

# **Attitude of Audience Members to Nollywood Films**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Critics and the regulatory authority – National Film and Video Censors Board – have severely criticized Nigerian home video films for placing too much emphasis on occultism, blood, gore and appeals to the lowest common denominator. The overall objective of this study was to find out if the views of audience members tallies with or is at variance with those expressed by the critics and experts. The study employed multi-stage cluster sampling and one thousand four hundred and forty copies of the study questionnaire were given out to respondents. The study found out that audience members have a favourable attitude to Nigerian home video films in spite of the emphasis on negative themes.

**Keywords:** *Nollywood, home videos, negative themes, film, audience, attitude*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Nigerian audiences' first experience in film screening was in 1903 at the Glover Memorial Hall, and enthralled the audience was! (Uchegbu 1992: 48). Even though film was introduced by a European merchant, it took the combined efforts of the colonial administration and the church to sustain the industry (Ekwuazi 1987: 1). The content of such films can be easily discerned. The British colonialist used it for their "civilizing" mission as well as to indicate the blessedness of being colonized. The church, as their involvement in education and the media industry has shown, used films for spreading the gospel.

However, the Nigerian film has grown in leaps and bounds on all indicators. But it was not always so. Adesanya (1997: 15) notes that cost of production greatly hampered film production. Film makers unable to cope with cost of shooting on celluloid first turned to reversal film stock and later on, video tapes (ibid). So unlike the American and Indian film industry, the Nigerian film industry popularly called *Nollywood* uses the video cassette format and recently the Video Compact Disc (VCD). As a consequence, the films are not shown in Cinema houses since they are shot straight into video tapes, replicated and sold for home viewing hence the term home videos. And it is this ingenuity that has changed the face of the Nigerian film industry.

The boom the home video industry is experiencing is credited to Nigerian businessmen of Igbo extraction, particularly Kenneth Nnebue, an electronic dealer and film promoter (Haynes and Okome 1997: 24). The businessmen they claimed understood that a retail market could be opened up by the sale of video

films. Kenneth Nnebue's first film *Aje Ni Iya Mi* was very profitable and hence served as a booster shot to home video productions. This is in spite of the fact that it was actually Yoruba travelling theatre artistes who began making video films in 1988 (Haynes and Okome 1997: 23).

Early Nigerian films thematically emphasised culture and history and to some extent morality and politics, but contemporary social realities were left out because of the financial constraints experienced by film makers (Shehu 1992: 138–139). Perhaps, the success of *Nollywood* could be attributed to the ability of present day film makers to emphasise contemporary realities which many Nigerians and Africans can relate to. The cultural aspect is still present though.

The themes of *Nollywood* films are indeed broad and covering Nigerian, African and universal issues:

... scourge of Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF), female genital mutilation, evils of polygamy, extra marital affairs, elopement, different forms of rituals, cultism, betrayal, sibling rivalry, the activities of hired assassins and armed robbers, the spirit world, mermaids, witchcraft, work place rivalry, incest, hypocrisy of religious leaders, the world of twins, mother-in-law problems, parental match making, clash of Western and traditional cultures, conflicts, sexual intercourse with housemaids, Christianity, Islam and traditional religion, landlords and tenants, sickle cell anaemia, barrenness, challenges to love and lovers, widowhood practices, unemployment, street children, search for roots, abandonment of aged parents, teenage pregnancy, overemphasis on male children, "first lady" syndrome, effects of bad upbringing on children, the police, drug trafficking, marriage, angry gods and goddesses, campus life, tribal conflicts, curses, conflict between rich and poor, proliferation of Churches, switching of babies at birth, surrogate motherhood, slavery, organized crime, home abandonment, prostitution, cancer, rivalry over titles, smuggling, HIV/AIDS, battle between good and evil, murder, handicaps, late marriage, history, destiny... (Akpabio 2003: 138–139)

