

Waste Culture and the Nigerian Economy

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Abstract:

The common perception in Nigeria is that plastic waste, specifically PET waste, is simply a pollutant. However, a growing number of individuals and businesses are discovering its economic potential through aggregation and recycling. To raise awareness about this untapped value, The Nigerian Bottling Company (NBC), part of the Coca-Cola Hellenic Group, produced a documentary titled *The Rise of Nigeria's Recycling Economy: Turning Waste into Opportunity*. This documentary was widely disseminated online and on social media. A content analysis and subjective interpretation of the NBC documentary aims to highlight practical waste management strategies that can be implemented at the local level to drive economic growth and promote sustainability within Nigerian communities. The documentary presents a compelling case for viewing plastic waste not just as an environmental burden, but as a valuable economic resource. Through a blend of factual data, narrative storytelling, expert interviews, and impactful audio-visuals, the documentary illustrates the current state of plastic waste management in the country and the potential for significant economic growth through recycling initiatives. It effectively demonstrates how innovative approaches can convert waste into opportunities, fostering both environmental sustainability and economic prosperity within Nigeria.

Keyword : Application Documentary Film, Nigerian Economy, Plastic Waste, Poverty Elevation, Segregation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Documentary films are a popular and impactful medium for addressing relevant contemporary issues within society (Adjeketa, 2025). Beyond entertainment, they serve as tools for education and even propaganda. Effective storytelling in documentaries can evoke strong emotions and empathy, leading to shifts in audience perspectives and driving social change (Shiv, 2019). Their relatively short length compared to feature films makes them accessible and engaging for viewers. Documentaries possess the power to set agendas, penetrate public consciousness, and raise awareness about critical topics. Issues of health and disease, waste disposal and management, and climate change, for example, are popular subjects found in documentary films around the world (Adjeketa, 2025).

In Nigeria, plastic waste is increasingly viewed as an economic opportunity rather than solely an environmental problem. A growing number of individuals, including youth, women, and men, are actively involved in collecting plastic waste from roadsides and dumpsites. Waste management companies also play a role by segregating waste collected from households, businesses, and hotels. This collected waste is then purchased by individuals and companies, creating a system where environmental clean-up generates income for those involved. To create awareness about the economic value of waste, particularly plastic waste (PET), the Nigerian Bottling Company (NBC), a member of Coca-Cola Hellenic Group, produced a documentary that was widely circulated on the internet and social media platforms. The documentary can be found on YouTube via https://youtu.be/FH6AccrtRLU?si=ZYSxtAOZ18eZeGm_. The documentary employed an interactive method, featuring interviews with both

individuals and waste business owners. This approach likely aimed to provide a comprehensive perspective on the subject matter, gathering insights from various stakeholders involved in the waste management ecosystem. The use of interviews suggests a focus on personal experiences and expert opinions to illustrate key points and engage the audience.

This study explores effective waste management and recycling strategies for developing countries by analysing the documentary film produced by the Nigerian Bottling Company (NBC). The core focus is on identifying practical methods presented in the documentary for managing locally generated waste, with the aim of achieving positive economic outcomes within communities. The research examines how the NBC documentary showcases approaches to waste management that can be implemented at the neighbourhood level to foster economic growth and sustainability.

The study further analyses and subjectively interprets the content of the documentary to arrive at its conclusion. Content analysis is a research method used to objectively, systematically, and quantitatively describe the visible content of communication. It's a technique that allows researchers to conclude by identifying specific characteristics within messages systematically and objectively. In essence, it's about analysing communication content to understand its underlying meanings and patterns. (<https://www.publichealth.columbia.edu/research/population-health-methods/content-analysis>, Yuliya, et al 2019). The NBC documentary, *The Rise of Nigeria's Recycling Economy: Turning Waste into Opportunity*, is purposefully selected and analysed because of its focus on the economic value of plastic waste to the masses

2. METHODS

A. Research Design

Bill Nichols, a prominent film scholar, categorized documentaries into five distinct modes, each characterized by different approaches to representation and engagement with reality (Shiv, 2019). These modes provide a framework for understanding the diverse landscape of documentary filmmaking. The first is Expository documentary, which directly addresses the audience with an authoritative voice, often using narration to present a clear argument or perspective. Next is Observational documentary, which aims to capture reality as it unfolds, with minimal intervention from the filmmaker, often relying on long takes and unobtrusive camera work. Interactive documentary involves the filmmaker directly engaging with the subjects, acknowledging their presence and influence on the events being documented. Reflexive documentary turns the lens inward, examining the documentary process itself and questioning the conventions of filmmaking. Finally, Performative documentary emphasizes the subjective experience and emotional impact of the filmmaker, often blurring the lines between documentary and personal expression (Baris, 2017; Marina, 2024; Sergio, 2015).

