

CULTURAL INTERROGATIONS AND BBN IMPACT ON YOUTHS A STUDY OF BBN SEASON 5: "LOCKDOWN"

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Abstract

Reality TV shows are integral aspects of television programs and either as a body or by cooperate organization, contribute towards educating, advertising and economic development of the organization and the country at large. The ugly situations portrayed in some reality TV shows especially BBNAIJA 5, always force the masses to put on their thinking caps, and start asking some critical questions about such reality TV shows and their roles in projecting, protecting and sustaining our cultural norms. Some devalued cultural norms presented in the recently concluded BBNAIJA (Season 5) projected our cultures as mere and weak hybridity productions filled with western culture, styles and ideologies; thereby raising cause for serious scholarly arguments, debates and interrogations. The aim of this research is to bridge the gaps on cultural degradation through BBNAIJA content creation and seek for an understanding between culture and entertainment. The research methodology is anchored on interview and observation techniques, while the theoretical framework is cultural identity theory. Furthermore, the objectives of this research include understanding BBNAIJA Westernized contents and their effects on the youth. To interrogate why Nigerian culture is not well projected or used as their task activities in the house are also some of the concerns of this research. From findings, there is a serious clash of interests as regards whether BBNAIJA is reflecting true Nigeria cultural norms and values. In conclusion, BBNAIJA though entertaining, has come of age where culture should not be totally de-emphasized rather, culture, and entertainment must be encouraged.

Introduction

Since its inception, television has become the most influential form of media and has never for once gathered massive followership like it has now, thanks to the new fad of television program in Reality Television. Anyone who watches television daily for the past ten years can tell you that television programming in the twenty-first century has thus far been dominated by reality based shows. Adibe and Ezike posit that "Recently, a new fad in television has surfaced- reality television shows, a genre of television programming that documents unscripted situations and actual occurrences, and often features a previously unknown cast" (p. 1). These shows have significantly proved to be a favorite among the youths. Chikafa and Matweke assert that "Reality television is significantly proving to be a favourite among the youth- particularly those who fall within the 18-25 age range." (p. 1). Apart from being interesting, Reality shows are entertaining and they open up a wide range of issues that one cannot anticipate.

The popularity of this type of performances is such that television channels find themselves scrambling to produce more reality shows to keep up with the demand of the audience. Sarpong, asserts that "as diverse lifestyles develop and the clamour for satellite and cable televisions soar, especially in the major cities, local TV companies have been compelled to adapt various TV formats of popular western programmes to keep them in contention for ratings" (p. 3). Hence, with this popularity and demands from the audience, there is a need to go beyond the entertainment values of these programmes and assess the effect the consumption of reality television performances have on their audience; thus acceptance and further encouragement of this emerging performance genre depends on the extent they have been able to balance the equation between educating the audience and entertaining the audience. Thus, the task of the researcher according to Patrice Pavis is to adopt a model of analysis: combining

an aesthetic of production and reception, studying their dialectical interaction; in other words, assessing both a production's anticipated reception and the relationship between the production and the spectators' activity in the process of reception (p. 26-27). It is against this backdrop that this research work will focus on the cultural impact of Big Brother Naija (BBN), a reality television programme that has gathered monumental audience followership in Nigeria.

BBNaija housemates are placed in isolation from the outside world, and made to live together while being continuously watched by television cameras. Following guidelines known to the organizers, the last housemate to survive eviction lands the grand price. Contestants freely interact around Big Brother assigned tasks, competitions including dance competitions and general household chores under the watchful eye of the cameras. Alabi on Africa Magic website writes that "The contestants from time to time have a moment to reflect on their activities and those of others in the diary room or the confession room. In the house, they are exposed to a coterie of familiar interactive emotions of happiness, frustration, failure, anxiety, friendship, opportunity and love" (p. 1). How housemates deal with these emotions, in part, influences fellow housemates and viewers' perceptions about their continued stay in the house. The house is also well supplied with food, drink, alcohol and excellent indoor entertainment facilities. And for that reason, leaving the house is a fate no housemate will resign to, yet eviction is inevitable.

Although the concept has been widely received for its novelty, the world over its entry onto the African scene, in the form of *Big Brother Africa*, has ignited a plethora of reactions. Critics from a variety of ideological persuasions have reacted to the show's handling of entertainment and cultural issues with some even questioning the reality of the 'reality show' itself, yet few can resist watching it, for whatever reason. Mudzanire et al (2018) posit that:

The show has elicited a lot of trepidation among the autochthons of African culture who view it as offensive to their cultural heritage while the 'hybrid generation' views it as site of fun, self exploration and indulgence. For their apprehension, the vanguard of African moral values views the show as subtle conduit for cultural imperialism and resultantly African moral defacement while the 'culturally innocent' see nothing beyond entertainment and pleasure (p. 76).