But the industry has been accused of over emphasising negative themes. The National Film and Video Censors Board, the industry regulatory body, in its guidelines for motion picture producers called for productions to be above board in portrayal of violence, crimes, sex and pornography, vulgarity, obscenity, religion and other sensitive subjects (NFVCB 2000: 107–111). Similarly, the board, in a warning notice titled "The Need for a New Direction in Nigerian Film Content", decried the emphasis on negative themes. It imposed a ban on *I hate my village*<sup>1</sup> for promoting cannibalism and failing to uphold Nigeria's cultural values. The board also placed bans on seven films – *Shattered Home*, *Outcast 1&2*, *Night Out (Girls for Sale)*, *Omo Empire*, *Issakaba 4*, *Terrorist Attack and Unseen Forces* – due to:

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<sup>1</sup> National Film and Video Censors Board Press Release titled "Censors Board bans 'I hate my village'".

limitless freedom and lawlessness by our movie makers [which] is drowning the industry with mostly repetitive or recycled films on a few themes that hinge on sex, rituals, blood and gore<sup>2</sup>

The Nigerian Minister of Information, Mr. Frank Nweke, has also lamented the emphasis on negative themes claiming that it gives the country a bad image: “You can have stories that talk on things like voodoo but when it is over done and made the centre of any offering, that is when it becomes a problem because the more people see it, the more they will think that our country is all about voodoo practice”.<sup>3</sup> Veteran Nigerian film maker, Eddie Ugboma, also has hard knocks for the slant of the films claiming that they originate from hell.<sup>4</sup>

## 1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The boom in home video productions and the corresponding audience interest have attracted a lot of attention to the sector. There is hardly any newspaper in Nigeria that does not devote space to this phenomenon. A lot has been written on the technical quality and aesthetics of the home video productions. The slants of the comments have always been against the emphasis on sex, violence, fetishism and other negative tendencies. Similarly, the production quality of these films has also been severely criticized.

In spite of these criticisms, new video films are daily released into the market thus necessitating this study. Therefore, the study sought to answer the question: What is the attitude of Lagos residents to the themes of Nigerian home video films?

## 2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

With these criticisms in mind, the study sought to find out if the attitude of audience members tallied with the views expressed by critics and the industry regulatory authority by posing these questions:

1. What is the disposition of audience members to sex, fetishism, violence and other appeals to the lowest common denominator in Nigerian home video films?
2. What is the attitude – favourable, unfavourable or neutral – of audience members to Nigerian home video films?

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<sup>2</sup> The Guardian, October 10, 2002, pp. 24–26.

<sup>3</sup> “Ministerial oath to reinvent Nollywood” Retrieved from [www.nguardian.com](http://www.nguardian.com) on January 18, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Weekend Vanguard, July 4, 1998 p. 15.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

Survey is a technique that is most commonly used by behavioural scientists (Sobowale 1983: 25). And since this study aims at investigating behaviour, and specifically attitude, the survey method was adopted.

There are different approaches to survey research including telephone, and personal interview (Sobowale 1983: 27–32; Manheim et al. 1986: 105; Frankfort-Nachimas and Nachimas 1992: 215). However, this study utilized the face-to-face interview because it guarantees a much higher return rate (Sobowale 1983: 29).

The population of this study is made up of the 7,877,809 million residents of Lagos State (National Population Data Sheet, 1991 – 2010). The study utilized multi-stage cluster sampling of Lagos residents. This sampling strategy was adopted because it is the most appropriate for sampling a geographically dispersed population (Burton 2000: 311) as is the case with Lagos, which has many far-flung settlements. This sampling technique requires selecting a specific geographic area, narrowing progressively down to a smaller unit, then houses and finally individuals (Wimmer and Dominick 2000: 90).

Based on the foregoing, with the aid of a table of random numbers, the following areas were selected: Ikoyi, Onike/Akoka and Bariga. All streets in each area were listed with the aid of the Lagos Street Finder in Multichoice Nigeria 2002 Diary. Ten streets were subsequently selected from each residential area with the aid of a table of random numbers, thus making 30 streets in all. Forty-eight copies of the questionnaire were administered to the residents in each of the streets, thus making a total of 1440 respondents. Respondents for each street were picked from 30 houses or flats with the aid of the table of random numbers. One respondent was randomly picked from one house or flat (Dominick 2000: 90).

