

Watching of Occult Film and its Influence on African's Supernatural Belief System; Specifically Ghana

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Abstract

Occult practices or issues surrounding occultism have been on the increase in Ghana, especially among the youth. It is believed that our belief system help nurture these practices when experienced through the propagating mediums. These propagating mediums are quite unclear however, suspected ones included access to the internet, occult materials and 'perhaps' movies.

Hence, this study examined the influence of watching occult film on African's supernatural belief system; specifically Ghana. The objective of this study was to examine whether occult film increases one's supernatural belief system as compared to non-occult film; age, sex, and educational level differences exist in supernatural belief system. Sixty-six subjects were sampled using stratified random sampling technique. Subjects were randomly assigned into either control or experimental group equally. Both control and experimental group subjects responded to a questionnaire (pre-test) and later watched a non-occult film and occult film respectively. They then answered the questionnaire again (post-test). The hypotheses were analysed using Correlated t test, Independent t test and One-Way ANOVA. The findings revealed that occult film significantly increases ones' supernatural belief system as compared to non-occult film. However, there was no significant difference between ages, sexes, and educational levels on supernatural belief system. This implies that what we watch can influence our behaviour.

Keywords: Occultism, Supernatural Belief System, Occult Film, Non-Occult Film

Introduction

Paranormal, superstitious and magical beliefs have been found in a diverse range of cultures for thousands of years (Jahoda, 1969), and polls show that these beliefs continue to thrive in modern times (Newport & Strausberg, 2001). Researchers have long speculated about the origins and functions of such beliefs (Jahoda, 1969; Vyse, 1997).

Occultism (Latin is *occulere* meaning "to hide"), belief in the efficacy of various practices like astrology, alchemy, divination, sorcery, witchcrafts and magic which are regarded as being based on hidden knowledge about the universe and its mysterious forces. There are occult practices within nearly all traditional civilizations. Western occultism has its roots in ancient Babylonian and Egyptian lore (Ellwood, 2008). Among Africans, access to this mystical power is hierarchical in the sense that God has the most and absolute control over it; the spirits and the living-dead have portions of it and some humans know how to tap, manipulate and use some of it. Each community experiences this force or power as useful and therefore acceptable, neutral, or harmful and therefore evil. On the credit side, mystical power is employed for curative, protective, productive and preventive purposes. For this reason, Africans wear, carry or keep charms, amulets and a variety of other objects on their bodies, in their possessions, homesteads and fields (Mbiti, 1990). In Ghana, stories are often told about the activities in the spiritual realm. It is even believed that aged women turn into witches hence; special camps are created for them (Zoure, 2008) in the northern part of the country.

However, knowledge about occultism was generally quite obscure some time ago but that is not so these days. There have been so many materials in this area not excluding those presented by our radio and television stations. This has made some people, especially the youth, to be inquisitive in getting information to access it which is sometimes frightening; "sakawa", which sometimes demands the fellow to carry coffin around in the

night (Yeboah, 2009). There is increasing evidence that occultism is fast growing in popularity and acceptability with “juju” for “sakawa” (medicine for internet fraud) being one of the fastest growing at the moment. It has been speculated that this practice is motivated by movies being shown on our televisions. Just before the “resurrection” of the Ghanaian movie industry, movies from our sister nations, especially Nigeria, were mostly occult nature. This included “The Last Burial”, “Issakabbah” and many others. Interestingly, Ghanaian movie industry “resurrected” with much productions in this area like “Kyeiwaa” and many other similar kinds. Coincidentally, Ghanaians saw an abrupt rise of occultism in most youths especially those in our Senior High Schools. For instance, it was reported that a young boy was caught suspected of practicing “sakawa” (Gomda & Achama, 2009). This may probably be because it somehow affirms Africans and specifically the Ghanaian supernatural belief system. Therefore, it is good to understand people’s beliefs well because it is these beliefs which can influence their behaviour. This has prompted the use of visual medium to find out whether it will influence Ghanaians’ supernatural belief system.

Objectives of the study

1. To find out whether watching of occult films influence Africans’ supernatural belief system.
2. To examine whether sex differences exist on supernatural belief systems after watching an occult film.

Relevance of the study

This experiment would help to understand the effects of films on humans. It would therefore help to control the rate of telecasting such types of films. This study would be useful to book writers and film producers as to the exact impact they want occultism to have on an individual. It would help educational directors and school authorities to know how to handle and deal with supernatural beliefs in students and how to psyche them up. This study would also add to the already existing knowledge or information on this topic.

