

# AUDIENCE PERCEPTION OF THE NIGERIAN HOME VIDEO - FILM

BY

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## INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian home video has emerged as major purveyor of Nigerian culture, and to a large extent the African culture, due to its extensive viewership. Its viewership spreads across nations in Africa, Asia, Europe and America. It is therefore important to examine the actual impacts of its content on its audiences. The audience is the ultimate consumer of video content. This paper therefore examines audience perception of the home video. It aims to further examine the levels of influence, meanings and understanding which the home video can bring to bear on its audiences. The paper also examines whether Nigerian home-video content is meeting the needs and expectations of its viewership.

## AUDIENCE PERCEPTION

The audience is cardinal in any communication endeavour. It is a fact that the value and import of any medium of communication is only to the extent of its impact and influence on the perception of the audience or viewer. Also, examining the potential of film on perception, Hyginus Ekwuazi (1987:95) notes that films are 'canned dreams', and that films are built out of the dreams of a people, by offering them a vicarious experience built out of their dreams. Film provide the people the symbols around which to weave their dreams, the film not only mirrors but cause society to model itself on its mirror image as reflected on the screen, it does not only reflect but influences society.

Emmanuel Oga (2006) notes that the essence of any production is the consumer, that the consumer or the audience is central to production, he notes that from the Greek through the medieval and Brechtian period the audience has been at the core of production, he warns that it will be catastrophic to undermine or underestimate the audience, adding that the end essence of production is consumption by the audience.

This paper therefore takes a look at the crucial aspect of audience perception of Nigerian home video and kinds of influence it has on its mass audience. Assessing the influence of Nigerian films on its audience. Yomi Olugbodi (2007:27-29) observes that a study of the Nigerian video film will show that a lot still has to be done in the area of effectively communicating messages to the audience. He notes that making film is really about communicating with an audience to do this one must understand the semiotics of film language. Film language is very crucial in communication. Film language is defined as a set of collectively generated conventions that enable us to tell stories to each other through the medium. Filmmaking as an art is a conscious manipulation of the audience. By weaving magic and reality, the film idealizes the real and realizes the ideal in the perception of the audience. The structure of the film with its basic mechanism combines to achieve this through photography, editing, mixage, projection, illusion, three dimensionality, and of movement and audiovisual image. To Ekwuazi such synthesis impacts the more forcefully on the audience and by virtue of the communicative interaction intrinsic to the viewing experience. He states that,



*The cinema speaks not to individuals but to multitudes, and does so in circumstances, time, place and surroundings, which are the most apt to arouse unusual enthusiasm for good as well as for bad and to conduct that collective exaltation which, as experience teaches us, may assume the most morbid form.*

Hyginus Ekwuazi (1987:95)

Emeka Nwabueze (2007:40) believes that spoken language too is important and crucial to film perception and influence. He believes that if the language is not indigenous, it should be tailored in such a way that the audience will understand that this is English Language spoken by a non-native English speaker.

Ema Ema (2006) in his article, '**Film in National Development,**' also notes that, unfortunately, most Nigerian films and video producers have often paid too much attention to the superficial and sensational, with information aspirations have always been their pawns and objects of ridicule. To him these producers have endangered public morals for long.

Before we examine the audience, let us ask the important question why does the film maker make his films? Is it with the audience in mind? What informs the psychology of the folklorist in all their ramifications. Audience sensitivities, sensibilities, psychology, preferences, tastes, likes and dislikes, collectively and individually decide the fate of each movie. The unwritten directive to every movie maker is know your audience. It is in this light that Timothy Asobele (2003:4), while examining the influence of Yoruba film on the behaviour of its audience, notes that,

*Ogunde and Yoruba film producers, have always reserved a central place for culture in the economic and technological development. The Yoruba film is the intellectual and artistic expression as well as the harbinger of the Yoruba behaviour patterns, their individual view about themselves, of their society and that of the outside world.*

Contributing on the import of the audience in film making, Eddy Ugbomah (2006), states that the masses or the audience need something fresh, he notes that in Nigeria the people want things that are African, the people want to see films through which they could see themselves, something authentically African, Ugbomah, does not see any reason why Nigerian productions would want to ape Europe and America, when they could more easily produce films which make meaning and are relevant to the people.

