

Audience Perception of Sexual Contents in Nigerian Movies

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Abstract

Studies of sexual messages in movies and on television have found that there has been an increase in the number of portrayals and amount of sex featured in these media and an increase in the explicitness of these portrayals. The objective of this study was to know the extent to which the audience want sexual contents in Nigerian movies. Survey was adopted as the research design and copies of questionnaire were used to gather information from 337 respondents in four local governments in Ogun state. Results showed that audiences consider sexual contents as bad, unhealthy, excessive and irrelevant in most cases. Based on the findings, the researcher recommends that producers should pass across sexual acts swiftly and with caution.

Keywords: Audience, Film, Media, Movies, Sexual contents

1. Introduction

The mass media seems to be a sure source of content, ideas, information and educative materials in the 21st century. The advent of the internet aided by globalization can be said to have increased dramatically the availability of such materials at individuals' disposal. Naturally, it can be argued that the mass media to an extent is a blessing when the speed of information exchange and access is considered. According to Bielak (1995) by the time the average person graduates from high school, he or she has watched more than 17,000 hours of television (TV).

Typical of every developing invention experiencing growth, the mass media however seem to have its dark sides. Researchers in certain quarters are of the opinion that mass media users are rather using it for negative purposes and the media also has negative effect on viewers. Onabajo (2002:3) elaborated that the 'developing worlds, especially African countries, have accused the advanced countries of cultural imperialism, through the mass media.'

One of the major drivers of cultural imperialism here is technology and invariably globalization which has shrunk borders and barriers making open the way for so many materials from the Western world to come in. It then seems to be appropriate to say that media users imitate and learn foreign norms which are now practiced in our own conservative society; television stations like E!, Style, MNET East, Fashion TV, MNET Action, MM1, MM 2 among others which Nigerian viewers are exposed to help to strengthen this.

It appears that movie producers and media practitioners are also not left out. They see the foreign scenes as superior and strive hard to meet the needs of the sophisticated and exposed viewers who have now been influenced by the pattern of life on the foreign scenes. In the bid to satisfy the audience and meet up with international standards, producers as well copy international intuition and production techniques. These techniques are hereby initiated into the local movie productions. Of course this helps in improving production quality but some lead to the degradation of culture and value.

In Nigeria a wide range of cable television services for example, *Direct Satellite Television (DSTV)*, *My TV*, *Startimes*, *Gotv* etc. are made available to subscribers, through the purchase of decoders and the payment of subscription fees which varies depending on the subscriber's choice of package. This probably is another means of making available all sorts of pornographic materials.

BBC News (2012) regarded Nollywood, that is, the Nigeria Movie Industry as the second largest film industry in the world by volume and its estimated annual revenue. This industry produces films with plots that portray scenes often related or connected to love, witchcraft, sex, rape, money, religion, lineage sustainability, procreation and deception among lovers. And in numerous cases young people have had access to "X-rated" films which according to the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB, 2010 para.10) *hereafter referred*

to as NFVCB explained that “censorship entails the examination of the contents of a film or video work to determine the age group of the target audience, based on the film’s possible or inherent psychological, sociological and moral impact, among other factors.” Moreover, the Nigeria Broadcasting code states that ‘the portrayal of nudity and sexual scenes and expression is justifiable only in context; however, it shall be presented with tact and discretion’ (The Nigeria Broadcasting Code 2002:45).

The increasing expansion in Nollywood in terms of number of annual film productions which have a high concentrate of sexual content, still with a readymade market and audience is a challenge. These movies are not often accessed by mature viewers (adults) alone as a result of the laxity of authorities, parents, distributors, and the media. While movie producers want to sell and appeal to their audiences, it is imperative that they understand the nature of the audience and what they would prefer to see in the movies and not just try to sell what they think is in vogue. This also brings to light the need for audience research to actually find out what exactly the audience wants to see in the movies they watch and the extent to which they want what is shown to them. Therefore, the study seeks to answer the question: What is the audience perception of sexual content in Nigerian Home Videos?

In this research, Audience is defined as a person or group of people that has/have watched a movie either partially or fully, while Sexual content on the other hand is any action that shows the act of- intimate touching, explicit sexual intercourse, kissing, necking, talking about sex and nudity.