Literature Review

According to Bandura’s (1977) social/observational learning theory, people learn not only through classical and operant conditioning but also by observing the behaviour of others. In Egypt for example, where grasshoppers are considered as a delicacy, people learn to eat them partly by watching other people enjoy themselves while eating grasshoppers. Four factors necessary for a person to learn through observation and then imitate are attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. Implying that subjects who watched an occult film would have their supernatural belief influenced which can lead to the exact performance under appropriate available conditions.

A study by Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1963) revealed that people, especially children, learn a lot from watching television demonstrating the power of observational learning. In one experiment, a preschool child worked on a drawing while a television set showed an adult behaving aggressively toward a large inflated Bobo doll (a clown doll that bounces back up when knocked down). The child was then left in another room filled with interesting toys, including a Bobo doll. The experimenters observed the child through a one-way glass. Compared with children who witnessed a nonviolent adult model and those not exposed to any model, children who witnessed the aggressive display were much more likely to show aggressive behaviours toward the Bobo doll, and they often imitated the model’s exact behaviours and hostile words. This shows that learning can take place just by watching a film. In other words, just watching an occult film can have an influence of practicing it. One can also think of vicarious reinforcement as a factor in determining the level of its influence.

Similarly, a study revealed that native science beliefs seem to be held firmly by quite a substantial proportion (at least 10%) of students. It was also found that formal education seems to gradually erode the native science beliefs of students (Anamuah-Mensah, 1998).

The prevalence of superstitious beliefs amongst students and their relationship to some variables was investigated by Ghanem and Awwad (2010). A survey questionnaire consisting of (70) items was administered to a sample of (223) male and female students. The results showed that, although prevalence of a few superstitious beliefs amongst students existed, there were no statistically significant differences amongst students' gender, specialization in high school, achievement level, and the parents' level of education, on superstitious beliefs.

Ghaffari-Nejad, Pouya and Kashani (2003) conducted a study which found out that of all studied patients, 77.8% believed in superstitious causes of their illnesses and 60.7% had received some superstitious treatment. Forty-six (88.4%) of male and 31 (65.9%) of female patients believed in superstitious causes of their mental illness showing a significant difference in this regard between males and females ($p < 0.008$). Similarly, 37 (71.1%) of male and 23 (48.9%) of female patients had sought superstitious treatments, which showed a significant difference between these two groups in seeking superstitious treatments ($p < 0.003$). The rate of superstitious beliefs and seeking of related treatments were lower in patients with higher levels of education.

Statement of hypotheses

Based on the literature reviewed above, the following hypotheses were tested.

1. Watching of an occult film helps increases one's supernatural belief system.
2. Males would be more likely to be influenced on supernatural belief systems after watching an occult film than females.

Methodology

Population and Participants

The population was students in Nsawam Senior High School at Nsawam. Sixty-six participants were selected using stratified random sampling which comprised of students in all the course classes, both sexes and all the three levels. Thirty-three participants were randomly assigned to the control and the experimental groups.

Materials/Instruments

Laptop computers (2) were used for showing the films in both conditions. The Revised Paranormal Belief Scale (R-PBS) was used in measuring the belief system. It has a four-week test-retest reliability of .92 and Cronbach's alpha of .70 after the pilot study. The questionnaire has 26 items in a 7-point Likert scale response format. That is, 1=strongly disagree, 2=moderately disagree, 3=slightly disagree, 4=uncertain, 5=slightly agree, 6=moderately agree, and 7=strongly agree. Two films were shown. An occult related film named Witches.com and a non-occult related also named Akeelah and the Bee. Witches.com had aspects of supernatural powers being manifested whilst Akeelah and the Bee was an educationally related type.

Design and Procedures

An experimental design, specifically pre-test-post-test control group design, was used for the study. An introductory letter was obtained from the Psychology Department of the University of Ghana to the Headmaster of Nsawam Senior High School to seek permission for the study. Suitable dates were set for the study after permission was granted.

The first day was for informed consent, sampling procedure, and pre-testing. That is, participants were adequately informed about the study. Stratified Random Sampling was used to select and assign interested participants into the control and the experimental groups. In all, sixty-six participants were selected across all courses and the three SHS levels. The participants were the pre-tested.

A week later, the occult film (witches.com) was shown to the experimental group whilst the control group watched a film devoid of occult practices (Akeelah and the Bee). After they have watched the films, they post-tested on the same questionnaire. On that same day, they were debriefed, appreciated and compensated. The questionnaires were then scored and coded for analyses

Results

The first hypothesis (H_1) stated that watching of an occult film helps increase supernatural belief system. The Correlated and Independents t Tests were used to analyse this hypothesis and the results are presented in the tables below.

Table 1a: Summary of the Correlated t Test Comparing Pre-Test and Post-Test Score of Control and Experimental Groups.

