knows someone who received the aid. The challenges surrounding the distribution of relief materials provided by government and donor agencies due to systemic corruption and mischief led to fatal repercussions as was the case of Ebola in 2014. At that time, stories were peddled around Nigeria that alternative means of treatment and prevention using salt was found to be efficacious, the unorthodox prescription of which ended up causing more harm than the virus itself. One would begin to wonder if the Covid-19 pandemic may not suddenly unleash terror on its numerous victims from unguarded prescriptions and failure of governance in managing pandemics

With the different approaches to the stories about diseases and pandemics, and a few likely distortions in the representation of the pandemic story, the place of documentary films becomes pertinent. Over the years, several films have been produced with different inspirations and objectives behind them. The genres of some films are satire, comedy or tragedy; but each has a target audience and need to convey the appropriate message or communicate an idea. According to Rosenthal and Eckhardt, we should write accurately even though void of perfection; but work should be put into a documentary film in order to bring out the appropriateness, accuracy and the intent of the film. Hence, it is important for documentary filmmakers to be aware of the type of audience that will come across the documentary film. It was then adduced from their avowal that some pertinent questions need to be raised and attempts at answering them made (56). Some of these questions are:

1. How does this film inform and enlighten an old African grandmother in the village on the dangers of the pandemic?
2. How do they use more pictures to send home their message thus bridging the communication gap?
3. How do these documentary films allay the fears of the elderly and the most vulnerable in the society, reducing panic and not landing them into a heavier pandemic of heart/panic attack?
4. How does one care for themselves appropriately without going over the board, because we have scenarios where people have taken funny concoctions thus landing them into a messier self-imposed pandemic?

In this place, Rosenthal and Eckhardt outlined various intrinsic ideas to ensure the smooth flow of documentary film (56). They outlined several key

factors that a documentary film should consist of; and they are paraphrased or edited for impact:

- i. Accuracy: We are making television programmes and/or documentaries, not writing articles for learned journals, but we still want accuracy.
- ii. Audience: We are working for a mass audience that can be composed of the aged and the young, the PhD and the person who left school at age fourteen, the expert and the ignorant.
- iii. Attention: We have to grab the audience. If the audience does not like what we show, it will turn elsewhere. Unlike students, the audience is not necessarily predisposed to what we want to show. We want to entertain, but we also want to inform the audience.
- iv. Knowledge: We cannot reflect; we cannot go back. We are unsure of the audience's knowledge of the subject: some will know everything; others will know nothing. We have to be clear, concise, and probably limited in our scope.
- v. View: Our intent is to present a view of history, not the definitive view of history. (313)

Stories can be made into films and films are divided into several categories. We have narrative, feature, animation, avant-garde and documentary films (Omoera 154; Hjort par. 6). The last mentioned is of interest to this paper. The audience in the society comprise different people from all walks of life. Those from the urban and rural areas are expected to be appropriately considered in the planning and execution of a documentary film. It is important to factor our audience when doing this. Everyone, especially a member of audience may want to relate and be a part of the story being told. When a documentary is centred on prevalent issues in the society, then it speaks and pulls in the audience for which the film or its story is meant. The audience is usually at the mercy of the filmmaker; so, there is the need to give them valid, accurate information whilst putting together any documentary film because there is no telling how far and wide the film will reach, especially with the advent of the modern day technology. The point needs to be buttressed because with digital technology, different stories about the Covid-19 pandemic spread across the world.

In 2021, unlike four decades before, information is readily available at the snap of our fingers, especially when we have varying audience to contend with. This different audience might be armed with information on the subject matter while some might not. Thus, the onus lies on the producer of the documentary film to keep an open but receptive mind undertaking in-depth research on the topic to lead the general populace aright and not astray. A

documentary film is meant to educate and inform; and if at the end of the day, the vast majority of people who are the target audience cannot relate with and benefit from the information given, then the producers and crew must have succeeded in faltering the thoughts of people and feeding them the wrong details which can be very incurable. According to Curran, documentaries:

Are many things to many people, often simultaneously. They are a form of self-expression, like novels, songs, or paintings. They are a form of journalism, independent and unmediated. They are tools for bridging the divide between cultures or exposing the harsh realities of a volatile world. They inspire, motivate, educate, exacerbate, and entertain. Documentaries reflect all that is great, challenging, disturbing, and humorous about the human condition. But first, they must reach an audience. (xiii)

Going by Curran's assertion, one can vividly see that an audience must be reached when creating any kind of film. Every producer or actor has an audience in mind; and when the film cannot reach the target audience, the producer has succeeded in suppressing communication and feedback. Curran goes further to ask valid questions on how audience reach and impact should be ascertained: who is your intended audience? Many documentaries, whether produced independently or in-house, are created with an audience in mind. It's always possible that the film you thought would only reach your immediate geographic region will be a breakout hit, but in general, you should have some idea whom you want it to reach: age, geographic area, educational level, etc. This doesn't mean that you shouldn't try to also reach a wider audience (40).

Most documentary films produced during the Corona virus pandemic had this breakout. What was done as a simple documentary of thoughts and events with just a recorder saw a lot of viewers scrambling for more information and ways to cope with the pandemic. The French Press Agency documented on 20<sup>th</sup> February, 2020 via their online newspaper thus "as the world confronts the spread of a deadly new virus, interest in disease themed movies, games and TV series has exploded, with worried viewers turning to documentaries and disaster flicks for answers and ways to cope" (French Press, 2020). Films on diseases, viruses and other related topics that people did not normally care about became films of interest because they were curious and wanted to see the outcomes, learn more, allay their fears or just seek out viable coping mechanisms to survive the pandemic.

## An Analysis of Audience Viewership Genre and Statistics during the Pandemic Period

Characteristics	Action/Adventure	Drama	Comedy	Thriller/Mystery	Horror	Sci-fi/Fantasy	Documentary	Reality	Food/Nature	Science/travel
<b>Total</b>	11%	11%	21%	5%	6%	8%	7%	4%	4%	2%
<b>18-29</b>	10%	4%	26%	6%	12%	10%	7%	5%	2%	2%
<b>30-44</b>	10%	9%	24%	4%	6%	9%	10%	3%	2%	2%
<b>45-54</b>	14%	6%	20%	4%	5%	11%	7%	5%	4%	3%
<b>55-64</b>	12%	15%	19%	5%	3%	6%	6%	6%	6%	2%
<b>65+</b>	12%	21%	14%	7%	1%	4%	6%	4%	6%	3%

**Source:** Culled from *Statista.com*, January 13, 2021

The total percentage of each film genre:

- i. action and adventure: 69%
- ii. drama: 66%
- iii. comedy: 124%
- iv. thriller/mystery: 31%
- v. horror: 33%
- vi. sci-fi/fantasy: 48%
- vii. documentary: 43%



viii.	reality:	27%
ix.	food/nature:	24%
x.	science/travel:	14%

The above correlates with what the French News Agency reported on February 20, 2020, that people tilted towards films that helped them know more about pandemics and issues on survival. Reality films, food channels/nature channels and travel channels which would have witnessed more audience viewership declined immensely due to a shift in the paradigm of individual audience members involved. During a pandemic and in the line of prioritisation, travel, food and reality television will mostly constitute the least on people's minds, as people are less concerned with things that give pleasure, notwithstanding the possibility of people's indulgence in those channels from time to time, maybe with the hope that the future avails to society when everything comes back to normal.

The documentary film also experienced a boost in audience viewership, as people documented their experiences and some people were eager and ready to digest these various pieces of information from around the world as means of learning more about the pandemic. This eagerness stemmed from the knowledge that people and society differ, so one would be curious to see how the pandemic has affected certain regions of the world. The present Corona virus pandemic was first discovered in China, a province called Wuhan. The province is one of the worst-hit by the pandemic, and it had several documentary films put online to inform and enlighten the world on the adverse effects of the pandemic. In Wuhan, the documentary films were mostly centred on several coping mechanisms, preventive measures and the adverse effects Covid-19. Curran states a perspective on the documentary and its timeliness that: these are exciting times for documentary films and filmmakers. Changes in technology and the way media is produced and consumed are creating new opportunities, and documentary stories are finding new audiences both locally and globally. Not just documentary films, documentary stories (1).