A pilot study was conducted. The purpose of the pilot study was to collect data necessary for the design of the final questionnaire used for this study. The development of the final questionnaire took into consideration the observations of experts<sup>5</sup> as well as the result of the pilot study. The questionnaire was amended to reflect observed problems. This was done to achieve standardization of research instrument and reliability of data gathered. In validating the questionnaire, effort was made to achieve the goals of easy comprehension, simplicity and conciseness. A reliability test was also conducted.

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<sup>5</sup> Professors G.S. Ibe-Bassey, Desmond Wilson and Doctors Mbuk Mboho and E. Soola.

## 4. FINDINGS

Of the 1440 copies of questionnaire distributed for this study, 1431 were retrieved giving a response rate of 99.3%. The high response rate was due to the face to face interview approach adopted for the study.

**Table 1.** Summary of Respondents' Demographic Characteristics.

Demographic Characteristics	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	Total
<b>Age</b>	Below 15 years (5.0)	16–25 years (43.3)	26–35 years (30.9)	36–45 years (13.6)	46–55 years (4.9)	56 years & above (2.3)		100
<b>Sex</b>	Male (60.0)	Female (40.0)	–	–	–	–		100
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>	Primary 6 (7.0)	School Cert. (25.5)	HSC/A Levels (13.8)	OND (12.2)	NCE (3.2)	HND/B.Sc (28.5)	Higher Degrees (2.9)	100
<b>Yearly Estimated Income (N)</b>	Below N100,000 (49.0)	N100,000 – N300,000 (18.8)	N300,000 – N500,000 (14.5)	N500,000 – N700,000 (6.7)	N700,000 – 1 above (11.0)	–		100
<b>Occupation</b>	Civil Servant (19.1)	Student (43.4)	Business (29.7)	Others (7.8)				100
<b>Religion</b>	Christian (73.7)	Muslim (24.3)	Traditional (1.9)	Others (0.1)	–	–		100
<b>Residential Area</b>	Ikoyi (33.7)	Akoka/Onike (33.1)	Bariga (33.2)	–	–	–		100

The sample for this study was drawn from Ikoyi (33.7%), representing upper class; Akoka/Onike (33.1%), representing middle class and Bariga (33.2%), representing lower class. Majority of respondents were between the ages of 16–25 years (43.3%). This age range was followed by those between 26–35 years (30.9%), 36–45 years (13.6%), below 15 years (5.0%), 46–55 years (4.9%) and 56 years and above (2.3%) respectively. There were more male respondents (60%) than female respondents (40%). Respondents' level of education was as follows: Primary Six Certificate (7.0%), School Certificate (25.5%), HSC/A Levels (13.8%), OND (12.2%) NCE (3.2%), HND/B.Sc (28.5%), while respondents with higher degrees accounted for 9.9%. Yearly estimated incomes of respondents were as follows. Below ₦100,000. (49.0%), ₦100,001 – ₦300,000 (18.8%), ₦300,001 – ₦500,001 (14.5%), ₦500,001 – ₦700,000

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(6.7%), and ₦700,001 and above (11.0%). Majority of respondents were students (43.4%), followed by those in business (29.7%), Civil Servants (19.1%), while other occupations accounted for 7.8%. In terms of religious affiliation, Christian respondents accounted for 73.7%, Moslems 24.3%, traditional religion adherents (1.9%) and others 0.1% (See Table 1 above).

**Table 2.** Summary of Respondents Attitude to Themes of Home Video Films.

Themes of Home Video Films	Frequency and Percentage Indicating Level of Agreement					
	SA	A	N	D	SD	M
Sex	201 (14.0)	504 (35.2)	263 (18.4)	302 (21.1)	105 (7.3)	56 (3.9)
Fetishism	461 (32.2)	584 (40.8)	159 (11.1)	107 (3.5)	58 (4.1)	62 (4.3)
Violence	239 (16.7)	585 (40.0)	380 (26.6)	149 (10.4)	24 (1.7)	54 (3.8)
Incest, evils of polygamy and bad behaviour	237 (19.1)	612 (42.8)	271 (16.1)	187 (13.1)	75 (5.2)	53 (3.7)

Key: SA – Strongly Agree  
 A – Agree  
 N – Neutral  
 D – Disagree  
 SD – Strongly Disagree  
 M – Missing Cases.

