

Advocacy of 4IR Agenda in Selected Feature Films: An Analysis of Aneesh Chaganty's *Searching* and Nicholas D. Johnson & Will Merick's *Missing*

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Abstract

A film contains images that are projected on the screen to generate chimera of movements. It is a visual story-telling type of entertainment which can also serve as a tool of edification. Film is also used to probe vital social issues. It is deployed to make the audience take note of a development, learn about a new culture, and experience dissimilar perspectives on a given subject matter. Genre of films include; historical, science-fiction, comedy, drama, thriller, drama, adventure, crime, gangster, horror, western and musical. The genus of film that brings controversial discourse to the consciousness of its audience is referred to as advocacy film. Advocacy film also allows its audience to examine issues from different perspectives. Existing studies on films with advocacy are mostly documentary films. However, scant attention has been paid to advocacy feature-length films. Guided by Emerson Kim's Media Advocacy Theory, this study investigates how the Fourth Industrial Revolution agenda were established in Aneesh Chaganty's film; *Searching* and Nicholas D. Johnson & Will Merick's film; *Missing*. The study concludes that film is not entertainment only; it could also serve as a means to display/situate social, political, cultural, economic and technological discourses in the age of industry 4.0.

Keywords: Film, Genre, Advocacy Film, Fourth Industrial Revolution

Introduction

The first industrial revolution started in the mid-1700s when steam power and mechanised production was first introduced in Britain (Jeremy in Shang-Su & Tan, 2017:6). The development later stretched to the other parts of Europe and this revolutionized production process and its exchange among nations during the 18th century. The development also had ripple effects on the way the societies were organised. The First Industrial Revolution came with the introduction of coal, steam power and automated means of production. These mechanized modes replaced the previous subsistent ways of production and distribution of goods. The Second Industrial Revolution (1870 and 1914) which was driven by electricity, oil and gas can also referred to as Technological Revolution. This era brought about expansion in communication technology. In essence, transportation, communication and mechanized production experienced a boost during the Second Industrial Revolution. The disparity between the first and second Industrial Revolutions was the introduction of electricity as a source of energy. The invention heightened level of production in factories. The Third Industrial Revolution also known as the Digital Revolution started around 1969. Upon the arrival of the third Industrial Revolution, analogue devices were replaced with the application of digital technologies. Also, the use of renewable energy sources like ocean waves, hydro solar, wind was part of this the epoch (1960s to early 1990s). In addition, the era also

witnessed the development of nuclear energy and electronics. The change in the twenty- first century has cranked to warp speed. The one hundred and five (105) year gap distance between the first and second industrial revolutions was reduced to fifty- five years between the second and third revolutions. The world witnessed the Fourth Industrial Revolution in the year 2000 with broadband internet and renewable energy. It has redefined how mundane or routine activities, lifestyles and interactions with one another are carried out. The third industrial revolution began in 1969, while the fourth industrial revolution (Industry 4.0 or 4IR) continues through the second decade of the 21st century (Sentryo quoted in Frost, 2020: 193). 4IR is the radical break, combination and advancement of the previous three Industrial revolutions. In essence, it is the fusion of advanced technology, resulting to the introduction of artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, biotechnology, robotics, networked digital computation, and information communication technology (Benyara, 2023: 120). However, advanced economies of the world are leading in the race of leveraging the benefits of the 4IR while most countries in Africa are still lagging behind. This is partly due to the technological backwardness bedevilling these nations and ineffectual government policies. In this work, we argue that feature-length film, specifically the advocacy genre, serves as a vehicle for projecting the 4IR. In addition, some of the disadvantages of the fourth industrial revolution on film shall also be examined.