One striking feature that cannot be overlooked was the place of comedy. In all the film genres, comedy witnessed the highest number of viewership from all age grades and audience viewership. Comedy as a long age standing art has been in existence as old as a man. Even *The Holy Bible* admonishes that, "a cheerful heart is a good medicine but a crushed spirit dries up the bones" (Proverbs 17:22). People have used laughter as therapy to solve a lot of underlying issues. Little wonder Aristotle studied it and Socrates debated it. Such famous historical figures as Charles Darwin whose work on the *emotions* (1899), Thomas Hobbes on *Laughter, Wit and Power* (par. 1) and

Henri Bergson (2019:4) wrote papers on their humour theories. Adding to this assertion, Mel Helitzer and Mark Shalz posit that:

Psychologists have always been interested in explaining human behaviour through humour. Humour is an important manifestation of what society really believes, but dares not speak or teach. "We can't confront tragedy directly," suggests Joseph Boskin of Boston University, "so we try to ease ourselves in a humorous way. "Laughing at misfortune frequently replaces negative feelings with positive feelings. This is true whether we're laughing at someone else's misfortune or our own. Sigmund Freud, who studied humour (but not for the fun of it), theorised that jokes allow us to express unconscious aggressive and sexual impulses, to substitute words for what we may not be able to accomplish in deeds. (33-34)

### **The Auteur Theory in a Documentary Context**

One notable feature about the documentary film during the pandemic era was the ability to send a message across even with little or no crew. The way the film was being produced, directed and scripted gives relevance to the *Auteur* theory, which has had a longstanding controversy on whether the director should be attributed the sole authorship of the film. An *Auteur* is a filmmaker whose individual style and complete control over all the elements of production gives the film or documentary that unique touch or feel. Michael Rabiger claims that: this term was coined in the 1950s during the French New Wave and refers to the writer/director wanting to exercise an integrated control across the spectrum of the writing and realization processes. Such control can only be exercised when you have thoroughly internalized how work of depth and resonance is created, how screen works become individual, and how the narrative form itself might be expanded and developed (17).

Usually known as the *auteur* in French, the English translation, author, is comparable to an author of a book. The arguments against this theory are somewhat valid in the sense that no one wants their job or hard work in putting up a film or documentary script usurped or not creditworthy. Nevertheless, a good documentary is expected to have a detailed script of real life or real time events which are taking place or must have taken place. It is most times likened to an unravelling puzzle where no one knows what comes next. Importantly, the process of making a documentary film involves painstaking research and findings to articulate facts to give a verifiable account of an event. No matter the mode of documentary film or method employed by the cinematographer used to deepen storytelling through film, there are six sub-types or sub-genres of the documentary film: poetic, expository, reflexive, observational, performative and participatory (Nichols 1). In Nicholl's opinion: "individual

voices lend themselves to an auteur theory of cinema, while shared voices lend themselves to a genre theory of cinema" (99).

Hence, the role of the Auteur is very important in ensuring the production of authentic account of an event based on facts in the creative process. The scriptwriter writes a script; but the director visualises it and brings out the intricacies that make the film worthwhile whilst avoiding the convoluted aspects of the writer's perspective. This is not to say all scripts written by scriptwriters are usually convoluted; but the director is skilled in the art of minimal rendition of a film. Skilled in the art of directing, he/she envisages what should and what should not find its way into a film. By implication, the director's role becomes that of a gatekeeper who censors the flow of information in a film. This makes the auteur theory of much import and validity. Rabiger affirms that:

The auteur notion of filmmaking was a useful antidote to industrial filmmaking in the 1950s and '60s but was never a working reality. Fiction films have always been made by creative teams that get behind a script or improvisational scripting process. I am only exaggerating a little if I liken directors to sailing ship figure heads: out front and highly visible, of great symbolism, but wholly dependent on who and what propels them. As a director you have so much to control that you depend on the creative input of others. Directing means giving control of their parts to actors, of the camera to a camera operator, lighting to a DP, sound recording to a recordist, the editing to an editor... and writing to a writer. As a director you coordinate the work of all these people, and you work through them. You need their skills and you need their values. Their separate judgments help you attain some distance on the material so you can retain a sense of how it must strike a first-time audience. (145)

