

**REACTION OF NIGERIAN YOUTHS TOWARDS 2020 ‘BIG BROTHER NAIJA’
REALITY TELEVISION SHOW: CASE STUDY OF STUDENTS OF RHEMA
UNIVERSITY, ABA**

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ABSTRACT

The ‘Big Brother Nigeria’ reality television programme made its debut in 2006. Drawing its viewers from mainly Nigerian youths, the show has continued to attract admiration and criticism from across the Nigerian audience mainly for its explicit sexual content, vulgar language and youthful exuberance. The study took a closer look at the 2020 show and explored the exposure and attitude of students of Rhema University, Aba towards the show. The population of study was 352 and the sample size was arrived at 187. Survey research method was adopted as the research design. The study discovered among other things: That majority of the respondents were exposed to the programme. That the most popular mass medium of exposure was television in comparison to laptops and android phones. In terms of rating, majority of the respondents shied away from rating it either positive or negative but were rather non-committal though majority admitted that the show promotes ‘immorality’. The researcher recommended that the show be made to reflect more of African cultural values to serve as a window to showcase our cultural values to the world.

Keywords: Big Brother Naija, Reality Television show, Nigerian Youths, Rhema University Students.

Introduction

‘Reality Television Programme’ as a genre of television programming has grown over the years and has become an addiction of some sort of many viewers especially the youths. Many people watch reality television programmes for several reasons such as entertainment, new business ideas, fun, advertising of products and services, socializing, education and a lot more. The appeals that Reality Television shows have on their audience have also led to many manufacturers and organizations to explore them for their marketing communications.

In Nigeria, Reality Television show has in recent times significantly proved to be a favourite among the youths, particularly, those who fall within the age range 18 – 35. Among these programmes is the ‘Big Brother Nigeria’ most times referred to as ‘BBNaija’.

Big Brother Naija, formally known as Big Brother Nigeria, is a Nigerian reality competitive television series based on Big Brother Television Franchise, in which 12 to 15 contestants live in an isolated house and compete for a large cash prize worth millions of naira at the end of the show by avoiding being evicted from the house by viewers.

The first season was aired from March 5 to June 4, 2006, the second season started January 28, 2018, the forth on September, 2019 and the fifth on July 19, 2020.

According to Chikafa and Matereke (2012), the concept of Big Brother was borrowed from George Orwell's novel of 1984 titled 'Fictional Dystopia of Oceania' in which he described a world of ever surveillance. In the novel, the dictator who watched over the citizens of Oceania was called Big Brother and his terrifying slogan was 'Big Brother is watching you'.

The Big Brother reality show has continued to thrive and at the same time wax stronger mostly among the youths. This is not notwithstanding that the show over the years has been criticized for its display of obscene and vulgar language and scenes considered culture. Reasoning along this line, Ojoko (2013) argues that Big Brother reality show has no doubt generated a lot of controversies in recent times and worthy of note is the fact that the sponsors or organizers of the programme are nearly faceless and the show exhibits low moral values.

The level of immorality being celebrated by Big Brother Naija Reality Television Show is adjudged as lacking in proper education of the youths, (Laitto, 2015), yet, the Nigerian audience especially the youths have continued to imbibe the style of the programme and the participants have suddenly turned to celebrities. This has led to several calls demanding for its ban and censorship. For instance; in 2007, the Nigerian House of Representatives issued a directive to the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) to discontinue the airing of any indecent or vulgar clip of the Big Brother Naija Reality show (Ralvy, 2007).

Despite these outcries and moral panics, the reality show has neither improved its moral tone nor has the viewership traffic decreased. For instance, the number of viewers that voted on the final week of 'Big Brother Naija', 2020 was estimated at 30 million, most of whom are youths. This, indicates that there is a large followership amongst the youths as the reality show seems to have a lasting impact on them especially students.

