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A sales girl sorts through dvds in a shop at the Nigerian film market in Lagos. — AFP photos



Nigerian actress Hilda Dokubo (second left) and Nigerian actor Wole Ojo (left) talk with the chief operator on the shooting of the movie 'The CEO' in Lagos.

Nigeria sees a rush to get Nollywood online

A glamour blogger, a filmmaker and a tech mogul are competing to create a home-grown African rival to Netflix, but poor internet connections and intense competition are proving daunting obstacles. They dream of popularizing access to films made in Nigeria, which is home to the world's second biggest movie industry in terms of production behind Hindi-language Bollywood. With nearly \$4 billion in revenue and almost 2,000 productions every year, films made in what is known as Nollywood are largely sold on the streets and to idling motorists caught in traffic as pirated copies for just a few dollars.

Local start-ups and Nollywood stars understand the interest in changing the distribution of films that are hugely popular across Africa, where cinemas are few and far between. With such a huge potential market, video-on-demand platforms have sprung up in Lagos, Nigeria's commercial capital and home to the country's film industry. And competition is already fierce.

monthly fee of 1,000 naira. "We are hoping to be to Africa what Netflix is to the world," Ikeji wrote on her Instagram page, which has some two million followers. She promised glamour, sass and humor, particularly with reality shows such as "Football Wives" or "Highway Girls of Eko", "a show on real-life prostitutes" in Lagos.

The 37-year-old former model-turned-businesswoman made her fortune through advertising revenue on her site, which tracked the lives of Nigeria's rich and famous. She said she had invested "half-a-billion naira" of capital in the project. As well as buying video, she is also making original content from her own studios in Lagos. Before the end of the year, Nigerian company Envivo is expected to launch its own platform with an initial investment of more than \$20 million, said filmmaker Chioma Ude, who is the firm's marketing director. "(US telecoms giant) Cisco wants a big footprint in Africa, and as our technical partner, they will provide all the technology, from the network to the video compressions, etc.," the founder of the Africa International Film Festival (AFRIFF) told AFP.

the lack of widespread high-speed internet coverage. Only 34 percent of Africans have internet access compared with more than 50 percent in the rest of the world, according to the 2018 Global Digital report. But Africa showed the biggest progression in internet users last year, especially through mobile telephones.

Serge Noukoue, organiser of the annual Nollywood Week in Paris, said price was everything and the African consumer wanted to pay "as little as possible" to watch a film.

"Even iROKOTv, the pioneer on the continent, doesn't really make a profit," he said. "They have had a lot of success in fundraising but what subscribers actually bring in is less conclusive." Jason Njoku founded iROKOTv in 2010 but said he made a mistake to count on streaming from the start. "It simply couldn't work," he explained. "Data costs were prohibitive, as is access to reliable broadband across huge swathes of the continent. Our customer service team was inundated with queries. "We totally rebuilt our product and rebuilt our entire company around the African consumer and their habits." That led to an application that ate less data and which allows free mobile downloads of video files. There is original content, while films have also been subtitled in French, Swahili and Zulu to make them more

accessible to other African countries.

Fierce competition

Competitors have emerged elsewhere in Africa in recent years, including Kenya's BuniTV (\$5-a-month) or South Africa's Magic Go (\$8-a-month). "If these online platforms don't make money yet they're a bet on the future for when connections are better," said Noukoue. "A lot of projects have been created but there will not be room for everyone in the market in the long term. Competition will be fierce." Giants of the sector such as Netflix, which in 2016 launched in Africa, could outshine the continent's video-on-demand pioneers in years to come. "Netflix doesn't yet have a real Africa strategy but it's started to produce original African content. That will be a gamechanger. "It has considerable means at its disposal that the others don't have." — AFP



The co-founder and CEO of Iroko television Jason Njoku speaking about Iroko tv during an interview in Lagos.

Netflix of Africa?

Blogger Linda Ikeji—one of Nigeria's biggest names on social networks—recently launched Linda Ikeji TV (LITV) to great fanfare. It offers dozens of films, series and programs inspired by US shows but with a Nollywood twist for a

'Prohibitive' data costs

A viable economic model for the promoters of Nollywood online still needs to be found, given



British actor Paul Anderson performs in a scene from 'Tartuffe', Moliere's play adapted by British playwright Christopher Hampton.



British actor Paul Anderson (left) and French actress Audrey Fleurot perform in a scene from 'Tartuffe'.

Bilingual play brings Trumped-up Moliere to London

For the first time in the history of London's West End theatre district, a play is being staged in English and French—Moliere's classic "Tartuffe", transposed into Donald Trump's United States. The comedy at the Theatre Royal Haymarket stars two television regulars from either side of the Channel—Paul Anderson in the title role as a US evangelist, and Audrey Fleurot as Elmire. Anderson is known for his role as Arthur in "Peaky Blinders", a crime drama series about a 1920s gang in Birmingham, while flamboyant redhead Audrey Fleurot played lawyer Josephine Karlsson in the Paris police and legal drama "Spiral".

In the modern take on the 1660s play, Orgon, portrayed by Sebastian Roche, is a French media tycoon in Los Angeles, who falls under the spell of radical evangelist Tartuffe. Tartuffe has hoodwinked Orgon so comprehensively that he looks set to steal his fortune, drive away his son, seduce his wife Elmire and marry his daughter. The play is going down well with a young and enthusiastic audience calling for encores. However, newspaper critics have not been so keen. The Times said "Merde, what a mess", calling it a "pretentious shambles" and "excruciating", while The Daily Telegraph said it

was "frankly maladroit" and "induces tears of frustration".