Hence, the threat of reality Television entertainment like this on the cultural and ethical conduct of a large section of the Nigerian population, especially the youths, cannot be easily ignored. The contents of this type of performance genre are shaking the cultural and ethical foundations of the Nation. Therefore the problem of this paper is moral decadence through the hybridization of Nigerian culture and malignant bastardization of moral and ethical values of Nigeria through immoral and unethical entertainment.

Cultivation Theory and Cultural Identity Theory

Cultivation Theory is a social theory that examines the long-term effect of television on the audience. According to Gerbner (1969), "Cultivation is a method for gauging the impact of television viewing on beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes..." (p. 438). He stated that "it is a sociocultural theory regarding the role of television in shaping viewers' perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and values (p. 2). 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. He further asserts that "The cultivation hypothesis states that the more television people watch, the more likely they are to hold a view of reality that is closer to television's depiction of reality" (p. 2). Furthermore, Gerbner and Gross argued that "The longer we live with television, the more invisible it becomes" (p. 1). This shows that the more people live in the television world, the more they forget that the television content is not real.

The theory proposes that the danger of television lies in its ability to shape not a particular view point about one specific issue but in its ability to shape people's moral values and general beliefs about the world. The theory stands on a number of concepts: the symbolic environment, storytelling, the symbolic function of television, the television traits, the cultural model, and

the cultivation of value system, the multidirectional process, and the cultural indicators. (Gerbner, p. 2).

Thus the impact of performance on the audience has occupied the attention of many theories up to the time of George Gerbner. However, the suitability of Gerbner's theory in this study is its in-depth interrogation of cultivation capabilities of television viewers.

Cultivation is some sort of desultory learning that results from the accumulation of exposure to TV. And what the viewer sees on the screen becomes the basis of a mental image that the individual forms about the social practical status of values, population characteristics, and the various cultural standards common by the society's classes, categories, and individuals (Moshara, 2015 p. 2).

Cultivation analysts hypothesize that people who are heavy viewers of television will be more likely to hold beliefs and attitudes congruent with the messages and world view of television." (Shanahan, 1999. p. 17).

While the cultivation theory is concerned with the effect of television on the viewers, the cultural identity theory focuses on self-identification, that is, a sense of belonging to a group that reaffirms itself. This explains that it is the extent to which one is a representative of a given culture behaviorally, communicatively, psychologically and sociologically. This also incorporates the values, meanings, customs and beliefs used to relate to the world. Therefore, it is expected that whatever belongs to a particular set of people must constitute their mode of identification in the form of language, mode of dressing, food, arts and so on. Applying to the BBNaija reality show, a show that is meant to showcase Nigerian culture should not have activities that subjugate the indigenous culture of the people but instead it should be an environment where the people's culture should be appreciated and promoted.

BBN and Reality Television Shows in Nigeria

Reality Television shows have become the toast of entertainment industry. In Nigeria, we have seen reality Television shows like; Gulder Ultimate Search, Amstel Malta Box Office, MTN Project Fame, Maltina Street Dance Africa, West African Idol, Koko Mansion and so on; all become engaging television content people tune in to watch. One such reality show is the widely acclaimed Big Brother reality Television series which is considered the biggest reality television show in history. According to a Backup Author as written in The Nation Newspaper, "It is considered one of the biggest reality shows ever to have been conceived in the world with different countries staging their own versions" (no page). Nigeria is by no means left out in the Big Brother craze. In 2006, M-Net created the Nigerian version of the show and that signaled a new dawn in Reality Television shows in the country. Reality Television shows have the power of taking someone from obscurity to fame. A prime example would be the Kardashians with their eponymous show, keeping up with the Kardashians which has been on air since 2007. They have been dubbed America's most famous family and have built a global empire from a string of endorsements and merchandizes which rake in millions of dollars.