Different segments of the show have also generated controversy ranging from the fact that the winners were alleged to be pre-determined, to the nude segments of the show (the shower hour) as well as acts on the show that were deemed to be sexually explicit and morally decadent. This has ignited debate on the appropriateness of the show especially to viewers with highly impressionable minds and the extent to which exposure to the show influences their behavior.

The study, therefore, sort to find out the exposure to and attitudes of Nigerian youths to the Big Brother Naija 2020 Reality Television Show using students of Rhema University, Nigeria, Aba as a case study.

Statement of the Problem

The reality television show, 'Big Brother Naija' has been fraught with controversy since it started gaining popularity in the Nigerian media space after its debut in 2006. This had led critics of the show to canvass for its ban from the screens of Nigerian Television Stations, citing its nude content, loose moral influence and other factors bordering on negative influence on Nigerian youths. There have been two extreme, the protagonists for the continued exhibition of show argue that it motivates youths to be vocal, courageous and daring in facing their challenges and solving their problems, (Singer, 1993). On the other hand, the antagonists blame the show for stoking the fire of contemporary social vices associated with Nigerian youths. Supporting this extreme negative position, Nwafor (2015) maintains that the show now displays uninhibited sexual frolics on open cameras, shameless smooching by hormonally, charged youths called 'housemates' and ear-tingling romantic conversations and dialogues.

This on-going debate on the positive and negative influences of the reality television show on the social behavior of Nigerian youths, students inclusive, have continued to attract the attention of scholars. This therefore calls for serious academic scrutiny and scholarly studies which this research looked into to determine the extent to which 'Big Brother Naija' reality television show actually influences the youths, using Rhema University students as a case study.

Objectives of Study

1. To determine the level of exposure of students of Rhema University to the 2020 Big Brother Nigeria Reality Television show.
2. To determine the students' attitude to the programme, that is, whether positive or negative.
3. To find out the students reaction to the alleged 'immoral' content of the programme.
4. To determine the acceptability of Big Brother Naija show amongst students of Rhema University.

Research Questions

1. To what extent are the students of Rhema University exposed to Big Brother Naija 2020 reality TV show?
2. What is the direction of opinions of Rhema University students towards the programme?
3. How do students of Rhema University rate BBN in terms of morality?
4. To what extent would the students of Rhema University accept the opportunity to participate in BBN.

Operational Definition of Concepts

- **Big Brother Naija:** This is a television reality show based on Big Brother TV series in which 12 to 15 contestants live in an isolated house and compete for a large cash prize worth millions of naira at the end of the show by avoiding being evicted by viewers.
- **Immorality:** This is the violation of moral laws, norms or standards i.e. doing or thinking about something one knows or believes to be wrong.
- **Influence:** The power to affect, control or manipulate something or someone, either negatively or positively.
- **Reality Show:** This is a television programme that aims at showing how people behave in everyday life or in situations created deliberately by the programme makers to represent everyday life.
- **Students of Rhema University, Aba:** These are students from different parts of Nigeria who study at Rhema University, Aba.

Literature Review

Conceptual Review

Origin of Big Brother and Big Brother Naija

Amongst all the reality television' shows in Nigeria, none has achieved the legendary position and proportion of Big Brother Nigeria. It is a reality television show in which a group of people are brought together in a large house, cut-off from the outside world, and made to live together while being continuously watched by cameras (Chikafa & Mateveke, 2012). During this period, the house mates are excluded from the outside world with no access to any electronic devices or internet. The house mates are always monitored by in-house cameras and they wear personal audio microphones which they wear throughout the day time. To win the final cash prize, a contestant must survive periodic (usually weekly) evictions and be the last house mate remaining when the show is concluded.