Scandalous play

Is it provocative to stage a bilingual play in Britain as it heads for the EU exit door? "Tartuffe" has always been a scandalous play, right from its origins when it was banned, and the provocation inherent in the play continues," director Gerald Garutti told AFP. "It's a play which divides opinions, between those who favor a form of openness, and those who tend more towards withdrawal, autonomy, insularity and something more closed. And clearly politics and ideology have a stake in it," he said, in reference to Brexit. Garutti prefers to go by the acclaim from the stalls, where a Netflix-happy generation is able to juggle with the languages and the surtitles, which crop up in several places around the stage.

And in Christopher Hampton's adaptation, a final surprise twist anchors the play in the realities of the modern-day United States under President Trump. "I wanted to keep as much as possible of the original text and in thinking of the idea of a religious guru, I naturally thought of California," Hampton told AFP. "From that

came the idea of an American Tartuffe with whom all the members of the family have to speak in English." Besides Trump, "the Me Too movement was a strong part of my thinking. "Like all the great plays, 'Tartuffe' remains relevant in a slightly different way with the passage of time."

Gymnastic switch

Each era throws up its share of virtue-spouting hypocrites who cannot practice what they preach, whatever it is they are preaching. Especially when desire, in the form of Fleurot dressed in a siren's robes, enters the mix, in a spicy seduction scene with the falsely puritanical evangelist Tartuffe. "At the start of rehearsals, the French team said 'we don't touch Moliere!'. But in the end, it's interesting to bring things up to date, so long as we don't distort the play," Fleurot told AFP.

Working with two languages was also a challenge. Roche said: "It's an interesting gymnastic switch between French and English, it's a very different rhythm. There is also a different sound." To play Tartuffe, Anderson wears a white linen tunic which covers up his tattoos. "The risk element is what I liked about it, not doing something the people would expect me to do," he said.

The inspiration for his interpretation came partly from his own imagination but also from dark manipulators such as the Russian monk Rasputin and the Californian serial killer Charles Manson. "There is a slight Charles Manson in him, in the charming side, in the charismatic side," said Anderson. "He was very charismatic, regardless of being a monster." The play runs until July 28, with tickets ranging from £15 to £90 (\$20 to \$118; 17 to 102 euros). — AFP



British actor Paul Anderson, French actress Audrey Fleurot (right) and British-French actor Sebastian Roche (left) perform in a scene from 'Tartuffe'. — AFP Photos

Music fans mark 70 years since first LP as vinyl enjoys revival

In the basement of the British Library, curator Andy Linehan inspects the latest addition to a massive archive of wax cylinders, cassettes, LPs and CDs - a vinyl record that made musical history. Released in the United States in 1948, Mendelssohn's Concerto in E minor, performed by violinist Nathan Milstein with the New York Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra, was the very first vinyl LP, or long playing record. The 12 inch 33 1/3 rpm format allowed longer pieces to be recorded, changing the way listeners enjoyed their music.

"The fact that the long playing record came into existence was a huge step for music sound recording and for the listener," Linehan, curator of popular music in the British Library sound archive, said. "Previously you could only get 3 minutes or so onto one side of a record and now because you had a narrower groove and a slower speed, you could get up to 20 minutes, which meant you could get a whole classical piece on one side of a record ... you could get a whole package of songs together on one record."

Today marks 70 years since Columbia Records introduced the LP, and British music retailer HMV and label Sony Classical recreated 500 copies of the concerto to give away to fans, with one replica donated to the British Library's archive. The record adds to the library's 250,000 collection of LPs, usually commercial releases in Britain, and artefacts going back to the beginning of sound recording, such as wax cylinders, patented by Thomas

Edison in 1877, the first way fans could buy music to listen to at home. Today's anniversary comes at a time when vinyl has been enjoying a revival. In Britain, while it still only accounting for 7 percent of album sales, it draws fans of all ages.

According to the British Phonographic Industry (BPI), vinyl LP sales rose to 4.1 million last year from 205,292 in 2007. "Vinyl is popular because people see it more artefact rather than utility," Gennaro Castaldo, BPI communications director, said. "They love the whole ritual around buying it and then playing it at home and also the sound quality is much warmer, richer and people appreciate that." Rock remains the best-selling vinyl genre and last year, the biggest seller on the format in Britain was Ed Sheeran's "Divide" album. Older titles such as Amy Winehouse's "Back To Black" and Fleetwood Mac's "Rumors" were also in the top 10. "Our record stores are stocking more vinyl than we've ever stocked in terms of the last 10 years," Simon Winter, PR and events manager at HMV, said.

At the flagship HMV store on Oxford Street, in central London, music aficionados buying vinyl records said they appreciated its sound quality. "I grew up with mum and dad listening to a lot of Meat Loaf and a lot of heavy metal and rock and roll ... and a lot of that was done on vinyl," Steve Pound said. "That recording is just very, very unique." — Reuters



Andy Linehan, Curator of Popular Music Recordings at the British Library, places a limited edition pressing of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in E Minor 1948 recording - the very first 33rpm vinyl LP to be issued - into the British Library's musical collection of over 250,000 pieces, in London, Britain. — AP