2. Research Questions

1. How do viewers perceive sexual contents in Nigerian movies?
2. To what extent do the audience want sexual contents in Nigerian movies?

3. Research Hypotheses

- H_0 : Sexual contents do not have any significant influence on adolescents.
 H_1 : Sexual contents have a significant influence on adolescents.

4. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the *Psychological Theory of Perception*. Perception or what other scholars refer to as social perception according to Nelson and Quick (1997:83) in Unumeri (2009:18) ‘is the process of interpreting information about another person.’ What this definition means is that the outlook one forms about people depends on the amount of information available and the extent to which one is able to correctly decode the information that was acquired. Hence, one may be in possession of the same set of information that others have on a particular situation, person or group but still arrive at different conclusions due to individual differences in the capacity to interpret the information at hand.

Folarin (2002:63) posits that ‘perception depends on a complex of variables such as a psychological disposition, past experiences, cultural expectations and social relationships.’

The process of media audience perception involves four stages of: *Selective exposure, selective attention, selective perception and selective retention*. Selective exposure is when a person exposes himself or herself to communications that are in agreement with his existing attitudes while ignoring that not in accordance with his attitudes. Selective attention has to do with information that one pays attention to avoid confusion. Selective perception explains that the interpretation of any message depends on the receiver while selective retention is the ability of the audience to recall information in relation to his wants, needs, attitudes etc.

This theory is relevant to this study in that the Nigerian movie audience have to be exposed to movies for them to really be addressed as audience. After exposure, the selective attention transmits to the fact that the movie audience would have selectively chosen the content to concentrate on in the movies, that is sexual content in this case. The selective attention given to sexual content therefore determines the perception and understanding of the content by the audience. After which retention of the sexual scenes, lessons learnt and influences of exposure occurs.

5. Film: An Overview

‘Motion picture’, ‘movie’ or ‘film’ according to Knight and Carey (MCMLXXI:474), is a ‘continuous sequence of still photographs, in black and white or coloured, projected in rapid succession onto a screen to give the optical illusion of motion. Movies are made up of plots and characters serve as the actors who act out a story line/plot. Vassiliou (2006:2), stated that ‘the story of a film can be considered the ‘original’ story a

director/writer had in mind... and that film presents us with a story or narrative that is re-enacted through the interaction of characters.’

Films are a form of “literature on screen”. They are a popular form of entertainment, as well as a powerful medium for educating and indoctrinating viewers through the mass media. Like every other channel of mass communication, films perform three default functions- to educate, inform and entertain.

5.1 Brief History of Film in Nigeria

Akalugo (2001) says that Nigeria’s first contact with cinema was in August 1903. This took place at Glover Hall, Lagos where the first film was shown. The Colonial administration in Nigeria with the Christians missions used the film, among other media to accept Christianity and Western Culture. Akalugo further explains that film production, distribution and exhibition were restricted to Lagos where they compete with concerts and drama shows and the contents of such movies were highly censored (Akalugbo, 2001).

According to Akalugo (2001:25), the films were designed to accomplish the following objectives:

- To publicize the activities and objectives of the Federal Government of Nigeria.
- To help in educating the public on methods of improving its way and standard of living.
- To portray the achievements of Nigerian culture both locally and internationally.
- To inform the public of news events in and outside Nigeria.

The foreign film distributors and exhibitors succeeded in turning attention from the documentaries to themselves. Fortunately, Nigerians became involved in the production of films and by 1970 the first indigenous feature film was produced in Nigeria: KONGI’S HARVEST, it was based on a play written by Wole Soyinka and was produced by Calpeny Nigeria Ltd.

The release of the box-office movie *Living in Bondage* in 1992 by NEK Video Links owned by Kenneth Nnebue in the Eastern city of Onitsha set the stage for Nollywood as it is known today (Olayiwola 2011). Home Videos were and are produced to serve as an alternative to the cinemas, and the name was derived from the conception that the audience can seat in the confines for his or her home and watch the movie at his or her convenience (Okon 2010).

5.2 Sexual Content in Movies

Sexual content can be regarded as any sexual act, from passionate kissing all the way to intercourse. As seen in the operational definition of concept of this study, ‘any action that shows the act of, intimate touching, explicit sexual intercourse, kissing, necking, talking about sex and nudity’ can be referred to as sexual contents. Synonym for sexual contents include, sexual images, sexual materials.