Several critics like Stephanie Zacharek, Pauline Kael and a host of others have continued to argue for and against the auteur theory; but several directors out there have proven that the director owns the creative process. For instance, there are the likes of Kunle Afolayan in Nigeria who have redefined the director's role and carved a niche for themselves. One can tell a Kunle Afolayan film, just at a first glance; because the expertise and the directorial approach have defined artistic blends that transcend film genres. Tunde Onikoyi, Taiwo Afolabi, Ikedi Agube, Canice Nwosu, Cyprian Obadiogwu among other critics have attributed great storylines and scripts to Kunle Afolayan because he brings to life any script and tells the Nigerian story vividly with clear bold pictures that resonate with the viewers' minds. Hence, films like *October 1*, *The Figurine* (2009), *Phone Swap* (2012) and *Citation* (2020)

are just few out of many films produced by the auteur director. Observably, the likes of Mahmood-Ali-Balogun, Kemi Adetiba, James Amuta, Tunde Kelani, and a host of others also fit into this category. Alternative story telling through film is therefore paramount in our bid to attain positive humanity and development.

Furthermore, directors like Christopher Nolan, Martin Scorsese, Alfonso Cuarón, Steven Spielberg, Jahman Anikulapo, Femi Odugemi, Tunde Kelani and a host of others have and are continuing to leave an indelible mark on any production they work on. This group of directors have mastered the skill of storytelling with directing; they expatiate and blow out the scripts with empathetic vigour to make meaning. Some of these directors have redefined film production and have also gone ahead to validate several scripts or stories. Some hit films include, *The Dark Knight*, *The Wolf of Wall Street*, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, *Jurassic Park*, *Shrek*, *Ayinla and Dazzling Mirage*. There is no denying the talent that the directors and writers possess; but the effort in every production is mostly overlooked because people crave the finished product for consumption, just as a saying goes, 'no one cares about the baker, just the bread; but without the baker, there will be no bread.' Fabre juxtaposes the difference between the author and the screenwriter thus: traditionally the "author" of the film was thought to be the screenwriter, the author of the script upon which the film was based. The French New Wave theorists disagreed. They believed that the written script of a film is only a blueprint, raw material that achieves meaning or significance only when the words are embodied in images on the screen. As they saw it, since the director is responsible for the images, he oversees the set designs, cinematography, editing, and performances of the actors, and also, in many cases, reworks the screenplay or script. Thus, according to the new wave critics, it is the director and not the screenwriter whose artistic vision is inscribed onto the film (120).

### **Analyses of Selected Documentary Films during the Covid-19 Pandemic**

It is evident that no matter the point of view, a documentary film can help to mitigate socio-political challenges. Ge Yunfei's *The Lockdown: One Month in Wuhan*, produced in 2020 and Jack O'Donoghue's *Virus* produced also in the same year are two foreign documentary films adopted to examine the evolution of the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequent effects in the globe. The third film *Unmasked* produced by Femi Odugbemi and Kadaria Ahmed in 2021 is a four-hour documentary film on the lives of Nigerians affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. A focus on the three films shall further our stance on the alternative storytelling and meaning-making mode of documentary films. Yunfei's *The Lockdown: One Month in Wuhan* (2020), takes us on a journey of the Covid-19 pandemic: where it started and several ways the people especially

the victims were able to cope with it. The 33-minute documentary starts with a thoughtful quote that showcases the depth of the pandemic and finding self-hope in a nearly hopeless situation. The quote goes: "Life is too fragile; I have come to the hospital; I must return home alive." This statement comes with a feeling of hope for the viewers because, in times like this, only hope sustains.

The film explores the lockdown in Wuhan that occurred on 23rd January, 2020. This was in the bid to stop the deadly virus from spreading further across the nation; and this happened one day before the Chinese New Year's Eve. This was met with chaos and mixed reactions as it was a major travel day for people planning to return home to meet with family members and friends for the holidays. Due to the rush, transportation was shut down and a lot of people ended up walking on the streets. Cheng Hugh, a migrant worker in Wuhan, who was affected by the closedown of transportation, could not go back to his family, which is a regrettable scenario amongst many people who could not access transportation back to their families and homes for the celebration of the New Year. Stuck in the city, he walks around looking for homes to seek refuge; but all were occupied at the end of the day the number of those infected with the virus numbered up to 495.

