Film as a Mass Medium: Audience Perception of Home Video Films as Representation of Realities in Nigeria (Study of Residents in Awka South)

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26 September 2018

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BY

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Abstract

The proliferation of home videos amongst other variables has been viewed as a major threat to creating narratives that truly represent the society. This study examines, using Nigeria as a context, the representation of reality in home video films. Gathering respondents from Awka South, a local government area in the south eastern part of Nigeria, the study employed the survey research design with a sample size of 400. The result of the analysis showed that home video film audiences perceived representation of realities in the society in home video films. The study draws from the reflective-projective theory of communication as the theoretical underpinning that provided insight on how the media mirrors the society.

Keywords: Home Videos; Awka South; Audience; Media

Setting the scene

Film with its ever increasing reach is one of the most influential areas of the media. Arguably, as popular as literature, film has been adopted by individuals, companies, and independent groups for the purposes of entertaining, informing and educating others in an entirely unique form. With the eclectic divisions of the mass media, film as a sub-branch of this main board has established itself on the world's centre stage with a growing number of audiences attracted to it each day.

The drive for every film is to tell a story. Home videos as a spin-off of film development have continued to grace home screens all over the world, providing narratives to their audience. However, after the advent of the movie industry (Nollywood) in Nigeria which has been viewed as a feasible employer of labour in the nation, many investors have navigated their oars to this direction owing to its economic boom. This intangible reason for venturing into this sector has conceivably led to the churning out of home videos with vague messages and poor content values. However, since home videos are not made in isolation, the evolving question centres on how viewers connect with these narratives on the screen.

The propelling belief that engendered this study was the quest to empirically establish that Nigerian residents have access to home videos, are exposed to home videos, understand their themes alongside the potency of these home videos in mirroring the society and providing narratives that represents and connects with the audience despite other mediating variables.

The Scene

Films have almost become an inseparable part of the human life. It is tough to imagine a world without this form of mass medium. Arguably, many patterns and lifestyles have being said to be adopted from home videos. However, moviemakers do not make their movies from a vacuum. Inspirations for home videos come from the real life encounters and consequently mirror the society.

Since the inception of the Nigerian film industry, Nollywood, in 1992, the industry has witnessed the mass production of home videos encoded with messages for the Nigerian audience and Africa at large. It was created to enable Nigerians tell their own stories in their own way, since the media is believed to be a cultural ambassador of every society. They emerge from what Richard Mofe Damijo, a popular actor called 'real genuine stories of the people'. These realities are woven with other fantasies that come as a product of the creator's imagination. Adenugba (2007) cited in Alawode & Uduakobong (2013 p.2) posits that the producers of films all over the world use what is in vogue to develop their plots (in terms of messages and themes), in dressing, language and lifestyle amongst others. This is due to the ability of writers, directors and producers in orchestrating societal values and ideals to the contents of their movies. The Western 50s and 60s movies captured the existing divide between the haves and the have-nots in the society. Terrorism as it affects Nigeria has been captured in movies such as 'Boko Haram', produced by Pascal Amanfo in 2013 while occultism has been represented in the 1990s by movies such as 'Living in Bondage', Nollywood's first produced home video. These movies have highlighted the potency of home video films as a mass medium capable of passing across information entwined in entertainment. Although the movie, Boko Haram has been criticised on the basis of non-creativity and high level of unseriousness in the industry, the point that it presesnted the issues as they were in the society and

sensitized the masses as a powerful mass medium holds sway. Explaining home videos as a powerful mass medium, Taylor & Wills (2002) cited in Ekwenchi, Adum & Uzuegbunam (2013,p1167) observed that film is a forum for raising important issues about actual social problems.

In recent times, several appearances on the screen has taken a shift from what is known both from the interpretative and representative forms. This shift has held a successful sway in the film industry amidst the debates that had trailed its feasibility in comparison to real society. Many have argued that home videos exaggerate, present false events, half-truths and alien culture due to the mainstream syndrome, leaving an impression on its audiences. What people watch and listen to, affects and influences their perception about a society at some level or the other. If not consciously, it leaves its traces in their psyche, especially those from outside the society. Udomisor & Sonuga (2012, p.27) observed that 'through films and videos, the cultural background and identity of a nation are exhibited to the outside world'. In view of this, Alawode & Uduakobong (2013 p. 4) opines that the world has undoubtedly come to know and appreciate the cultures, identity and image of Nigeria through the characters (dressing, lifestyle and language), settings (environment and sceneries), storylines and themes as well as their prominence. Alawode & Uduakobong (2013 p.17) also opines that film makers should understand their roles as the nation's image makers and strive towards enhancing the nation's image in their portrayals and representations. The positive impact of movies on society gives a reality check. In view of this, Alawode & Uduakobong (2013 p. 4) opines that the world has undoubtedly come to know and appreciate the cultures, identity and image of Nigeria through the characters (dressing, lifestyle and language), settings (environment and sceneries), storylines and themes as well as their prominence.