Documentary filmmaking is a unique and multifaceted genre. It blends the ambition to capture and represent reality with the creative and critical approaches inherent in art. This hybrid nature allows documentary to explore real-world subjects through a lens that is both informative and artistically expressive (Shiv, 2019). Documentary films, rooted in real-life situations and factual accounts, aim to deeply influence public consciousness. To achieve this profound impact, documentary filmmakers prioritize genuineness and authenticity in their work.

The pursuit of truth and accuracy is paramount in creating documentaries that resonate with audiences and leave a lasting impression (Shiv, 2019). Also, documentary films serve as a powerful communication tool, aiming to instigate social change and foster public engagement by addressing relevant and timely issues. They provide a platform for exploring complex topics, presenting diverse perspectives, and ultimately, inspiring action within society (Ellen, 2024). Therefore, the core function of documentaries lies in their ability to inform, educate, and motivate audiences to critically examine the world around them (Adjeketa, 2025, Shiv, 2019).

As a visual storyteller, documentary is a potent tool because it deeply impacts audiences, shaping their understanding of social issues. By offering a framework for interpretation, visual narratives influence how people perceive and decode the complexities of society. The strength of this medium lies in its capacity to create lasting impressions and guide perspectives (Cohn, 2019).

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Waste Generation and Management

Waste generation is fundamentally the process by which materials are discarded because they are no longer considered useful in their current form, leading to their categorization as waste. This process is a crucial aspect of understanding waste management and its environmental impact (Ohaka, Ozor, and Ohaka, 2019). According to Smith (2020), waste management encompasses the strategies and regulations designed to handle waste generation and disposal effectively. It involves a systematic approach to controlling the handling and disposal of waste materials, with the primary goals of minimizing environmental pollution and safeguarding public health (Jones 2019). This multidisciplinary field focuses on organizing, regulating, and implementing various activities centred on the principles of reducing, reusing, and recycling waste.

The choice of waste disposal practices in Nigeria is influenced by a range of factors, including Awareness, exposure, profession and education. A key finding suggests that indiscriminate waste disposal particularly, plastic waste, often stems from a lack of understanding regarding the economic value and interconnectedness of physical and human environments (Mudasiru, 2012). This highlights the importance of education and awareness programs in promoting responsible waste management practices. The key point is that a lack of awareness about the environmental and health consequences of improper waste disposal contributes to poor practices. Also, higher levels of education are associated with more responsible waste disposal behaviours. Individuals with greater exposure to information and resources related to waste management are more likely to adopt proper disposal methods (Mudasiru, 2012).

Improper waste disposal poses significant threats to both the environment and public health (Brown 2021). The hazards stemming from inadequate waste management are multifaceted, encompassing cultural norms, environmental degradation, economic burdens, technical challenges, institutional weaknesses, and political considerations. Addressing these dimensions is crucial for effective waste management strategies (Duxbury and Cullen, 2012). Improper solid waste disposal and management is a significant national problem in Nigeria, particularly acute in urban centres (Ohaka and Ohaka, 2013; Longe and Ukpebor, 2009). While present in rural villages, the issue disproportionately affects cities due to higher population densities and increased consumption rates.