## **CULTURE AND PERCEPTION**

The question of cultural parameters is a very key and important one in film interpretation and perception. Mabel Ewrierhoma (2006) notes that as a cultural tool, the video should construct identities, using mono-cultures, cogent identities towards total change. She advocates cultural viewing models that can ensure that we view our films in a way that they can make meaning to us, not to watch Nigerian movies with Euro-Asian or Euro-American cultural bias paradigms, in which case we lose meanings and essence. She notes that viewership disorientation and mal-presentations of symbols, signs and materials, for example wrong use of costume can create a disconnect among audiences who have no basic understanding of African material and colour connotations.

It is therefore, important that producers and directors of the home video take strong cognizance of the proper use of icons, symbols and



materials that can meaningfully connect to the African viewer. The proper use of visual materials and symbols are the very key to the question and essence of interpretation in the development of the Nigerian video, especially on audience perception. It is therefore, incumbent that the video-film in Nigeria must strive to explore the vast potential hitherto untapped in our traditional visual components. These will aid filmic composition and expression, and also assist in providing depths of meaning.

Recognizing the import of culture in perception and communication, Emeka Chikelu (2005), states that, when used creatively T.V and film content can play a major role in bridging gaps of information and in defining cultures and people, in sharing experiences and broadening knowledge. Indian film content, he says, had projected a story line of indigenous Indian culture, Chinese films also successfully used content to define their civilization. In Nigeria, the movie industry can make a tremendous contribution to the shaping of our national image by a conscious effort to present the reality of our rich cultural heritage, our beautiful diversity and creative content.

Charles Igwe (2008:3) believes that the Nigerian home video has created an opportunity for Nigerians to create our own and capture our own stories; it has given us a voice and a power to change perceptions of ourselves, of our surroundings, of our nation, both locally and internationally. Timothy Asobele (2003:2) believes that of all the media of mass communication, the motion picture has the most universal appeal and impact. It can rise above the limitations imposed by language and cultural barriers through its unique power of images, sound heritage from one generation to the next, and in the absence of other cultural activities, film becomes our sole cultural institution, and consequently, our object of

cultural concern. Mass media i.e. including film, are responsible for providing the basis on which groups and classes construct an image of the lives, meanings, practices and values of other groups and classes, providing a selective construction of social knowledge, social imagery, through which we perceive the world, the lived realities of others, and imaginarily construct theirs and ours into intelligible world. Femi Shaka (2007:39) notes that film transfers the dream world or imaginary world into a world of the living, he believes that the imaginary world also is populated by human beings in flesh and blood, their dreams and aspirations are put there before you and you see them. He says that very often you get tied to them and they begin to mould you. To him,

*Film is related to literature, it physicalises the dream world of the writer. It translates it into a livable world that you can see and feel. It takes you into the physical realms of the dream world of the writer and makes you want to emulate the star, because films are built round stars.*

## CONCLUSION

Film can therefore, be used for an effective acculturation of the people, it has been proved to influence the behavioural and thinking of the audience across the world. Nigerian home video can be used to address the crucial question of unity in Nigeria; the home video can stress those symbols that unite the country, like in costumes, songs, icons and symbols.

Many viewers form strong identification with television or motion characters, films assist the individual in structuring their worlds rightly or strongly, effectively or ineffectively, it also creates a psychological accord between audience and screen characters, it emphasizes their relevance to cultural development. The Nigerian home video needs to project historical archetypal characters with strong and positive character images, such



characters as kings, queens and ordinary people who served their societies and made huge self sacrifices for the general good of the people. These characters will serve as role models to our teeming youths and those seeking positive heroes and role model.

Films in Nigeria can be purposefully, positively and constructively utilized to promote ethical values, equality and concretize the impulse of coexistence among the people of Nigeria. The home video is a veritable tool for the current Re-branding project. It can effectively be used to project the positive image of the Nigerian society. It is the most versatile medium by which the identity, image, culture, peculiar sounds, aspirations and achievements of a nation are impressed in the people's mind. The indigenous film especially is the strongest link between Nigeria's culture and her cultural identity.

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