Review of Literature

Films or movies are a variety of entertainment with both local and global appeal. Films, otherwise known as motion pictures are also called moving pictures, movie, cinema (Naraliza, 2021:11). Films are arguably the highest form of art in that motion pictures encompass other art forms, including acting, writing, visual effects, animation, and so on. Since the introduction of films in the 19th century, films have experienced some transformations to establish itself as modern art. Practitioners of the traditional arts such as poetry, drama and prose welcomed film with contempt at its introduction. Nonetheless, films later gained popularity as art form and a force to reckon with. Films are one of the significant tools of communication available to human society (John and Joseph, 2020:120). Like the visual arts, decorative arts and literature, films are also a creative form of self-expression. Films, in similar fashion to music, artifacts, drawings, paintings, have an important role in the negotiation of social discourses (Mungai, 2008:1). Films also combine other art forms, such as, for its production. We argue in this paper that films are the most effective contemporary art for conveying ideas to audience. Comparing film to other art forms, Ogunyombo submits thus:

Film transcends the static limitations of painting and sculpture in the complexity of its sensual appeal as well as its ability to communicate simultaneously on multiple levels due to the continual interaction of sight, sound, and motion. Film even outclasses theatre in terms of showing several points of view, depicting action, manipulating time, and conveying an infinite feeling of space. Unlike a stage drama, a film can give a continuous, uninterrupted flow, blurring and minimizing transitions while maintaining the story's continuity. Unlike the novel and the poem, a film communicates directly through real images and sound rather than abstract symbols like words on paper. (NOUN, 2022: 11)

Technology is at the core of movie making. Consequently, its progression and sophistication travel with advancement in technology. The messages in films are visually communicated. Through this achievement in the film industry, language barriers are broken with features such as, translations and subtitles. While the conventional arts rely heavily on the imagination of their audience, films have the characteristics of actuality which has more effect on the viewers/audience than what other art forms. This explains the reason Ekwuazi refers to film as visual story-telling, but the large screen of the cinema and the small screen of television have a lot in common, i.e.: visual language (Ekwuazi, 2002: 25). Film-making process requires the use of the cameras, audio gadgets, lighting equipment, computers and other gadgets. In essence, it takes a great deal of technological input to make a film. A good film has the potential the choices of the target audience in life. Being a visual medium, the audience's interest is primarily sustained by what they see in the film and not necessarily the story. Film causes the desire of things that we may not ordinarily like, but with the appropriate application of visual elements and components by the disparate artists for a film production, the audience is enticed and wilfully involved in the film as they watch it unfold (Preware, 2022: 3). Film is a medium that resonates with individuals and societies differently. Apart from the fact that films entertain, they are also used as platforms where issues are showcased in the public domain for reflection and possible deliberation. Since films are regarded as a form of entertainment, therefore, films tell us deeper stories of how societies are conceptualized—either realistically or idealistically. Whether as utopian or dystopian visions, films reflect an interpretation of a society. Films can also be prescriptive, informative and overwhelmingly escapist, and we have learned that through films (Garrett, 2019:1). Films are used to project cultures, showcase civilization, and display worldviews. Viewers easily identify with movie characters, thereby creating some possibility of making similar choices in their own lives according to the characters in the films. Therefore, films have the ability to influence the viewers/audience to act in certain ways or the other. This could be as a call to action about an issue and a covert or overt admonition against some vices. Film as a medium not only influences our society, but also takes the same society's reflection, and projects it to the world. This teaches us what is good and bad, what is right and wrong. Not only culture and society need to teach the audiences but through social interactions also they can learn it (Chatterji, 1999 quoted in Marry and Bullard 2018: 249). There are films that encourage worthy acts like probity, patriotism, bravery, sense of duty and trust. We also have movies that preach against vices like greed, tenacity of office, cultism, and gender-based violence, bullying and crime.

There are films that are make frontal statements in terms of themes, while others have hidden messages. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of film in making statements on topical issues (domestic and global) is an established fact. A key feature that makes a film stand out is its visual power. This gives it the ability to have a lasting effect on the psyche of its audience. Films have magical tendencies that can influence the decision its audience make socially, politically, spiritually, and educationally. Consequently, interest groups like unions, business associations, trade groups and nations like America, India, China, Japan and Korea have ways of projecting their values, albeit discreetly, through their films. Therefore, films have become a strong tool of projecting national images, for example *Lincoln*, *Shaura*, *Spring In A Small Town*, *Remembering World War II*, *The Brotherhood of War*. Some films are repository of knowledge of human history. A number of countries of the world are involved with film making through their own industry. The United States of America is arguably the most powerful, organized, popular and influential country in film-making (Preware, 2022: 1). Additionally, films have become a means of gaining deeper knowledge about societies and

can give insights into certain social dynamics or an ideology like the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Some film directors will disagree on the agency of film-making. Some will rightly argue that they are change agents, and that through their films they want to make us feel uncomfortable, face reality, and question ourselves. But even if they succeed, they only support the idea that films reflect our world and our world is reflected in films. (Garrett, 2019:3) you can't some and mention one scholar at the end. Please provide more references