There is no impact on the audience, creating storylines that do not resonate with the society that be. As Landsfield in Ogbuoshi (2005, p. 10) noted that "…the strongest point is to give African audience the local stories they want…some films about Africa, however have tried to have tried to be as truly representational as possible.". Opubor & Nwaneli (1979, p.76) lends credence to what Landsfield observed by noting that we should tell our own story because we now know the truth.

Certain home videos can help us understand our own lives better, the lives of those around us and how our society and culture operates. It all depends completely on the subject matter of the movie. Zur, O & Brigit W (2011, p.2) of the Zur movie institution noted that "movies affect many of us powerfully because the combined impact of images, music, dialogue, lighting, sound and special effects can elicit deep feelings and help us reflect on our lives. Uwah (2008, p.84) posits that "Nollywood uses languages and themes that resonate with Nigerians to tell their stories. Even though, Uwah (citing Akomfrah, 2006, p.282) filmmakers make films essentially to make money, they are systematically being guided by the tenets of African nationalism and cultural identity which help them address local concerns".

It has been recognized as a popular culture which not only mirrors and tells stories of the societies which it subsists; the films depict the lifestyles, attitudes, environments and activities within and around them.

Home videos act as an escape hatch for people who wish to forget about all their worries, frustrations and tensions, even if its effects last for a few hours. It makes them have the feeling that other people somewhere in other societies are encountering things they encounter in their own society. Hence, establish commonness. In the same vein, film as a mass medium seeks to show and reinforce commonalities among people.

Capturing the potency of home video films in representing the society where they are produced, Odia Ofeimun, a poet and critic in an in an interview with Guardian African Network notes, 'If you really want to know what is going wrong with Africa, Nollywood shows it.' (Nollywood: Nigerian's Mirror, 2012). What we see or do in reality is more often than not what we see on the screen. It's not rare that we witness incidents in our films that are in most ways very similar to the ones that we encounter in our daily lives.

However, the portrayal of characters whose descriptive frames were drawn from established historical works of arts, classical literatures and religious tomes including the bible from which dragon and the leviathan were drawn, notwithstanding their absence in our society has been raising eyebrows on the social relations of these on-screen adaptations as realities.

The reflective projective theory

This research draws its theoretical framework from Lee Leovinger's Reflective Projective Theory. This mass communication theory postulated in 1979 argued that the mass media act like mirrors for the society. It suggests that the media represent society's attitudes and values as they simultaneously project idealized visions of a society. Individuals interpret these reflections, seeing both their own images and realities in the society.

Home video films as a mass medium has been conceptualized under this context as a channel for social surveillance and transmission of same. One of the original significance of home videos as an offshoot of film was to illustrate individuality and portray the relation of individual and society.

Methodology

To determine the extent of Nigerian people's exposure to home video and their perception of it as a representation of reality, this research adopted a survey. A 21-item structured questionnaire was used as the survey instrument for data collection. This research was conducted among residents in Awka South, Nigeria. The choice had been informed by the fact that Awka South as a part of the whole abounds in homes graced with home video sets and televisions. Any area in the country would have been chosen for the purpose of this study. However, Awka South was purposely chosen as a research context. The survey questions were in regard of audience ownership or access to television, video sets and mobile media, exposure to home videos through the aforementioned sources, understanding of the video messages and their perception of representation of reality in home videos. Consequently, residents in Awka South spread across nine towns make up the study population. The nine towns are Amawbia, Awka, Ezinato, Isiagu, Mbaukwu, Nibo, Nise, Okpuno and Umuawulu. A sample size of 400 was drawn from the population of 301,657. The rationale behind the sample size of 400 was based on Taro Yamane's formula (1967) for computing sample size. For statistical convenience, sample size of 399.470299 was rounded-off to 400.

The multistage sampling procedure was used for its proficiency in probability sampling in a relatively wide geographical area. It allowed equal chance of selection of samples at different stages of the research before the final sample unit is attained. Randomization was achieved through a computer generated table of random numbers.

Presentation, analysis and discussion

This study revolves around findings from analysed data obtained from 400 respondents randomly selected from the villages in Awka South. The overall results garnered in this study gave rise to a whole gamut of discussion.