Groups		N	M	SD	df	t	Sig
Control	Pre-test	33	133.97	18.94	32	1.099	.140
	Post-test	33	129.58	19.83			
Experimental	Pre-test	33	133.64	16.07	32	-3.435	.001
	Post-test	33	148.76	20.20			

Results in Table 1a indicate that there is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test control group scores [$t_{(32)} = 1.099$, $p = ns$ (one-tailed)]. However, significant difference existed between the experimental groups [$t_{(32)} = -3.435$, $p = .001$ (one-tailed)] with the post-test experimental group scores ($M = 148.76$, $SD = 20.20$) were significantly more than the pre-test experimental group score ($M = 133.64$, $SD = 16.07$). This confirms the hypothesis that watching of occult films help increases one's supernatural belief system.

Table 1b: Summary of the Independent t Test Comparing Control and Experimental Groups

Groups		N	M	SD	df	t	Sig
Post-test	Control	33	129.58	19.83	64	-3.893	.000
	Experimental	33	148.76	20.20			
Pre-test	Control	33	133.97	18.94	64	.077	.470
	Experimental	33	133.64	16.07			

Results in Table 1b indicate that the Post-test Experimental group ($M = 148.76$, $SD = 20.20$) had significantly more supernatural beliefs than Post-test Control group ($M = 129.58$, $SD = 19.83$) whilst there was no significant difference between pre-test control and experimental groups. Again, this confirms the hypothesis that watching of occult films help increases one's supernatural belief system.

The second hypothesis which stated that males would be more likely to be influenced on supernatural belief systems after watching an occult film than females was tested using an Independent t test. The results are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Summary of Independent t test of the scores on Supernatural Belief System between the Sexes

Sex	N	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig
Males	16	151.44	11.21	31	.734	.235
Females	17	146.24	26.16			

Results in Table 2 indicate that no significant difference exist between the sexes on supernatural belief system [$t_{(31)} = .734$, $p = ns$ (one-tailed)]. Therefore, the hypothesis that males would be more likely to be influenced on supernatural belief systems after watching an occult film than females was not supported by the data.

Other additional analyses of data revealed no significant difference between educational levels [$F_{(2, 30)} = 2.579$, $p = ns$], religion [$F_{(2, 30)} = .298$, $p = ns$] and ages [$F_{(3, 29)} = .266$, $p = ns$].

Discussion

The study explored the influence of occult films on Africans' supernatural belief system. The main aim of the study was to determine whether watching of occult film helps increase one's supernatural belief system.

The first hypothesis, as confirmed, indicates that watching of occult films help increases one's supernatural belief system. Therefore, occult-related movies obviously influence one's belief system which might lead to its practice taking observational/social learning theory into consideration. This affirms Bandura et al. (1963) classic experiment that demonstrated the power of observational learning with the kids. The other education-related movie did not make any significant impact on the participant's belief system. This further means that films shown on the television stations do have its impact on humans and in this current study, it accounted for the increase in the scores for the experimental group's supernatural belief system as compared to the control group.

It is also noteworthy that with respect to supernatural belief system, there is no significant difference between the educational levels, sexes, religions, and ages which supported the study by Ghanem and Awwad (2010). However, other studies reported otherwise (Anamuah-Mensah, 1998; Ghaffari-Nejad, Pouya, & Kashani, 2003) although it has also been reported that formal education seems to gradually erode the native science beliefs (Anamuah-Mensah, 1998). However, there is the strong belief that education cannot expunge an African's belief and religion as 'Africans have been deemed to be 'notoriously religious' (Mbiti, 2006). This implies that every film produced unto the market has an impact to make. So, an occult film on the market has its respective impact particularly being its influence on our supernatural belief system. This can be seen as a stimulus which sets out practical examples for one to practice. Therefore, one should take care of the type of movie one watches.

Recommendations

It is recommended that parents and guardians should monitor and regulate the kinds of films they allow their wards to watch as it has the potential of affirming their beliefs or ideas. Movie producers, and television stations, as well as other media commissions (regulators) should also be caution about the type of films that is allowed to be aired. They should take into consideration what impact or influence a film produced or shown will have. A careful consideration of the type of film shown or produced will also go a long way to help reduce the incidence of occultism in the country and practicing for that matter.

The author further recommends that future research in this area could use the link found between Africans' supernatural belief system and their behavioural practices to device a therapy that will help curb some of these behaviours. That is, future research in this area can aim at developing therapy or strategies that will succeed in changing some of our negative supernatural beliefs and bad practices.

Conclusion

The study examined the influence of occult films on Africans' supernatural belief system. Results revealed that occult film increase Africans supernatural belief system as compared to the non-occult film. However, there were no significant difference between sexes, educational levels, religions and ages. The finding gives insight the influence on films. Hence, educating parents, guardians, film producers, and the media in general to be cautious in what they watch.

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