Findings and Analysis

The examination of 4IR agenda in the selected feature-length films is the focus of this study. To achieve this, qualitative research method is adopted to draw data for analysis. Researchers adopt analytic research method aiming to explore the primary source of information (selected films) and secondary source of information (reviewed literature).

In *Searching*, David Kim (John Cho)'s 16-year-old daughter goes missing, a local investigation is opened and a detective is assigned to the case. At exactly 37 hours later without a single lead, David decides to search a place no one looked at. This hidden place (his daughter's laptop) contains all the secrets. Cho becomes a single dad after his wife dies from a cancer recurrence while their only daughter Margot (Michelle La) is in high school. Margot goes off to a study group and should return that night, but when he does not see her the next day, he realizes that she was missing. By involving the Police, Messing (Detective Vick) became the lead investigator in the search for Margot (Michelle La). He calls the cops and that is when Messing, who plays Detective Vick, comes in to lead the investigation into Margot's disappearance. While she leads the ground search, David hacks into his daughter's email and social media accounts to discover his child had another lifestyle hidden from him. Margot did not run away as Detective Vick originally made David to believe. She is at the bottom of a ravine. It is Vick who covers the tracks of her son Robert, who is the actual culprit. When David gets too close to the truth, Vick gets an ex-convict to do a taped confession and then kills him in a fake suicide. Margot is still alive because a thunderstorm apparently provides water for her to survive. It was revealed from Vick's tape confession that this was a catfishing scheme gone wrong. (Catfishing is the process of luring someone into a relationship by means of a fictional online persona.) Her son Robert had a crush on Margot ever since they were kids, and instead of talking to her like a normal person, he catfished Margot for months over a live video-chatting application called YouCast under the surname 'Fish n Chips', using a friendly looking redhead woman who goes by Hannah. Robert makes up the story that he needs money to pay for his mother's medical bills, so Margot stops going to piano classes and sends him \$2, 500. He tries to give her the money back in person to explain the situation, but instead of doing it at school where she could publicly embarrass him for catfishing him, he asks her to meet in the forest near favourite lake. In the film's finale, the arrest of Vick is linked directly into a successful rescue attempt on Margot. The rescue crew discovers Margot severely injured but alive. This gives the Kims a much-needed happy ending. The film comes to an end a year later with Margot going off to college and her relationship with her father evidently improved.

The film *Missing* begins with an archival video of a young June Allen. She is with her father James, who died from a brain tumour shortly after the video was made. Years later, June's mother Grace, leaves for a week-long trip to Cartagena, Colombia, with her boyfriend Kevin, leaving June in the care of Grace's friend Heather, a divorce lawyer who expresses some jealousy at Grace's relationship with Kevin. A week later, June is tasked of welcoming her mother and Kevin from Los Angeles International Airport, but they never arrived. June contacts the FBI, but later decides to investigate herself using an array of digital tools at her