The rise in population directly correlates with a rise in solid waste generation. Migration, driven by the pursuit of improved living conditions, manifests differently in developed and developing nations. Developed countries leverage their economic, industrial, and technological advancements to generate wealth and resources, enabling them to effectively manage migrant populations by providing essential infrastructure, employment opportunities, and social security, thereby enhancing urban life. In contrast, developing countries like Nigeria witness migration to urban cities in search of better prospects. However, these cities often lack sufficient paid employment opportunities, leading to a significant disparity between urbanization rates and the availability of resources required for sustainable urban management. This mismatch poses considerable challenges to the well-being of both migrants and existing urban residents (Oluwasola, 2007). Negatively, therefore, both migrants and existing residents contribute to the volume of solid waste generated in these urban cities. There is therefore a surge in PET waste in Nigerian cities, highlighting the challenges of effective disposal. This situation demands urgent attention to mitigate the environmental and health consequences of inadequate waste management (Adjeketa, 2023).

The expansion of commercial activities directly leads to an increase in the generation of commercial waste. As businesses grow and more commercial ventures emerge, the volume of waste produced as a by-product of their operations also rises. This highlights the interconnectedness between economic development and waste management challenges (Onyinyechi and Humphery 2018, Ezeah and Roberts, 2018). Onyinyechi and Humphery (2024) highlight several promising strategies for improving waste management in Nigeria. Their research emphasizes the importance of integrated waste management systems, which involve a holistic approach to handling waste from generation to disposal. They also underscore the significance of community engagement initiatives, recognizing that local participation is crucial for the success of any waste management program. Furthermore, the authors point to the necessity of infrastructure investment to support efficient waste collection, processing, and disposal. Public-Private partnerships are identified as a valuable mechanism for leveraging resources and expertise. Finally, education is deemed essential for raising awareness and promoting responsible waste management practices among the population.

In Nigeria, individuals and entrepreneurs are increasingly viewing waste not as a problem, but as a valuable resource. The waste collecting business is experiencing significant growth, providing job opportunities for a large number of people. This shift highlights the potential of waste as a key element for sustainability and economic prosperity within the country. The study analysed the content of the documentary, *The Rise of Nigeria's Recycling Economy: Turning Waste into Opportunity*, to showcase this transformation and inspire further innovation in the waste management sector

B. In the Waste Collection Business

The documentary focuses on individuals and stakeholders in the waste collection business. All of which spoke positively, especially as it relates to the economic value. According to Mr Adamu Muhammed, one of the waste pickers interviewed, he does not see PET as waste but rather as an economic commodity. In his words:

We for Nigeria here we dey look am say na waste but no be waste.

Speaking on the economic value and the motivation she gets, Olawunmi Adeyemi (waste picker) explained:

Every bottle we bring, it's 40 Naira per KG and then we realised we don't buy the plastics anyway. So we would bring like 5 bags and scale it and then we would have like a scale of 20kg or 30kg and everybody gets paid. What motivated us was that we don't buy the plastics. So everybody uses them and throw them away and it makes our environment dirty. But as we pick and bring these plastics, they become useful.

The founder of Recycling Scheme for Women and Youth Empowerment (RESWAYE), Donyinsola Ogunye, in Lagos State, spoke about the focus of her aggregation business. Her 15-year venture into the aggregation business has benefited many. In her statement,

The aggregation business started with an inspiration to help women and young people earn a living while taking care of the environment.

She appreciated the Coca-Cola Foundation for supporting individuals and small businesses. Also, Akinwale Vincent, the Country Lead for ECOSAVE, Lagos, exposes the opportunities in waste aggregation.

There are lots of job opportunities for both skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled employees. Like in our facility, we have the sorters, the graduates who oversee site supervisions, we have marketers, we have drivers, and different people who are being employed in the business.

What is required for the growth of the aggregation business in Nigeria is the right policy, framework, and a follow-up with finance and infrastructure, said Dr Femi Idowu-president, Lagos Recycling Association, Nigeria in Africa. Further, the Lagos State Waste Management Authority (LAWMA) has started a public campaign for public enlightenment on the economic value of PET waste. Jirinsola Olaleye, Head of secular economy LAWMA, admits:

We are doing a community campaign, we are going down to the doorsteps to ensure that people have this information, and we are promoting segregation of waste. Instead of the one bin that you are used to having at home, you now have two bins, one for the general waste that we are used to, which is the green bin, and that which we designate for recyclable materials.

The documentary concluded that "The plastic changing Nigeria is more than a solution to waste. It is a part way to a brighter future. With collaboration, investment, and innovation, this industry can unlock its full potential, creating a cleaner environment and opportunities for millions.