Zhao Zhizang, one of the first medical doctors to come in contact with the virus in Wuhan, said the wild animals were to be blamed and the wet market where the outbreak occurred has been shut down but the virus has long spread. Health workers are seen at the frontline, taking care of ailing patients who have contracted the virus, all geared up in their safety kits yet still at great risk. Unfortunately, Dr. Zhao contracted the virus and other co-workers began to show symptoms. Those who did not contract the virus, like Dr. Tang Shi, were not home for two weeks, working long hours, which had considerable impact on all aspects of society especially the health and health management systems in the city. Since the hospital could not take in more patients, due to limited bed space, the construction of a new hospital to house 1000 patients began. Going into the hospital to capture more scenes of Covid-19 patients was prohibited because they have a protective system that enabled whatever or whoever goes into the hospital to remain in the hospital and stay indoors without going out. Thus, curbing the spread of the virus and its being contracted in the hospital. The documentary film goes further to explain to the audience that courier services were one of the few essential services that were open for business in the country even at that, only three express services agreed to deliver services in town and it must be medical supplies. The documentary ends on a sad note when we learn about the death of one of the doctors who was at the frontline of fighting the Covid-19 pandemic.

*The Lockdown: One Month in Wuhan* gives us an insight into the numerous challenges that were faced, in disease management and restriction.

It takes us on a thrilling journey, the images and different turn out of the documentary film might not have been depicted vividly by a scriptwriter because the documentary is realism at its best and not some make-believe to entertain an audience. Figures and events were presented the way it is and at the time it was taking place (real time). No writer could have given us the exact feel of the pandemic, some would have downplayed it, while others exaggerated the situation at hand and when these two factors come into play some groups of people become offended by the reportage because various interests are being served. A documentary film is the documentation of reality. Rabiger further analyses the various points of view in the Auteur theory, though he argues that "...the origin of authorial viewpoints remains uncertain" (202). He noted that authorial point-of-view (POV) has two main polarities that often overlap: (a) A personal or auteur POV may be the means by which the film expresses a central personality and attitude toward the characters and their story. (b) Authorial POV may be vested more diffusely in the handling of archetypes and archetypal forms in genres such as the film noir or the Western.

Rabiger's categorisation implies that no film stands on its own; all elements must synchronise to bring out a masterpiece. For *The Lockdown: One month in Wuhan*, is the director's view on the film. Nevertheless, other elements are infused to make a film because the sole production of a film will likely not meet all the criteria that bring out the creative effects and processes of that film. Different works and logistics go into every film production. So, having sole creative ownership of a particular film is almost impossible but a good director should be able to adopt a script like a baby, taking care of, grooming and nurturing the whole idea just as his/hers; afterwards leaving an impression that showcases perfection that can be attributed to only the best hands especially in the directing of the film. For a documentary film, Dean explains that: basically the director's job is to interpret the script, get the best possible performances from the actors, guide the camera people, and oversee it all into a complete cinematographic story, using his or her unique vision. There are a million ways to tell and show anyone tale. The director uses his vision and makes it "his story, even if someone else wrote it (90).

Relatively, Jack O'Donoghue's documentary film *Virus* (2020), takes us on a vivid journey of the outcomes and possibilities of the Covid-19 in Australia. After a devastating bush fire on 24th January 2020, Australia reported its first case of the Covid-19. This caused a strain on the national supply chain, especially production of face masks. This pandemic fundamentally changed the way the people in Australia lived. Two-thirds of businesses were no longer functional and the iconic Sydney harbour, which was usually flooded by tourists, was generally paralysed. This had a

devastating impact especially on the tourism sector and gross domestic product (GDP).

Many hospitality and retail workers lost their jobs and others witnessed a drastic reduction in work hours, while others were forced to go on unpaid leave. On an average, 50,000 people visit Bonday Beach, but at the time of recording the documentary, the beach was empty and abandoned. Business and education could only be accessed online and through various digital platforms. The reliance on the digital technology and internet in the production, distribution and transmission of cultural products engendered new ways of doing things. In response to the pandemic, many stores offer online services with the staff having more time to themselves; individuals focus on other outdoor activities like sports; families and friends spend more time together, learning new skills and connecting via online video chats.