When asked their views as to whether or not Nigerian Home Video Films place too much emphasis on cultic and fetish practices as well as sex, violence and bad behaviour, a majority of respondents answered in the affirmative. A clear majority of respondents expressed the view either by agreeing or strongly agreeing that Nigerian home videos place undue emphasis on sex, fetish practices, violence and other anti-social acts. (See Table 2)

**Table 3.** Summary of Respondents Attitude to Glorification of Negative Themes and Storylines in Nigerian Home Video Films.

Subject Matter	Frequency and Percentage Indicating Level of Agreement					
	SA	A	N	D	SD	M
Glorification of negative themes and storylines in Nigerian Home Video Films	204 (14.3)	563 (39.3)	268 (18.7)	245 (17.1)	77 (5.4)	74 (5.2)

Table 3 reveals that a majority of respondents (53.6%) expressed the view that there is glorification of negative themes and storylines in Nigerian home video films. Respondents who expressed disagreement accounted for 22.5% while close to a fifth of the respondents (18.7%) preferred to remain neutral on this score. Based on this finding, the study concluded that there is indeed glorification of negative themes and storylines in the home video productions. This finding is in line with the thinking of the National Film and Video Censors Board as expressed in a press release titled “Censors Board Bans ‘I Hate my

Village.” The board stated in the release that moviemakers glorify acts of cannibalism and other negative tendencies. The finding is also in line with Adewara’s observation that two home video films – *Blood Money* and *Rituals* – were marked by goriness, sadism and morbidity<sup>6</sup>.

**Table 4.** Summary of Respondents Attitude Towards Nigerian Home Video Films.

Subject Matter	Frequency and Percentage Indicating attitude			
	Favourable	Neutral	Unfavourable	Missing cases
Respondents’ attitude to Nigerian Home video films	672 (47.0)	482 (33.7)	96 (6.7)	181 (12.6)

From table 4, it is clear that a majority of respondents (47%) have a favourable attitude to Nigerian home video films, with a very small number of respondents (6.7%) indicating an unfavourable attitude. A third of respondents (33.7%) expressed neutrality. This finding is underscored by National Film and Video Censors Board’s findings that there is a boom in the home video industry<sup>7</sup>. The Censors board approved 1,470 films in 1999 up from 3 in 1994 (NFVCB 2000: 97–100).

## 5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Croteau and Hoynes (1997: 136–137) explanation of source and significance of content has some implications for Nigerian home video films. They see content as reflection of producers, audience preference, society and influence on audience as well as a self-enclosed text.

### A. Reflection of Producers/Marketers

The peculiar circumstances surrounding the development of Nigerian home video films or *Nollywood*, separates it from those of other countries. As we had noted earlier, Yoruba travelling theatre artistes were actually the ones who pioneered films using the home video format but they could not translate this into commercial success due to overemphasis on the Yoruba language and worldview which alienated other audience members. It was Igbo businessmen who actually developed the structure on which the Nigerian film industry presently stands. And of course, these businessmen (known as marketers in the industry) have their stamp on the various productions. This is because they put down the money used in making the films. No wonder then that Anyiam-Osigwe (2001: IV) traced emphasis on negative themes by these films to marketers. Her

<sup>6</sup> Sunday Vanguard, February 8, 1998, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> The Guardian, October 10, 2002, pp. 24–26.

study found out that in order to satisfy the profit orientation of these marketers, script writers, producers and directors churn out movies focusing on themes of violence, rituals, occultism and fetishism. Ogunleye (2003: 8) also alluded to this when she lamented that even a film – *The Adulteress* – scripted by two women (Chinny Matts Chukwu and Simi Opeoluwa) parades so much sex:

It seems very strange that women should write and direct such a script. It shows that box office consideration is more important to some women than any feeling of gender camaraderie

