

The power of online in the knowledge economy: The *Nolly Silver Screen* Example

They asked for the number of Facebook friends I had.

“None.”

Twitter?

“Zilch.”

Pinterest, Google Plus...anything on social media?

“Nada.”

I had ‘no e-influence’ apparently but it wasn’t like if you Googled my name, nothing would come up. In fact, I did have many web footprints but not in the currency they understood. It did not matter as much that I had articles, interviews and quizzes up on the internet with my by-line. In fact, I had even written several movie reviews for www.dstv.com. These people wanted someone who had a network of devoted disciples. This was the only complaint I got from them. I told them that I intended to make a return to social media but as a brand – the Isabella Akinseye brand as a writer, presenter, voice-over artiste, editor and model. I also wanted to launch a Nollywood website which would feature articles, interviews, reviews, videos and much more. I was still in the process of putting it altogether and it will all be rolled out in a couple of months. At the end of the interview, they said I had done well and particularly noted my “passion” and “energy”.

This was one of the job interviews I attended in mid 2013. In the weeks leading up to hearing from them about the role of the Senior Web Editor, I got thinking. Why was it so important to have influence in cyberspace? After all, the DSTV brand was already strong in Nigeria? What would my Facebook likes and Twitter followers really do for the number 1 cable TV network provider in Nigeria? ‘A lot’ was my conclusion and this made me press the fast forward button on my re-entry into the digital space. It was no longer enough to just be able to put up content online. They wanted additional reach. More eyeballs. More minds being filled with their content. They wanted to use not just my knowledge about the industry but my network to drive traffic to their site. The more people I had in my circle – the more people that could potentially join theirs.

I later got the job but turned it down as the offer was not as competitive. A part of me strongly believed that if I had more social media mileage, maybe, I just might have been able to bargain for something better or an even higher position. Another part of me wished I had started my proposed website *Nolly Silver Screen* a lot sooner. That would have been the perfect example of not just being a Web Editor possessing writing and artistic skills but also a digital marketer and social media influencer. It would have shown some form of influence and connection to the industry. I would have come off as a “knowledge worker” which according to Peter Drucker (2001) “will be the dominant group in its [knowledge economy] workforce.” By having a platform online where I’m

regularly updating it with industry news and original content, I would have been able to prove my knowledge of the industry in practical and real terms.

Knowledge gap in Nollywood

I remember wanting to revolutionise Nigeria's entertainment industry as a teenager. As I grew older, I leaned towards its film industry – Nollywood and a career in acting. However, I found myself in my University days writing for magazines, newspapers and websites. In my second year, I took a course in Film Studies with the hope of writing a dissertation on a Nollywood film. Unfortunately, I was unable to do so as my supervisor said there were not enough written and literary materials to use in answering my research question. In other words, there was not enough written knowledge in the public domain for my work to stand and be graded academically.

This theoretic and academic knowledge gap in Nollywood got me thinking – how would people take us seriously when there is little documentation about our progress? How would people be able to study and learn about our films?

These questions stayed with me for a long time and even when it seemed like my Nollywood acting dream was dimming, I used writing as a platform to get my foot in the door. Starting with news articles and interviews, I started and contributed to the blog of tvNolly – an online portal that streamed Nollywood films.

I spoke to Adeniyi Olutayo, the owner of tvNolly about starting a magazine that would educate, entertain and inform people about Nollywood; one that would stand as a reference for the industry. He said that people do not read. He said people prefer pictures, news bites and gossip. They want to know 'who is doing who' and what the latest fashion is on the red carpet. I responded that lifestyle and movie blogs were already filling that vacuum. What we would offer would be different – it would be a more intelligent read with depth and substance. In the end, he was more interested in something that would have wide mass appeal such as gossip and I wanted something that could end up as a reference on a Wikipedia entry or dissertation.

Abroad, they had magazines dedicated to film – *Variety*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, *Total Film* and *Empire* to mention a few. I had seen in them the potential to monetise a knowledge sharing platform. People all over the globe were thirsty to know about movies, their stars and everything else in between. If Hollywood could recognise that knowledge gap and fill it, why could we not do the same in Nollywood? *Nolly Silver Screen* was born in October 2013.

ICT and the knowledge-based economy

Drucker wrote in the November 2001 edition of *The Economist*.

Information technology, although only one of many new features of the next society, is already having one hugely important effect: it is allowing knowledge to spread near-instantly, and making it accessible to everyone. Given the ease and speed at which information travels, every institution in the knowledge society—not only businesses, but also schools, universities, hospitals and increasingly government agencies too—has to be globally competitive, even though most organisations will continue to be local in their activities and in their markets. This

is because the Internet will keep customers everywhere informed on what is available anywhere in the world, and at what price.