Big Brother reality show was premiered in 1999 at Veronica in the Netherlands. This shows that the reality television show had been on air in other parts of the world for about five years before its debut in Africa, precisely South Africa in 2003. Since then, the Big Brother reality show has become a multi-billion dollar television show business with countries all over the world allowed to make their own versions of the show. It was reported that the show has become so successful that Endemol, the original right owner has sold out the copyright to more than 30 countries as at 2009. At presently, we have Big Brother Netherlands, Teen Big Brother, Britain, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Italy, Nigeria, to name but a few.

In most countries that broadcast the reality show, the format is usually centred on four elements.

- (a) The environment where the contestants live.
- (b) The knock-out system by which the contestants are voted out of the house by the audience at home.
- (c) The task, set by the editorial team, which the contestants are required to complete on a weekly bases.
- (d) The diary room, in which the contestants are required to record their feelings, frustrations, thoughts and their nominations (Andrejevic, 2004).

Although the show made its debut in Nigeria in 2006, interest among Nigerians was ignited in 2010 when Uti Nwachukwu, a Delta born musician and actor emerged winner of the contest and converted huge sum as prize money. This interest was further re-ignited when another Nigerian, Karen Igho emerged co-winner of the 'Big Brother Africa,' Amplified version in 2013 and also pocketed huge sum of money.

Globalization of Big Brother and Nigerian Cultural Values

Through the expansion of satellite television broadcasting in Nigeria, the popularity of Big Brother Nigeria has continued to soar. But inspite of this so called popularity, the reality television show had numerous issues to address which border on our cultural values. Many critics of the show point at issues such as sex, nudity, violence, cheating and voting unfairness, all, manifest content of the show.

Srivastava in Chikafa & Mateveke (2012) views Big Brother Naija as irrelevant in the African context especially because the continent is under strains of disease, war and poverty. He observed that during Big Brother season two, President George W. Bush was touring five African countries and focusing on the above mentioned problems while African Big Brother Naija fans were busy watching contestants flirt, guard, cook, shower, play games, get bored, go to sleep'.

On the other hand, Vanzoonen & Aslama (2006) observed that the reality show has been praised for establishing new bonds between otherwise disconnected people. Bignell (2005) argued that the appeal of Big Brother Naija lies in its representation of an African originated programme whose agenda is not the usual wars and natural disasters represented in American and European news agenda.

Empirical Review

Ugwanga in 2014 led an empirical study to ascertain the influence of reality television shows on the youths of Windhoek, the capital city of Namibia. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative research designs using a triangulation of data collection methods. A total of 90 copies of questionnaire were distributed to students of three randomly selected tertiary institutions in Windhoek; University of Namibia main campus the Polytechnic of Namibia and the International University of Management, Namibia. The main research question was: To what extent do reality television shows influence youths in positive and negative manners?

The research findings suggested that majority of youths spend most of their time watching television and they watch popular reality television programmes such as; American Idols, Survivors, Big Brother Naija and Star performers. And that since the 2013 Big Brother Naija winner was a Namibian, Daniel Matthew, it seemed this inspired many youths in Windhoek to be watching Big Brother Naija. Contrary to the widely held negative views about reality television shows, the study discovered that they were indeed important social phenomenon. The study did not suggest however that there were no problems with reality television shows, but indicated that there were positive and negative influences the show imposed on youths of Windhoek.

At the home front, Laitto (2019) investigated the influence of MTN Project Fame reality television show on the brand image of MTN. Among the objectives of the researcher was to find out the effect of reality television shows on viewers' perception of reality. One result of his findings showed a correlation between the perceived reality of the show and the brand image of the product. This finding corroborates the work of Kilborn (1994), which suggested that reality television programmes had certain attributes namely:

- (a) Record events in the lives of individuals or groups.
- (b) Attempt to simulate these real-life events by means of dramatized reconstruction.
- (c) Package this material into an attractive programme with entertainment value that can be marketed on the strengths of its reality credentials.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the cultivation media theory. The theory is associated with the works of George Gerbner, L. Gross, M. Morgan and N. Signovielli in 1996 (Anaeto, Onabanjo and Osifeso 2008). It is a social theory which examines the long-term effect of television. The theory states that the more time people spend 'living' in the television world, the more likely they are to believe social reality portrayed on television (Cohen and Weimann, 2000). It assumes that the mass media gradually cultivate messages into the audience mind and consciousness and that steady viewing of television will make the audience perceive reality according to what is portrayed on television. Applied to this research, the theory may suggest that constant viewership of Big Brother Naija reality television show would gradually build mental images and increase physiological arousals that decrease positive moral values among students of Rhema University, Aba Nigeria.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted survey research design. This design was adjudged as a reliable method of extracting useful information from the youthful students of Rhema University, Aba. A survey consists of a pre-determined set of questions that is administered on a sample. With a representative sample, that is, one that is representative of the larger population of interest, one can describe the attitudes of the population from which the sample was drawn.

Population of Study

As at June, 2021, the total population of students of Rhema University, Aba was 352.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 187 students was chosen from the population of 352 using Taro Yamane (1964) formula.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N (e)^2}$$

Where n is sample size N is population and e is level of precision

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N (e)^2} = \frac{352}{1 + 352(0.05)^2} = 0.0025$$

$$\begin{aligned} & 1+352 \times 0.0025 \\ & = 1 + 0.88 \\ & = 1.88 \\ & \frac{352}{1.88} \\ & = 187.23 \text{ or } 187 \end{aligned}$$

Using a table of Random Numbers, the sample was drawn from students lists obtained from the Registrars Office, Rhema University.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Exposure to Big Brother 2020 Reality Television Show

Exposure to BBN 202	Number of Respondents	Percentage %
Yes	135	72
No	52	28
Total	187	100

Source: 2021 Survey of Rhema University Students

From the table, 135 students of Rhema University or 72% watched the 2020 Big Brother Naija reality television show while 52 or 28% did not watch it.

Table 2: Channel of Exposure

Channel of Exposure	Frequency	Percentage %
Television	83	61%
Android phone	26	19%
Laptops	26	19%
Total	135	100

Source: Survey, 2021

Table 2 revealed that 83 or 61% of the Respondents out of 135 that admitted watching the 2020 BBN show said it was through the television, 26 or 19% was through Android phones and another 26 or 19% was through laptops.

Table 3: Rating of Big Brother Naija

Rating of BBN	Frequency	Percentage %
Negative	27	20%
Neutral	81	60%
Positive	27	20%
Total	135	100

Source: Survey, 2021

Table 3 revealed that 27 or 20% of the students who watched Big Brother Naija 2020 had a negative perception of it, the majority of them 81 in number or 60% were undecided, while 27 or 20% had a positive perception of the show.

Table 4: Influence on Nigerian Youths

Influence on Nigerian Youths	Frequency	Percentage %
Positive	81	60%
Negative	54	40%
Neutral		
Total	135	100

Source: Survey, 2021

Table 4 revealed that 81 respondents or 60% agreed that Big Brother Naija has positive influence on Nigerian Youths while 54 respondents or 40% agreed that Big Brother Naija has negative influence on the youths.

Table 5: Promotes Immorality among Nigerian Youths

Promotes Immorality	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	76	56%
No	59	44%
Total	135	100

Source: Survey, 2021

Table 5 showed that 76 or 56% of the respondents agreed that Big Brother Naija promotes immorality among Nigerian Youths while 59 or 44% said it does not promote immorality among the youths.

Table 6: Acceptability of Big Brother Naija

Acceptability of Big Brother Naija	Frequency	Percentage %
Not Acceptable	19	14%
Acceptable	27	20%
Neutral	46	34%
Highly Acceptable	43	32%
Total	135	100

Source: Survey, 2021

Table 2 revealed that 19 or 14% of the respondents found Big Brother reality show not acceptable among their friends, 27 or 20% of the respondents said their friends accepted it, 46 or 34% were undecided, while 43 or 32% found the show highly acceptable among their circle of friends.