## B. Reflection of Audience Preference

It stands to reason that since audience members would determine the commercial success of any production, their interests should be of paramount importance. There can be no doubt from the findings of this study that movie makers have been able to arouse audience interest in Nigerian films. But here again the marketers claim credit. In fact, Emmanuel Isikaku who was the chairman of the Lagos State Executive Council of Nigerian Video Marketers Association (MVMA) had boasted, in reaction to criticisms by National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) and critics on the issue of undue emphasis on negatives themes that,

You see, we are very close to the consumers and it is based on what they tell us that we (in turn) tell movie makers<sup>8</sup>

Movie producers also hold the view that audience members love negative themes. Sunday Soyinka, a movie producer, told this writer<sup>9</sup> that when audiences are for instance, frightened, while watching a film, the word quickly spreads and interest in such production builds up very fast. These views are borne out by the findings of this study: Respondents acknowledge the presence of negative themes, yet they love the flicks anyway!

Even though there is still some elements of negative themes in the industry, the bad guys get punished at the end. Interests in the subject matter of love, romance and themes verging on the farcical also are becoming quite popular.

## C. Reflection of Society in General

The slight edge that Nigerian home video films have over foreign films from the point of view of audience interest cannot be divorced from its reflection of the Nigerian society, as I had noted elsewhere.

From the viewpoint of producers, these films have important roles to play... [and they] correctly reflect the realities of the Nigerian society. In

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<sup>8</sup> Saturday Champion, August 19, 2003, p. 33.

<sup>9</sup> Interview conducted with two producers – Oluwole Olorunfemi and Sunday Soyinka – at the office of the Public Relations Manger, National Film and Video Censors Board (South West Zone) on Wednesday August 6, 2003.

such an epic film as *Afonja*, the producer has to show graphically the fetish means employed by this accomplished warrior... (Akpabio 2003: 131–132)

The fetish means alluded to here and other cues are realities in the Nigerian society and thus, readily connect with the people. The rural and urban settings in which the films are shot and the various characters as well as themes and story-lines are what the average Nigerian can easily identify with.

#### D. Influence on Audience

Although media effects literature does not support a link between content and overt behaviour, there is no doubt that portrayals in film does have effect on impressionable members of the society (Folarin 1998: 69). Even those that are not impressionable are not totally immune hence the concern about sex, violence and appeals to the lowest common denominator as well as the media's ability to turn us into one dimensional human beings, made in their image. Movies' ability to reflect goings on in the society would give some mileage to the influence it exerts. This is because

When home video films employ various screen techniques and story-telling format that reflect the culture of Nigerians, it could be a vehicle for positive change. Recourse to local language, myths, legends, folktales and other traditional forms would bring about the synergy that is required for better message reception and influence (Akpabio 2004: 8)

#### E. Context as Self-enclosed Text

In some instances, content may or may not reflect all of the above but rather be a self-enclosed text that requires reading between the lines. Croteau and Hoynes (1997: 138) quote Kellner (1995) as he decodes the film *Rambo*. The film might show

The conventions of the Hollywood genre of the “war film”, which dramatizes conflict between the United States and its “enemies”, and provides a happy ending that portrays the victory of good over evil

The interpretation of the film also involved an analysis of the cinematic and formal elements.

Nigerian home video films generally have also been decoded. Uzoatu and Ogunade (2000: 29) posit that

If we put aside the voodooism, occultism, fetishism etc, we will see that home videos tell us what our actual lifestyle is. It indicates that we are a people with pedestrian instincts, and tendencies riding on a primordial train... All the same, the movie business has become a template of some unity, a mirror of what is not ideal and also a bad teacher of what is right.

No doubt marketers' stranglehold on the industry and the amateur productions at the very beginning of the home video boom elicited such harsh criticisms and interpretation.

From the findings of this study, the conclusion to be drawn is that respondents have a largely favourable attitude to Nigerian home video productions even though they expressed the view that there is too much emphasis on themes such as sex, violence, prostitution, sibling rivalry, evils of polygamy, devilish spiritualism and related themes.

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