Part of the reason I chose to go down the digital path for *Nolly Silver Screen* was to be able to connect with a global audience and also be a part of the 'Internet revolution' which has been fuelled by the knowledge economy. What was the point in remaining in my own backyard when developments in information communication technology have already made the world a global village? Why limit my influence to just Nollywood and be content in being a local champion? By going digital, it will mean an additional audience for filmmakers to reach irrespective of geographical location. This new e-audience will now be able share their views about articles and videos posted on the site – in turn, providing informal feedback for the filmmaker. Another advantage of the online platform is the ability to use social media to drive traffic to the site. Finally a strong online presence means that more people might stumble across your work just by using a search engine.

According to B-Å. Lundvall and D. Foray (1996):

The ICT system gives the knowledge-based economy a new and different technological base which radically changes the conditions for the production and distribution of knowledge as well as its coupling to the production system.

This supports Drucker's argument that the internet allows for knowledge "to spread near-instantly." This means that people no longer have to wait till the next morning to read about an event in the newspaper. It means that knowledge can be shared in real time in form of text, video, sound and images. In the past, *Nolly Silver Screen* has live tweeted names of winners and event pictures at different Nollywood award ceremonies. What is interesting is the way this near instant information is then shared. The tweets are usually retweeted and favoured by the organisers, fans and even other websites. This leads to greater exposure of the site and new followers on Twitter. Perhaps by providing that information on the go, newly acquired followers see *Nolly Silver Screen* as a portal for knowledge and connection to the industry. However, every success story has its own dark moments and *Nolly Silver Screen* is no exception.

The downside of social media in a knowledge economy

In my experience, one of the problems with social media is that it gives everyone a platform and a voice irrespective of educational background or expertise to share knowledge online. Anybody can make claims to be a 'knowledge worker' and write anything they want about any topic. Some do not even have human faces. A lot of the comments received on *Nolly Silver Screen* are spam from computer robots but this does not compare to a Twitter experience I had earlier on this year.

I had written a review about *Honeymoon Hotel* for another lifestyle and entertainment website I contribute to. It was one of worst movies I had seen to come out of New Nollywood and what was even worse was that it screened in the cinemas and the star studded cast was heavily promoted. At first, a blogger read it and sent me a message that I should have waited for the film to be out of the cinemas first so that the producer can make his money before slamming it.

Days later, the producer/director, Elvis Chucks got to read it and promptly, engaged in a name calling session on Twitter. I tried to explain the rationale behind the review but he was having none of it, he was angry – very angry. He went as far as calling me a prostitute and telling people not to visit my site. He made fun of the fact that I had less

than 200 followers on Twitter and said I did not finish school. I later found out that when another film critic reviewed the same movie on another website, he also called him names. Some days after the Twitter encounter, my account got hacked. Since then, my account has been hacked again and at a point was locked by Twitter. The negative experience turned out to have positive benefits. More people began to follow me on Twitter and later on, some actors approached me to give me insider information on the going-ons on the set of the movie. In fact, a member of the cast, a well respected actress, Joke Jacobs said that I had done the right thing and that the industry needed more people like me.

Succeeding in the knowledge economy

"Success in the knowledge economy comes to those who know themselves – their strengths, their values, and how they best perform" Drucker (1999) wrote in *Management Challenges for the 21st Century*.

"More and more people in the workforce – and most knowledge workers – will have to manage themselves. They will have to place themselves where they can make the biggest contribution; they will have to learn to develop themselves."

Learning in the knowledge economy never ends because of the rapid rate of innovation in technology. To continually succeed as a knowledge worker, I need to constantly update myself of changes and pick up new skills along the way. When I started writing a blog with my friend Temitayo Olofinlua, I did not bother myself with IT or graphics skills. We both worked at a Nigerian publishing firm at the time, Kachifo Limited. We stuck to reading, writing, editing and proofreading and left the graphics for the artist.

Now, to successfully run a website, you need to be able to work with pictures and make use of different image editing softwares. When starting *Nolly Silver Screen*, I knew I could not afford to hire a professional to help me but I also did not want to run stories without well edited pictures or illustrations. I decided to take classes to learn graphic design and magazine layout. With my new found skills, my confidence received a boost which led me to start the magazine I had earlier wanted to do while contributing to tvNolly. I published the first edition of *Nolly Silver Screen* magazine on my birthday 21 February 2014. Since then we have published a magazine every month which for us is an additional tool to further disseminate knowledge.