Table 7: Should the show stop?

Channel of Exposure	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	43	32%
No	92	68%
Total	135	100

Source: Survey, 2021

Table 7 revealed that 43 or 32% of the Respondents agreed that Big Brother Naija should be stopped while 92 or 68% said that it should continue to be aired.

Table 8: Opportunity to Participate in Big Brother Naija 2020.

Participation in Big Brother Naija 2020	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	73	54%
No	62	46%
Total	135	100

Source: Survey, 2021

Table 8 indicated that 73 or 54% of the respondents would have liked to participate in the 2020 Big Brother Naija if given the opportunity. 62 or 46% would not have like to participate.

Discussing of Findings

Research Question One: Exposure to Big Brother Naija Reality Television Show

Research question one sought to find out if Nigerian Youths are inclined to watching Big Brother Naija despite widespread criticism of the show. The outcome of the study where 72% the respondents admitted watching the programme established the fact that BBN is a favourite programme of Nigeria youths, the criticism notwithstanding.

Research Question Two: Through which medium did you watch the Big Brother Naija 2020 Television Reality show?

Of special interest to the researcher is if television remains the dominant audio-usual medium of entertainment compared to android phones and laptops. The outcome of the study proved the assumption to be correct as 61% of the respondents attested to this fact. This confirmed the proposition by Folarin (2005) that television provides more entertainment than other media of mass communication.

Research Question Three: How would you rate Big Brother Naija reality television show in terms of morality?

There is no denying the fact that Big Brother Naija show has been condemned by the older generation for projecting immorality among Nigerian youths through nude content, explicit romance, foul and indecent language. But the question arises; do Nigerian youths agree to this assumption? The outcome of the study as shown in Table 3 showed that majority of the youths surveyed, 60% were very undecided, that is, they couldn't take any position on this. What could this suggest? The present day youths do not comprehend what is immoral or not? This is left for the imagination of the reader.

Research Question Four: To what extent would the students of Rhema University accept the opportunity to participate in BBN?

Despite the widespread criticism of Big Brother Naija reality television show, it is interesting to know that given the opportunity, Nigerian youths would like to participate in the show.

Table 8 revealed that 54% of students of Rhema University would have liked to participate in 2020 show if given the opportunity. This finding therefore is supported by the Cultivation Media Theory by Gebner et al (1996) which examined the long effects of television. The theory states that the more people spend time 'living' in the world of television, the more likely they are to believe social reality portrayed on television. It assumes that the mass media gradually cultivate messages into the audience consciousness and that steady viewing will make the audience perceive reality according to what is portrayed on television.

Summary of Findings

Some of the findings in this research include:

The BB Naija 2020 Reality Television show was watched by majority of Rhema students and by extension majority of Nigerian youths. As a result, the show can be adjudged to be popular with Nigerian youths.

Television remains the most acceptable medium of exposure to the programme compared to android phones and laptops.

Despite criticisms of indecent exposure and use of foul and vulgar language, youths could not judge the programme content as negative.

Majority of youths however adjudged the programme as promoting immorality.

Nigerian youths do not want the programme to be discontinued for whatever reason.

Given the opportunity, majority of Nigerian youths would like to participate in the programme.

Conclusion

This study concludes that although there are many negative criticisms of the BB Naija reality television show, it is and remains very popular and acceptable to Nigerian youths.

Recommendation

This study recommends that there should be sustained campaign for the restructuring of the BB Naija show to reflect more indigenous African cultures and values in order to serve as a window to showcase our cultural values to the outside world. This view is supported by the suggestions by the Nigerian Nobel Laureate, Prof. Wole Soyinka cited in the Daily Independent Newspaper editorial of June 23, 2013 that “the incursion of the negative and dubious alien cultural values and tenancies in Big Brother can best be countered by the strengthening and exposure of indigenous cultures, ideally in innovative ways”.

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