In Nigeria, Reality Television has produced some of our biggest celebrities. Music star Iyanya was the winner of the 2008 *MTN Project Fame* reality show and he is currently one of the hottest and most sought after musicians in Nigeria. Omawumi Megbele became famous when she came second in the first edition of West Africa Idol. O.C Ukeje is unarguably the biggest Nigerian actor to have emerged from a reality television show. Ukeje won *Amstel Malta Box Office (AMBO)* a platform that launched his acting career. Uti Nwachukwu first participated at the celebrated Next Movie Star before entering the Big Brother Africa house. Today, Uti has since become a celebrity as he co-hosts the popular African magic program, Jara while becoming a host of various events. After 10 years, *Big Brother Nigeria* came back and was rebranded as *Big Brother Naija*. The number of Nigerians who auditioned for the show tells a story of how the new generation wants to be on television and become famous. While some are a bit skeptical about the return of what they see as a controversial show, the majority cannot wait to have something to keep them entertained for the next three months.

Historically, the origination of Big Brother Naija is synonymous to Big Brother Africa, an African version of the popular Big Brother show. The concept Big Brother was borrowed from George Orwell's

1984 novel titled ‘fictional dystopia oceania’ in which he described a world of never ending 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”. Although, Big Brother was first introduced in the Netherlands; however, it was not until 2003 that Africa started its commencement of the show, which lasted for nine seasons before it abruptly came to an end (Wikipedia 2018). The Big Brother Naija show debuted in Nigeria in 2006, although banned for ten years for reasons not disclosed to the public; it was indeed a surprise to see it back on air in 2017 and has since then, with the aid of the growth in satellite television in Africa roused Nigeria audience's interest and has remained an annual event till date.

The second season tagged “See Gobe” was aired on January 22 2017, lasted for 78 days with a drastic increase in its viewership and had Efe Ajaba, the winner awarded the cash prize of N25 million and a brand new SUV. The third season tagged “Double Wahala” recorded over 170 million votes across the platform with Miracle Igbokwe as the winner. However, the most recent edition, aired in 2020 tagged “Lockdown” which is also the focus of this study lasted for 70 days with 20 housemates. It was recorded as the season with the highest number of viewership and ratings as over 220 million votes were recorded from viewers across the platforms. Housemates from this season also attained more fame than other housemates of precursory seasons. A large number of people have expressed their stand on Big Brother Naija programme. Whilst some have said the programme is a mere symbol of unity and source of entertainment, others have argued that it depicts indecent acts which clearly contradicts the cultural ethos of Nigerians and Nigeria Broadcasting Code (NBC, 2017) such as nudity, vulgarism, alcoholism, sex, among others. (www.pulse.ng).

Unafican Acts in the BBNAIJA

One of the popular allegations levied against the BBNaija show is the subjugation of the indigenous cultural values of the Nigerian people and the promotion of the more alien cultures. Hence, in order to appeal to the conscience of a wider audience, the Nigerian culture suffers an hybridization. Cultural hybridization is simply the presentation of two different cultures. Although, culture has been viewed contentiously as a way of life of a people including their norms, beliefs and behavior, this consideration has become inadequate because it lacks a premise or origin of a culture. Psychologists have denied the idea that culture is ‘holistic’. Culture according to Julian and Kornblum is “that mix of behavioural norms and inspirations that causes behavior, maintains present behavior, or encourages future behavior, independently of situational incentives and restraints” (p. 222). What this definition suggests is that the elements of culture and liable to change and unless the entire culture is altered, behavior results from a combination of cultural and situational influences – a situation that is contemporarily considered as culture hybridization.

Therefore, cultural hybridization occur when people mix elements of foreign culture and acts with the culture of a particular people, thereby creating a new way that enables people to express personal and cultural identities that are different from the ones which they are originally known for. Larson posits that “Cultural premises are the pattern of behavior or beliefs that are almost articles of faith for audiences and that have passed on to them by their culture or society” (p. 147). A good example is the BBNaija show where participants showcase some traits that cannot be attributed to the indigenous people of Nigeria. Among the notable features of the Nigeria people’s culture is morality and the BBNaija 5 was filled with series of immoral attitudes that are alien to the Nigerian culture.

Following the mise-en-scene approach, the evaluation of the 2020 edition of the Big Brother Naija shows that among the alien cultures portrayed on the show is kissing. Every one of the housemates in the 2020 edition of the BBNaija show is captured in one kissing scene or the other which made viewers wonder if the show is portraying real-life situations or the contestants are there to entertain the viewers. However, kissing is not the problem as kissing is an acquired aspect of African culture. But, kissing in public glare and display of canal feelings is regarded as evidence of promiscuity. The act of promiscuity as attached to the kissing on this show is evident in the life of the housemates who publicly kiss one another to get acquainted with one another which they believe will help them to avoid early eviction. However, as it became evident to the housemates that everyone came into the house with the same mindset, they moved into another game plan which is more immoral than the initial kissing.