Beyond developing and managing myself as Drucker advised, the *Nolly Silver Screen* team serve as additional filters for the site and magazine. They do not just bring a variety of content but also help to correct my editorial and artistic lapses and loopholes. By utilizing the different strengths of each team member, we always end up with a better publication overall.

Knowledge is still key

In the knowledge economy, Peter Drucker, suggests that "knowledge is now becoming the one factor of production, sidelining both capital and labour." To start *Nolly Silver Screen*, I needed minimal capital and labour compared to the amount of knowledge required. The capital was for buying a domain name and a hosting plan as well as paying a web designer and illustrator. I already had my laptop and an internet

subscription. The labour was initially done a few freelance contributors and me. We all wrote pieces, I upload them with pictures on the site and promoted the links on social media. These two factors of production were relatively straightforward and cheap. The knowledge was and is still the tricky part. At the beginning, a lot of questions came up. How would an outsider speak knowledgeably enough to be taken serious by both insiders and the public? How would we prove that we knew what we were talking about? What would differentiate us from the competition? How would we win over and gain the trust of those who truly possessed the knowledge of the industry?

Several months later, I have come to agree with Drucker that knowledge is still the number one factor of production especially on a website and online magazine such as *Nolly Silver Screen* that prides itself as a provider of knowledge. Some of the most read articles on the site have come from reviews and interviews – that are peculiar to the site. No other site for example has an in depth Trailer Review of Tunde Kelani's upcoming feature film on sickle cell, *Dazzling Mirage*. *Nolly Silver Screen* was also the first website to publish weekly cinema listings of Nollywood films and one of such listings has appeared in our top 5 of mostly read articles. As we progressed, we realized that people need a variety of information. As a result, the site has grown over the months to include audition notices, theatre news, Ghollywood, indigenous and other sections. People are thirsty for knowledge. So, our focus is on the quality of the work – from the actual content to the presentation. While we publish news worthy stories from other sources and press releases, we constantly look for ways to come up with new and exclusive content. Just a few weeks ago, *Nolly Silver Screen* was a media partner with Pan Atlantic University's Nollywood Centre which recently held its second annual Nollywood Conference. This meant we were able to interview the Director of the Centre in the May edition of the magazine. This kind of content and partnership opened a new audience – university students and filmmakers on their mailing list to *Nolly Silver Screen*. During the conference, one of the presenters sent his paper to us and this will be featured in the August edition.

The future of *Nolly Silver Screen* in a knowledge economy 2024

People ask me if I am making money from *Nolly Silver Screen*? Yes and No. Yes, because the site has adverts and some of the jobs covered have come with an honorarium. No, because the amount being made is so small compared to the money, time and resources being put into it. However, the future of *Nolly Silver Screen* in a knowledge economy in the next decade is bright. Already, the platform of *Nolly Silver Screen* has opened doors to me which would not have been possible if I was just a freelance writer depending on other publications to publish my work. Earlier in the year, I was invited to South Africa (all expenses paid) to cover the 2014 Africa Movie Academy Awards Nominations. One of the stories I published on the site was shortlisted for the 2014 AMAA Media Recognition Award. I even later got a call from the Senior Web Editor of *dstv.com* (he would have been my boss if I had taken the job) who stumbled across my work online to contribute articles and to cover the red carpet of the 2014 Africa Magic Viewers Choice Awards. These opportunities I believe were as a result of the digital presence of *Nolly Silver Screen*.

We recently increased the pagination of the online magazine from 16 to 40. We are also speaking to prospective advertisers. We have welcomed new additions to the team and so far, so good. The feedback is encouraging and the media support from newspapers and online publications has been immense. A decade from now, I strongly believe the knowledge we are documenting and preserving will form the content of the history books that will be read by tomorrow's generation in understanding Nollywood. And this time, there will be enough materials for anyone wanting to write their dissertation on a Nollywood film because the knowledge will be there. And me, the knowledge worker? I know it would not just be my influence that would have grown – my bank account as well from speaking jobs, writing gigs, media consultancy, advertising and digital marketing. Echoing Drucker, the knowledge economy is here and we knowledge workers are becoming more valuable over time.

Bibliography

B-Å. Lundvall and D. Foray, 'The knowledge-based economy: from the economics of knowledge to the learning economy', OECD *Employment and Growth in the Knowledge-Based Economy* (OECD: Paris) 1996.

Peter F. Drucker, *The Age of Discontinuity: Guidelines to Our Changing Society* (New York: Harper and Row) 1969.

Peter F. Drucker 'From capitalism to knowledge society' in D. Neef (ed.) *The Knowledge Economy*, (Woburn MA: Butterworth) 1998.

Peter F. Drucker, 'The Next Society,' *The Economist* (November 1, 2001), <http://www.economist.com/node/770819>