This study clearly reveals that all of the respondents have access to home video films directly or indirectly and a majority of these respondents are exposed to home video films through the listed video player enabled devices. The respondents were exposed to questions that aimed at determining their access to home videos, level of exposure to them and their device preference. From the data analysed using SPSS (2.0) - Statistical Package for Social Science, table 1 shows that 100 percent of the respondents have access to home videos. Table 2 shows that 75.5 percent of the respondents have access to home videos via televisions and video sets, 12.5 percent of the respondents through laptops, 7.0 through their portable D.V.Ds while the remaining 5.0 percent were accessing home videos through their video player enabled phones. On exposure to home video films, the data in figure 3 shows that a majority of the respondents, 97.8 percent, watch home video films with the listed devices while 2.3 percent do not watch home video films with any of these listed devices. The data in fig 4 also shows that 37 percent of the respondents watch home video films regularly, 55 percent watch occasionally while 8 percent don't know. This shows that a majority of the respondents are have a hold of their viewing frequency. It is clear from the above that a good number of residents in Awka south have access directly or indirectly to home video films.

The result on understanding of themes in home video films establishes that a majority of the respondents understand themes in home video films. The number of those who claim not to understand some themes in home video films are very infinitesimal. It shows in table 5 that 1.5 percent of the respondents do not understand the themes in home video films while 98.5 percent of the respondents understand the themes.

On perception of representation of reality in home videos, the respondents were exposed to questions that aimed at determining whether home videos highlight social

issues as well as on-screen characters portraying lifestyles obtainable in the society. The results on highlighting of social issues in home videos in table 6 shows that 95.0 percent agree that home videos films highlight social issues in the society while an infinitesimal percentage of 5.0 think they do not. When variables were measured, it shows that 5.5 percent of the respondents do not know the extent to which they highlight these social issues. 23 percent thinks the extent is 'not great', 43 percent thinks it is to a 'great' extent while 28.5 percent thinks the extent is 'very great'.

The data analysed from on-screen characters' portrayal of lifestyles obtainable in the society shows that a majority of the respondents, 78.5 percent, think on-screen characters portray lifestyles obtainable in the society while 21.5 percent of the respondents think that on-screen characters do not portray lifestyles obtainable in the society. When certain variables were measured, it revealed that a majority of the respondents perceive representation of realities in home videos. Table 9 shows that 24.5 percent of the respondents perceived reality to a 'very great' extent, 41.0 percent perceived reality to a 'great extent, while 29.5 percent opted for 'not great' and 5.0 percent did not know the extent at which home videos represent the society. Respondents who perceived representation of realities in home video films to a 'very great extent' (24.5 percent) and those who indicated 'not great' (5.0) were almost on an even split, hence pointing to the fact that there can be a shift in favour or disfavor of any of the variables, since there is a seemingly similarity between the results of the two variables.

Conclusion

The idea that home video films (themes) are produced in isolation of the society that be is an uninformed notion. Although it has been an issue of concern both to the teeming audience and the film industry, this study has sought to an empirical

approach to examine the issue. Whether they allow for consonance or dissonance of what the audiences experience in real life is what the study has geared to ascertain.

The major findings of this study suggests that the target audience understand themes in home video films and still perceive them as representation of realities in the Nigerian milieu.

It however, revealed that a majority of those who perceived representation of realities in home videos perceive it to a 'great extent'. Respondents who perceived representation of realities in home video films to a 'very great extent' and those who indicated 'not great' were almost on an even split. Consequent to this, there is a seemingly similarity between the results of the two variables and signifies that there is a high tendency of a shift occurring in favour or disfavour of any of the variables.

Apparently, since Nigerian home videos still reflect their society, credibility as a characteristics of the mass media had not been displaced.