According to Huston, Wartella, and Donnerstein (1998) sexual content can be defined “as verbal references to sexual activity, innuendo (an indirect intimation about a person or thing), implied sexual activity and visual presentation of sexual activity.” (Korpershoek, 2012:3).

Korpershoek (2012:3) citing Ward (2003), states that ‘sexual content has grown frequently and explicitly in different forms of media. For instance, messages about sexuality on television have increased in the last two decades’. Studies of sexual messages in movies and on television (prime time, soaps, and music videos have been studied most heavily) have found that over the past twenty years, there has been an overall increase in the number of portrayals and amount of sex featured in these media and an increase in the explicitness of these portrayals.

In Smith, Moyer-Gusé, and Donnerstein (2004:553), it was confirmed that when it comes to the content of movies, sex sells:

In a recent study, college students read descriptions of movies that either did or did not include sex. Participants expressed preference for those movies that mentioned sex in the description (Bahk, 1998). Because the movie industry is driven by consumer demand and moviegoers prefer sex, sex is prevalent in movies. A recent analysis of the 50 most profitable films of 1996 found that 40% of the movies featured at least some sex.

5.3 Factors that Influence the Different Interpretation Patterns of Sexual Content in Nigerian Film

Differences in interpretation of sexual content are presumably driven by selective perception, individual experiences and biases, and level of involvement in the content. Ward, Gorvine, and Cytron (2001) in

Manganello, Henderson, Jordan, Trentacoste, Martin, Hennessy, and Fishbein (2010:365) described three sets of factors that may influence perceptions of sexual content:

- a. Socio demographic factors (such as age, sex, and ethnicity)
- b. Viewing behaviour (such as time and attention), and
- c. Previously held attitudes (such as beliefs about sexual behaviour).

Socio demographic factors (such as age, sex, and ethnicity): As stated by McQuail (2005:430) ‘social background and milieu, especially as reflected in social class, education, religious, cultural, political and family environment and region or locality of residence affect the audiences’ interpretation pattern. It is generally understood that adults are more matured than children; therefore age determines how individuals will perceive, react and interpret sexual acts in movies.

Another variable here is gender or sex. Females are typically more scared by dangers and threats depicted in movies than males. Therefore in instances where the sexual act portrayed had negative effects on the characters, then the female audience who is gullible to threat would interpret it differently from a male who naturally does not get scared of threats (Smith et al. 2004).

Viewing behaviour (such as time and attention): The time and level of attention given to the movie while watching determines how the audience would interpret. An audience who was doing another thing while watching a movie will surely not interpret the sexual content in it the same way an audience who paid full attention will.

The timing is also a factor that determines different interpretation patterns among Nigerian film audience. McQuail (2005:430) mentioned timing as one of the most relevant factor, that is “whether one is alone or in company (friends, family, others). Where media are used (e.g at home, work, travelling, in a cinema, etc.”

Previously held attitudes (such as beliefs about sexual behaviour): Prior knowledge and understanding of the sexual acts depicted in movies varies from individual to individual. These previously held beliefs about sexual behaviour, sex, relationships etc. of different audiences make their interpretation differ. Beliefs here are not limited to people’s prior understanding and beliefs of sexual content, general beliefs of life, religion, culture etc. can also be attributed to discrete interpretations among the audience.

6. Research Methodology

This research adopted the survey research design. Surveys have an upper hand above other methodologies because they can be used to investigate problems in realistic settings and a large amount of data can be gathered (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011).

The study population consisted of the staff members of four local governments in Ogun state. The total population of staff in the four local governments is 2131. To get the sample size for this study, a formula by Yamane (1974) as cited by Evborokhai (2009) was adopted. The formula is illustrated thus:

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

Where

n = sample size

N = population

1 is constant

E= level of significance chosen (0.05)²

$$n = \frac{2131}{1 + 2131(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{2131}{1 + 2132(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{2131}{1 + 5.3275}$$

$$n = \frac{2131}{6.3275}$$

$$n = 336.7838799$$

$$n = 337$$

Sample size= 337

Table 1: Percentage of respondents in the four local governments and actual sample drawn from each group

Local Governments	Population	Percentage (%)	Sample size
Ipokia	597	28	94
Ijebu East	574	26.9	91
Ifo	464	21.8	73
Ikenne	496	23.3	79
Total	2131	100	337

The study made use of the cluster sampling of the probability sampling technique. ‘Cluster sampling is used when researchers recognises that some populations are distributed in pockets of settlement and the researcher wants to use the cluster as basis for selection’ (Tejumaiye 2003 p.45).