C. The Opportunity

Transparency is a key principle of good governance, and the PAKINTA system contributes significantly by providing real-time information regarding taxpayer obligations, payment history, and transaction status. For taxpayers, this feature builds confidence and reduces uncertainty. For administrators, real-time data assists in monitoring compliance behavior and identifying discrepancies (Ly et al., 2015). Interview data revealed that Bapenda frequently uses PAKINTA generated data to assess tax performance across different sectors. The system's dashboard allows administrators to view Total number of transactions by tax category, Real-time revenue updates, Payment completion times, and Patterns of late or non-compliant taxpayers. This information strengthens internal accountability mechanisms, as officers can be evaluated based on transparent performance indicators (O'Regan et al., 2021).

The Rise of Nigeria's Recycling Economy: Turning Waste into Opportunity by the Nigerian Bottling Company, narrative highlights the burgeoning recycling industry in

Nigeria, transforming environmental challenges into economic opportunities. Driven by dedicated individuals and businesses, this sector is redefining sustainability and prosperity. Waste pickers play a crucial role, collecting PET bottles and preventing environmental pollution. They are essential problem solvers in Nigeria's evolving ecosystem. Small-scale businesses, like Reswaye, convert collected plastics into valuable raw materials. Aggregators create job opportunities for skilled and unskilled workers, demonstrating that small businesses can drive significant change with the right support. The Lagos Recycling Association emphasizes the importance of policy, finance, and infrastructure. Community campaigns promote waste segregation at the household level. The Coca-Cola system in Nigeria is at the forefront, with its new PET collection hub in Apapa setting a benchmark in the plastic value chain, creating demand for post-consumer PET bottles and supporting entrepreneurs and waste pickers. Corporate organizations, particularly the Coca-Cola Foundation, have made critical investments, inspiring growth in the sector. The plastic recycling movement in Nigeria is a pathway to a brighter future, fostering collaboration, investment, and innovation to unlock its full potential, creating a cleaner environment and opportunities for millions.

Further, the documentary laid emphasis on implementing the documentary sheds light on the escalating problem of plastic waste, driven by the extensive use of plastic packaging and single-use items. It underscores the severe environmental consequences, such as the pollution of waterways and soil degradation (Onyinyechi and Humphery 2014, Okafor, Okonkwo, and Nwabue, 2020). The documentary emphasizes the potential of effective plastic waste management strategies, particularly proper segregation, to unlock the economic opportunities within plastic recycling. The narrative highlights that emphasizing the economic benefits of plastic recycling, alongside environmental cleanliness, can motivate greater participation. It showcases how individuals, including men, women, and young people, can earn a sustainable income through plastic collection, potentially improving their livelihoods and contributing to reducing hunger levels with adequate education and sensitization on PET collection.

While the documentary highlights the pressing issue of waste disposal in Nigeria and showcases innovative solutions being implemented by resourceful citizens, it emphasizes the potential for transforming PET waste from an environmental burden into a valuable economic resource. The film presents compelling success stories of individuals who have successfully established businesses centred on recycling and repurposing PET bottles, demonstrating the feasibility and profitability of such ventures. These examples serve as inspiration and a practical roadmap for others looking to address waste management challenges while simultaneously creating economic opportunities. The documentary underscores the importance of sustainable practices and the potential for grassroots initiatives to contribute significantly to environmental conservation and economic empowerment in Nigeria (Shiv, 2019).

4. CONCLUSION

The documentary, *The Rise of Nigeria's Recycling Economy: Turning Waste into Opportunity*, produced by the Nigerian Bottling Company, effectively uses a combination of factual evidence, narration, arguments, interviews, and audio-visual elements to explore the present economic reality of plastic waste management in Nigeria. It highlights how plastic waste, often seen as an environmental problem, can be transformed into a source of economic opportunity. The documentary showcases individuals and businesses involved in collecting, processing, and recycling plastic, demonstrating the potential for job creation and income generation within this sector.

By presenting real-life examples and expert opinions, the documentary raises awareness about the benefits of sustainable waste management practices and encourages investment in the circular economy within Nigeria. The analysis of the documentary reveals the extent to which plastic recycling is transforming waste into economic opportunities for many Nigerians.

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