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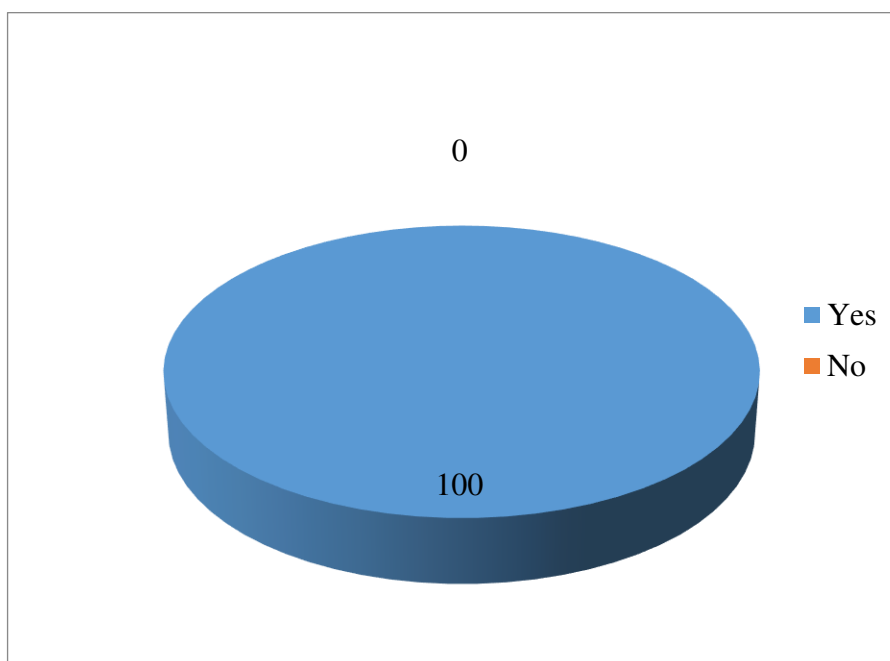
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Appendix