With *Unmasked*, referred to as a feature documentary film, the African, or Nigerian standpoint comes to the fore in the aspects of the management, impact of and responses to the pandemic. Of note are the challenges faced in allaying the challenge of the pandemic in Nigeria like corruption, inadequate health care infrastructure, poor systems governance, poverty, illiteracy and other problems. The core values as seen in the other films also hinge on governance, hope, communal dependency or reliance. The single theme that runs through the three films are handled differently by the filmmakers. The characters in the film are real-life personages from different walks of life who discuss public health management, psychosocial issues and the consequences that erupted from Covid-19. Before its national screening and tour, *Unmasked* had been screened at the iREP International Documentary Film Festival in 2021.

By and large, Yunfei's *The Lockdown...* represents the various challenges of the covid-19 outbreak in Wuhan, China and beyond. The documentary highlights the inhibitions posed to the human race and societies as a result of the measures put in place to curtail the virus. The documentary takes an in-depth foray on the health implication of the virus that affects human relationships to the adverse impact of the pandemic on the economy of China in particular and the world in general. Therefore, the way and manner each society adapted to handling the pandemic formed the diegesis of the documentary film. Similarly, O'Donoghue's *Virus*, captures the influence of the pandemic on the major source of Australia's economy. It evinces the connection between wellness and productivity and profit or economic gains. *Unmasked* however delves into the problem of maladministration of health systems that often arises from, or leads to breach of trust. From these documentaries, it is evident that the Covid-19 pandemic adversely affected societies, while also threatening the existential essence of various nations.

The reality of the Nigerian situation during the pandemic was not far-fetched, the health sector, economy and the day to day lives of people were adversely affected. Nigeria, an economy not ready for cases of emergencies that deplete the society's infrastructure in one way or the other, was at the receiving end. But this opened an array of new mediated opportunities; the old and young brushed up their boots and harnessed their internet skills, which led to ample diversification of the economy and the society. People developed new skills and found various ways to make money on various social media sites via marketing and selling products using digital humour. The drama skits industry also witnessed a boom because little or no cast was needed in the production/recording of several great drama/comedy skits that went viral, like content by Pastor Nicodemus, Mr. Macaroni, Broda Shaggy, MC Edo Pikin, Brain Jotter, among others. Being in seclusion, people were content-hungry and sought alternative means to be busy, relieve boredom and get entertained as well as engaged.

## **Conclusion**

The researchers in the course of this research, therefore, conclude that the ideal documentary as an objective medium may seem, at first, to be consistent with the 'direct cinema', a style of documentary that minimizes the filmmaker's overt manipulation of materials. Despite this, the documentary film producer needs to wield and not waive a lot of influence in his/her production in order to have complete control of it. A documentary film should be based on facts that do not need unnecessary embellishments and as the name implies is a recording of factual events based on truths that have been documented and kept to inform, enlighten, educate or even entertain as the case maybe. A documentary filmmaker would reduce the number of film cast and crew during a pandemic. This is so, because, there are usually restrictions that are encountered, as seen in the documentary film, *One month in Wuhan*, where the director was not allowed to go in to the ward with any equipment, as the hospital policy was that whatever goes in remains inside, so tentatively the movement of a full cast and crew during restrictions will make the work difficult instead of easier. Again, where cast or crew or both come down with the virus, the aim of filming the documentary is defeated. Therefore, utmost care is needed to ensure the wellness of the technical crew. Due to the fact that many people all over the world raised different conspiracy theories on the virus, it may be difficult for the documentary filmmaker to sift through different views about the Covid-19 pandemic. The documentary film producer should be mindful of his or her cast and should be cautious in choosing a story because of the mandatory location(s) in the story. As such, the story might take them to places of diverse or different cultures and stringent rules of



association. In as much as the film director wants a location that reveals actual occurrences, he/she should put into consideration factors that are likely to allow for the progress of the production, not locations that dispel the actual intent of the director. The story has to be told and the documentary filmmaker should not be hindered.

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