There are twenty local governments in Ogun state; to get the sample population the local governments were divided into clusters using the four major ethnic entities in the state, that is, Yewa, Ijebu, Egba and Remo. Afterwards, the simple random technique was used to select a local government from each cluster. In total four local governments were selected. Questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. Three hundred and thirty seven (337) copies of questionnaire were distributed out of which 309 copies were returned. Hence the response rate was 91.7% (80 (25.9%) male respondents, and 229 (74.1%) female respondents).

See table below for exact return rate by local governments.

Table 2: Return rate of the copies of questionnaire

Local Governments	Number Administered		Number Returned	
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
IPOKIA	94	27.9	91	29.4
IJEBU-EAST	91	27.0	90	29.1
IFO	73	21.7	66	21.4
IKENNE	79	23.4	62	20.1
Total	337	100.0	309	100.0

The data gathered were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical method. The descriptive employed the use of frequency distribution, simple percentages and tables to analyse the data. While the inferential statistics employed the use of regression analysis to check if the sexual contents in home videos have a significant influence on adolescents. Hence sexual content was taken as the independent variable while adolescent was taken as the dependent variable. The data were analyzed with the use of the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS version 17).

7.Data Presentation And Analysis

7.1 Presentation of Findings

Research Question 1: How do viewers perceive sexual contents in Nigerian movies?

Table 3: Respondents’ perception of sexual contents in Nigerian Home Videos

	Frequency	Percent (%)
Bad	195	63.1
Fair	90	29.1
Good	16	5.2
Very Good	8	2.6
Total	309	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2013

Table 4: Table showing stage where sexual acts become offensive

	Frequency	Percent (%)
Kissing	100	32.4
Intimate touching	83	26.9
Sexual intercourse	109	35.3
Explicit sexual intercourse	17	5.5
Total	309	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2013

Table 5: Table showing Audience Perception on the irrelevance of sexual contents in Nigerian Home Videos

	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	207	67.0
No	102	33.0
Total	309	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2013

Interpretation

As shown in Table 3, 195(63.1%) of the respondents perceive sexual contents in Nigerian movies as bad. From Table 4, 109(35.3%) of respondents say sexual contents get offensive at sexual intercourse stage. Table 5, 207(67.0%) of the respondents think sexual contents in movies could be irrelevant at times while 102(33.0%) say sexual contents are always relevant. Respondents were further asked a follow-up question on why or not they think sexual contents could be irrelevant in some situations, those that said yes said it is irrelevant when it does not relate to the film and when it is excessive. And those who said no, said so because they believe sexual contents relates to and stems from whatever has been happening in the movie and some said it gives the individual ideas about what is going on in the world.

From the analysis, it is obvious that the audience does not appreciate the level of sexual contents they watch in movies as the present state of sexual contents in Nigeria movies is rated as bad and unsatisfactory. This state of unpleasantness as revealed in this study aggravates the audience when sexual intercourse is portrayed in sexual contents shown. The length of these contents can also be attributed as one of the reasons the audience see sexual contents in Nigerian movies as bad because they regard it as excessive when it lasts for over a minute.

Moreover, some of these sexual acts can be regarded as irrelevant because they won't change anything in the movies if they are deleted. The audience especially adults who were the respondents are logically meant to know what is good for them and this shows why majority of the respondents say their perception of sexual contents is unhealthy for the audience.

Research Question Two: To what extent do the audience want sexual contents in Nigerian movies?

Table 6: Frequency at which sexual contents should be shown in Nigerian Home Videos

	Frequency	Percent (%)
Always	16	5.2
Often	22	7.1
Once in a while	136	44.0
Never	135	43.7
Total	309	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2013

Table 7: Stage at which sexual contents should stop

	Frequency	Percent (%)
Kissing	173	56.0
Intimate touching	64	20.7
Pulling off of clothes	34	11.0
Sex	38	12.3
Total	309	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2013

Interpretation

As shown in Table 6, 136(44%) of respondents believe sexual contents in home videos should be featured once in a while, while 135(43.7%) believe it should never be shown. From Table 7, 173(56%) respondents opine that sexual contents should stop at the kissing stage.