Table 1: Respondents who have access to home video films

Variable	Frequency	Percent

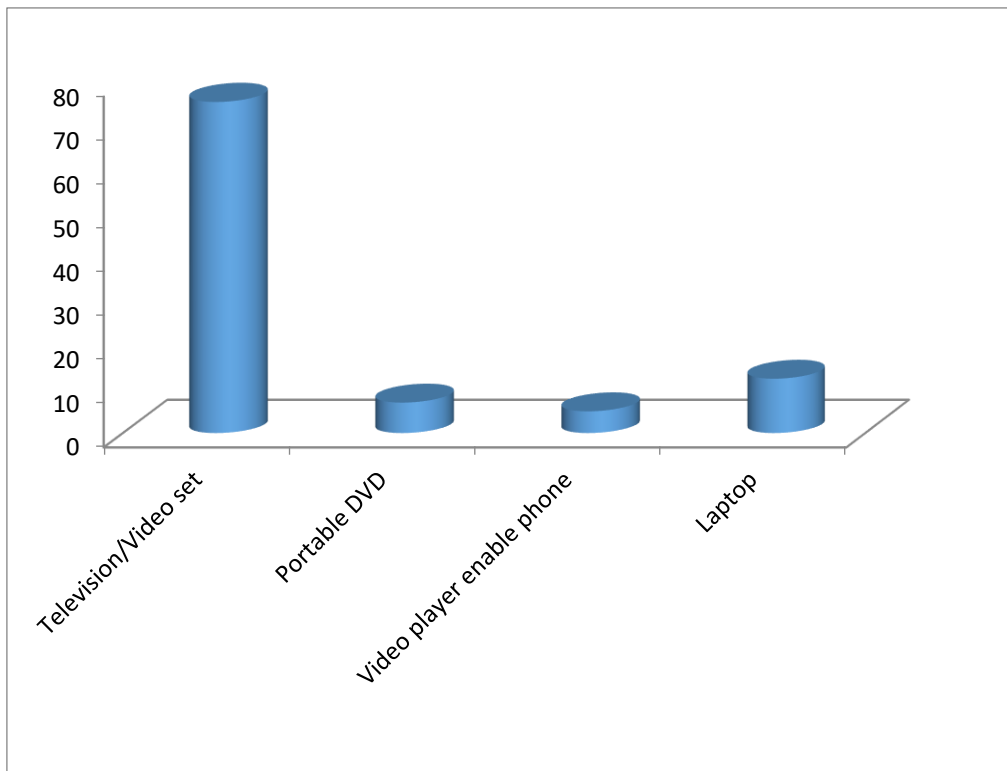|		
Yes	400	100.0

Fig. 1: Bar chart on respondents who have access to home video films

Table 2: Respondents who have home video film devices

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Laptop	50	12.5

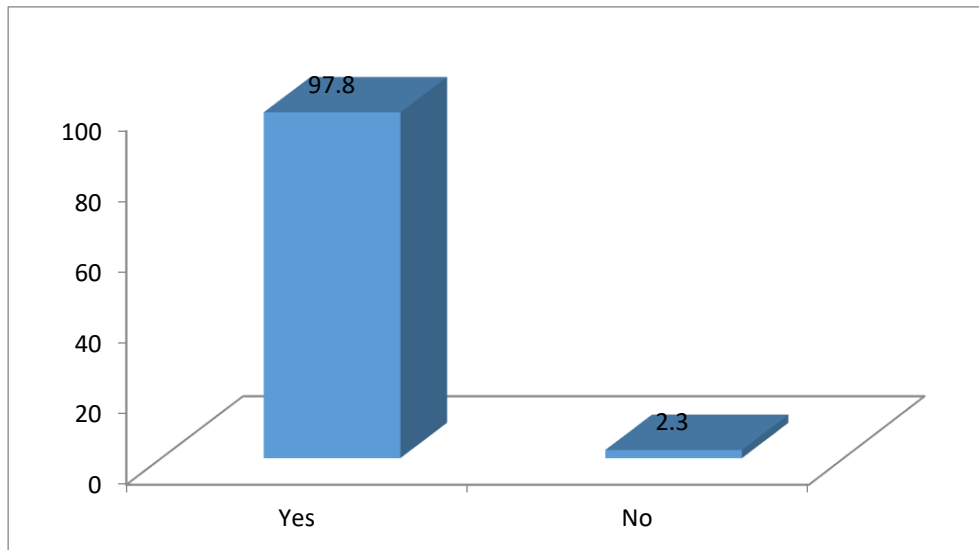|		
Video player enabled phone	20	5.0
Portable DVD	28	7.0
Television & Video set	302	75.5
Total	400	100.0

Fig 2: Cylindrical chart on respondents who have home video film devices
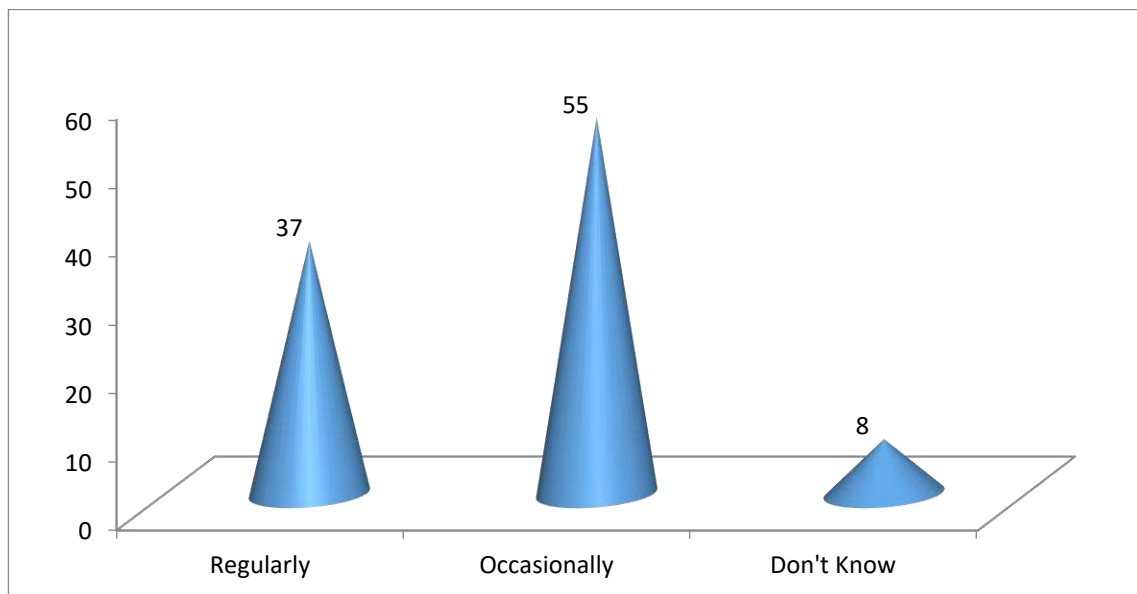
Table 3: Respondents who watch home video films with any of the listed home video film devices

Variable	Frequency	Percent
No	9	2.3

Yes	391	97.8
Total	400	100.0

Figure 3: Bar Chart on respondents who watch home video films with any of the listed home video film devices

Figure 4: Pyramid on how often respondents watch home video films

Table 5: Respondents who understand central ideas in home video films

Variables	Frequency	Percent
No	6	1.5
Yes	394	98.5
Total	400	100.0

Table 6: Respondents who think home video films highlight social issues in the society

Variables	Frequency	Percent
No	20	5.0
Yes	380	95.0
Total	400	100.0

Table 7: Extent of highlighting social issues in home videos

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Don't Know	22	5.5
Not Great	92	23.0
Great	172	43.0
Very Great	114	28.5
Total	400	100.0

Table 8: Respondents who think on-screen characters portray lifestyles obtainable in the society

Variables	Frequency	Percent
No	86	21.5
Yes	314	78.5
Total	400	100.0

Table 9: Extent of central ideas portraying realities in the society

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Don't know	20	5.0
Not great	118	29.5
Great	164	41.0
Very Great	98	24.5
Total	400	100.0