Indecent dressing is another form of alien culture seen in the BBNaija show. Shows like BBNaija should not be an avenue to advertise indecency as it is a programme that houses contestants drawn from all the regions of the country. This kind of programme should be used to promote the Nigerian culture especially in the aspect of clothing. Although the organizers organized performances where contestants were meant to dress in traditional attires that depict different tribes of the country but this does not go a long way as efforts were not put in place to check the flaunting of indecent dressing in the house. Contestants were seen with mini-skirts and clothes that did not fully cover their bodies which is capable of corrupting the viewers' minds. Over time, series of the campaigns have been aired on how indecent dressings should be jettisoned in the society as it is capable of leading to rape and other sexual assaults on the wearer. Among these campaigns is the one carried out by the Lagos state government where Dr. Charles Obaze, a psychologist, notes that when a lady dressed to seduce in the public, she might be susceptible to rape. "We see indecent dressings all over the places; social functions, weddings, churches ladies that are almost nude in the name of fashion; this behaviour promotes rape and violence against women," (The Nation Newspaper, 3). These acts before the show have been creating social sickness among youths in the country and this show has done nothing but to promote it the more at the expense of our cultural identity.



Lying is an act that Africans see as unethical. Lying in Africa is deceitful and the society strongly warns people to desist from this act. Society condemns the act to the extent that liars can be sidelined and rejected in the society if found guilty of this act. One thing is to lie about oneself and another thing is to lie about the people around you publicly. But no matter the level at which one lies, lying is an unacceptable act in the African society. This act of lying became a major instrument used by the contestants of the 2020 edition of BBNaija in a bid to win the cash prize. They did not only lie about themselves but also include lies that are capable of destroying each other's life which rendered them to be selfish and careless about their fellow housemates.

Nudity and exposition of the breast are some of the acts that are regarded as immoral and unethical in the Africa world view. Although, nudity and exposition of the breast are not immoral acts but doing them in public makes them immoral and always spurs the society to question the sanity of anyone found with these acts. In the 2020 edition of BBNaija, on several occasions did the housemates expose their nudity to the general public; although there are efforts by the cameramen to reduce viewers consumption rate of these acts, but bathing together in the bathroom and male housemates helping with the female dressings coupled with the swimming activities showcase their nudity more to the audience. One then question if the nigerian indigenous culture supports the bathing together of two individuals from different background or two stranger, this is alien to the people. These nudity and breast exposition did not go well with Yakubu who condemned the show by showing dissatisfaction with how the show allows youth to expose their bodies. In his words, he states that "unashamed youths too will start displaying their bodies which should be their private part and property of their husband and wife. The thing is killing the minds of the young generation that is coming up" (p. 3).

Fighting is the result of a misunderstanding between two individuals. Fighting is inevitable in our daily lives as human beings but the ability to control oneself is what the society cherishes. Against this backdrop, the African society is deeply not in support of public fighting as it brings a bad reputation to the fighters and their immediate family members especially when it occurred between grown-up individuals. Public fighting is however one of the unethical acts that characterized the 2017 edition of

the BBNaija show as housemates engaged themselves in series of a fights on and after the show. On several occasions did Lucy, TolaniBaj, Kaisha, Laycon, Erica and others engaged in different level of the fight while in the house. Same way, gossip became a regular routing in this edition of the show.



Conclusion

In conclusion, BBNaija though entertaining, has come of age where culture should not be totally de-emphasized rather, culture, and entertainment must be encouraged. The aim of this paper is to bridge the gaps on cultural degradation through BBNaija content creation and seek for an understanding between culture and entertainment, as well as to understand BBNaija westernized contents and their effects on the youth. Although this show entertain and promote unity among Nigerians in the face of several calls for segregation, findings shows that BBNaija exhibits series of foreign ultures that are alien to the Nigerian people which has the propensity of slopping down the cultural values and norms of the Nigerian people, thus there is a serious clash of interests as regards whether BBNaija is reflecting true Nigeria cultural norms and values.

So far, this paper has been able to establish that BBNaija reality TV show has the propensity to slopping the cultural and moral views, judgment, and attitude of young people especially towards decency, sexuality, morality, dressing, language, respect to elders and indigenous cultures and perception about women and violence against them which are the main values of the Nigerian people. BBNaija may also be teaching too many immoralities such as public exposition of the body, uncontrollable alcohol intake, lying, gossiping, and inadvertently encouraging cohabitation among unmarried young people, and ensuring in the rising cases of rape, gangsterism, and rascality in the society as well as teenage pregnancy, spreading of sexually transmitted diseases, and abortion, etc.

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