From the analysis, it means that sexual contents should only feature once in a while when it is relevant and cannot be avoided. There should be limited kissing in the movies.

From the analysis it is obvious that the audience does not appreciate the level of sexual contents they watch in movies.

7.3 Test of Hypothesis

Rule

$T_{cal} > T_{tab}$ = Accept H_1 Reject H_0

$T_{cal} < T_{tab}$ = Reject H_1 Accept H_0

H_0 : Sexual contents do not have any significant influence on adolescents.

H_1 : Sexual contents have a significant influence on adolescents.

Regression Summary

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		R^2	F (T cal)	Sig.	Remark	
	B	Std. Error					
1	(Constant)	2.250	1.322	0.711	8.451	0.02	Significant
	Sexual contents	0.221	0.795				
a. Dependent Variable: Adolescents.							

The coefficient of the independent (Sexual contents) is 0.221 which is positive. This shows that there is a positive relationship between Sexual contents and Adolescents. This invariably implies that the more sexual contents in movies the adolescents watch, the more it will bring about a corresponding increase on its influence on the adolescent, all things been equal.

The overall coefficient of determination R^2 , which is the explanatory power of the model, is 0.711, that is $R^2 = 0.711$. This implies that 71.1% of the variations on the adolescent sexual behaviour is explained by the sexual contents in movies they watch. The remaining 28.9% of changes can be explained by other variables that are not considered in the model but can cause variation on the dependent variable.

According to the regression result

$T_{cal} = 8.451$

To calculate T_{tab} , the DF (Degree of freedom) has to be ascertained

$DF = V$ that is $V = (N - 1)$

Where N= number of respondents

Therefore, we have

$(309 - 1) = 308$

Checking 308 at 5% level of significance on the T distribution table, we have that

$T_{cal} = 8.451$

$T_{tab} = 1.84$

$T_{cal} > T_{tab}$

$8.451 > 1.84$

Result

The T-test at 5% significance level shows that T-calculated of 8.451 is greater than the T-tabulated of 1.84, using the degree of freedom of (308); we reject the H_0 which says that Sexual contents do not have any significant influence on adolescents and accept H_1 which is that sexual contents in movies have a significant influence on adolescents. This means that there is a significant relationship between sexual contents and adolescents who are exposed to them.

7.4 Major Findings

- I. Audiences consider sexual content as bad, unhealthy, and regard it as excessive when it lasts for more than a minute.
- II. Audiences get offended when sexual acts get to sexual intercourse in movies and they are of the opinion that sexual contents could be irrelevant especially in cases where the sexual scenes would not change anything in the movies if they are deleted.
- III. Sexual contents should only feature once in a while, with kissing as the limit and should last within the time frame of 5-7 seconds.
- IV. From the test of hypothesis, it was also discovered that there is a significant influence of sexual contents on adolescents that are exposed to them.

8. Conclusion

This study examined audience perception of sexual contents in Nigerian home videos. The findings of this study revealed that sexual contents in Nigerian movies are not appreciated and that there is need for adolescents to be protected from getting exposed to these contents. Based on the findings in chapter 4, it can be affirmed that the present state of sexual contents in Nigerian movies is bad.

9. Recommendations

Movie producers can carry out audience research to find out what appeals to them and by doing this; they will pass their message across swiftly and with caution.

The government and regulatory bodies also have a major role to play. Film agencies such as the NFVCB should make sure they not only screen movies and place them into the right rating but should also do a follow up to ensure that producers do not play pranks by inserting clips that were not originally shown to them back into the movie to enable them sell. The Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) should endeavour that all its laws and regulations especially those that relate to obscenity and airing of movies with sexual contents must be obeyed by broadcast stations and when they are not followed they should be sanctioned. Parents are also urged to counsel and discipline their children to view only movies within their viewing category and if they must have access to these films, they should be view it wisely.

Future researchers who wish to carry out further study in this area are urged to get respondents from other parts of the country and in another category of workers other than civil servants as used in this study. Researchers are also urged to consider the adolescents' perspective to this issue since they are exposed to it.

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