disposal. She also hires Javier, a Colombian gig worker who complies with June's requests for a small fee. Upon hacking into Kevin's Gmail account, June discovers a number of aliases and criminal records of scamming many women for their money. Believing Kevin to have kidnapped her mother, June asked Javier look for clues on the whereabouts her mother and boyfriend in Colombia. She traces Kevin's past movements to a location in Nevada, where she talks to Jimmy, a man claiming to be a pastor at a Christian rehabilitation centre for ex-convicts. He tells her that Kevin has been rehabilitated and is genuinely in love with Grace. June eventually accesses her mother's online dating profile, where old messages reveal that her mother was already aware of Kevin's past. FBI agent Elijah Park informs June that he received footage of a band of criminals seemingly kidnapping Kevin and Grace in Colombia. June uncovers this as a fabricated event. Kevin had hired a lookalike actress named Rachel Page to impersonate her mother. She had been kidnapped en route to the airport beforehand. As the case makes national headlines, Rachel confesses she was unaware of Kevin's intentions when she accompanied him to Colombia. It revealed that Grace has had multiple aliases as well, sparking speculation that she had something to do with her own disappearance. Swearing by her mother's innocence, June's suspicions fall on Heather when she discovers an encrypted line of communication between her and Kevin. June sneaks into Heather's office but finds it ransacked and with files deleted. She then discovers Heather's corpse in a storage closet. Later, June views live footage of a police raid in Colombia focusing on Kevin, who is shot and killed despite surrendering. Seemingly at a dead end, June is about to give up but manages to access her mother's e-mail. She finds a threatening e-mail directed at Grace. This leads her to discover security cameras that Kevin bought to install at an abandoned house, which happens to be her old vacation home in Nevada. Just then, Jimmy calls June and indicates he has some information about Grace. Jimmy arrives and reveals that he is June's father and adds that Grace was emotionally unstable, taking June away from him after having him arrested under false charges. However, he also unwittingly reveals himself as a domestic abuser whose drug habit endangered all of them. Grace and Heather had told June he died of cancer to shield her from the truth. James sought revenge by enlisting Kevin, whom he met in prison, to pose as a prospective boyfriend so he could find Grace and June. James kidnaps June and takes her to the old house, where Grace is also detained. They reunite before Grace is shot by James. James tries to leave with June, but Grace fatally stabs him in the neck with a shard of broken glass. June, realizing James never shut off her laptop when he kidnapped her, uses the cameras to tell Siri to call the police. Several months later, Grace has survived her gunshot wound, and June is in college. Their story has been adapted on the true crime show *Unfiction*.

Kim used the laptop to search for his missing child. He combed Margot's e-mail and social media accounts to compliment the work of the police. In the scene, the internet became a double-edged sword that cut both ways. Robert was able to deceive and lured Margot to the spot where he almost killed her through the internet chat room (YouCast). Vick's attempt to cover her son's crime was uncovered through the use of the internet by Kim. Although Kim was not favourably disposed to her daughter's (June) addiction to the internet, but eventually the internet becomes her saving grace. The internet helped to solve a case the FBI found overwhelming. She moves from her step father's Gmail account to her mother's dating app and e-mail to solve the crime puzzle. It was through the help of Siri on her laptop that made the police to locate the crime scene. Eventually June and her mother and were rescued by the police. In these hyper-modern thrillers, stories are told via familiar for communication. The films' plots develop on computer screens through applications like FaceTime, and newsclip. *Searching* is a thought-provoking film about the intersection between teens' lives, involving their presence-and reliance-on social media. It is a riveting thriller with interesting reports

about online personas. *Missing* is similar to *Searching*. It (*Missing*) is a natural cinematic response to a generation of people raised and nourished by screens. The entirety of the onscreen action takes place within the confines of computer or phone browser. The two films are both mystery thrillers showcased through technology. However, the two stand alone. These two movies reflect the agenda of 4IR. In addition, both films make strong advocacy for the meaning of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. In this instance, the movies exposed how the internet can be used as a platform to fight and solve crime cases better and faster than the conventional means. These are creative ways of making a case-solving in the 4IR era. The movies so justify the fact that the 4IR is a massive systemic shift in the way people live, work and relate (Benyara, 2023: 120).

Conclusion

In this work, we have been able to examine film from both from the aesthetic and the social angle. As the paper argues, advocacy film is commonly used by film makers to make social commentary. We therefore looked into how Aneesh Chaganty's *Searching* and Nicholas D. Johnson & Will Merick's *Missing* were used to advocate the 4IR agenda in films. The study therefore further establishes that films are more than entertainment. Films serve as means through which critical messages and vital topics are scrutinised. The paper also argues that stakeholders in Nigerian film industry need to understand the powers of their craft in shaping public perception on social discourse. From the analysis of the two films, the paper attempted to show the aspects of film making, such as advancement in production process, internet's massive potentials and new technology on cameras, which are calling for more attention from Nigerian movie makers. This study advocates that policy makers, parents and stakeholders must adopt the utilisation of the Fourth Industrial Revolution for human capital development.

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