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**PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE CULTURAL RELEVANCE OF BBA II REALITY TV SHOW:  
A STUDY OF COVENANT UNIVERSITY STAFF AND STUDENTS**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study set out to investigate the public perception of the cultural relevance of BBA II reality TV show amongst Covenant University staff and students. A sample size of 300 respondents was chosen for the study. Majority of the respondents, which amount to 105 (50.7%), also perceived BBA II as a contradiction of Nigerian moral values in particular and those of Africa in general. Asides respondents that were not sure of the opinions to give, majority of the respondents represented by 91 (44%) believe the Nigerian should be discouraged from transmitting such a programme unlike the 35 (16.9%) that believe the media should be encouraged to transmit such reality TV shows. The study recommended that the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) be more alert towards checking the activities of the Nigerian media especially the broadcast media so that the media does not fail to recognize and preserve such cultural values.*

**Keywords:** African values, Big Brother Africa (BBA) II, mass media, public perception, Reality TV, Covenant University

**INTRODUCTION**

Reality TV has been defined by the Encarta Dictionaries (2008) thus; "TV show observing real-life situation: television programmes that present real people in live, though often deliberately manufactured, situations and monitor their emotions and behaviour." Wikipedia (2008) defines Reality TV as "a genre of television programming which presents purportedly unscripted dramatic or humorous situations, documents actual events, and features ordinary people instead of professional actors." Reality TV is a category of television programming that has existed in one form or the other since the early years of television, and has been used as a term to describe programmes produced since the year 2000. Reality TV has its roots in two main sources- the human psyche and forms of media (i.e. books).

News, sports and other nonfictional programmes, alongside documentaries are not categorized as "reality shows". Reality television programme formats could be in form of game or quiz shows "which resemble the frantic, often demeaning shows produced in Japan in the 1980s and 1990s (a modern example is *Gaki no tsukai*), to surveillance- or voyeurism-focused productions such as *Big Brother*" (Wikipedia, 2008).

The current Big Brother Africa II reality show is subsumed in the concept of *Big Brother*, a yearly tradition for fans that kicked off in 2000. "Africa's version of the reality TV shows captured the attention of viewers in over 40 countries" (Wikipedia, 2008). *Big Brother Africa*, a popular demand by some, was originally aired in 2003.

The concept behind the *Big Brother Africa 2* reality show is that of transmitting 12 contestants from 12 countries (taking part in a 98-day lock-in), to be filmed on location in South Africa, and produced by Endemol SA. Viewers of the reality TV show are left with the choice of ultimately deciding the winner of the grand prize- US\$100,000. *Big Brother Africa 2* was scheduled for airing on the Digital Satellite Television (DSTV) channels: *M-Net* and *African Magic*, from August 5, 2007 to November 11, 2007. From Tuesday to Friday each week, four 30-minute daily shows and a 30-minute 'Uncut' show were to be featured as planned.

Culture has been defined as the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempt to meet the challenges of living in their environment which gives order and meaning to their aspiration, economical, political, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization through differentiating a people from their neighbour. 'Self-identity usually depends on culture to such a great extent that immersion in a very

different culture—with which a person does not share common ways of life or beliefs—can cause a feeling of confusion and disorientation. Anthropologists refer to this phenomenon as culture shock' (Encarta, 2008). In Nigeria, for instance, some of the scenes transmitted from the Big Brother Africa II reality TV show served as a culture shock to most Nigerian viewers of the programme.

African values can be seen to encompass: common social background; mutual coexistence; inclination to that which is religious or sacrosanct; hospitality; cultural expectations; and responsibility towards elders/constituted authorities. As stated in *African Cultural Values* (n.d):

*The African does not like violence per se. This is because shedding of blood is abhorred.... In this light, unborn children are protected and, abortion is tabooed.... Furthermore, the sacredness associated with life goes to explain the rigidity with which the Africans treat and regard sexual intercourse and the sex organs. In fact sex taboos and the demand for virginity before marriage stems from the fact that Africans believe that: "The blood of virginity is the symbol that life has been preserved, that the spring of life has not already been flowing wastefully, and that both the girl and her relatives have preserved the sanctity of human reproduction". Also, "The sanctity of human reproduction" derives from the sanctity of life in the African concept. This idea of sanctity of life makes it an abomination for anyone, under any circumstances to take his own life. Suicide was never permitted.*

Some of the above instances of African values, in which the Nigerian culture is rooted, would serve as a platform for proper appreciation of the concept of morality as well as provide better direction of focus in this study. Immoral behaviour is basically controlled by social sanctions and internalized self-sanctions. "In many areas of social and moral behaviour the internal standards that serve as the basis for regulating one's conduct have greater stability. People do not change from week to week what they regard as right or wrong or good or bad" (Bandura, 2001). Bandura (ibid) adds that majority of human behaviour is a product of forethought towards occasions and consequences projected into the future.

It is not expected that the traditional media are phased out because of the presence of the social media. The social media are by-products of various forces such as "changing reading habits, advertising budgets, expenses and costs of maintaining and print publication in challenging credit markets, a shift from time spent by consumers in print and television to internet-based experiences, and so on" (Chan, 2009). Chan (ibid) concludes that such forces exact a punishing toll on the traditional media.

Media can help create a feeling of 'belonging', a feeling of being included, of being part of society (Devroe, 2004). Hawkins & Pingree (1982) in Bandura (2001) consider televised influence as "the content people watch rather than the sheer amount of television viewing."

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Message contents in mass media are expected to be abstractions from reality. They are to be microcosms of sorts (Folarin, 2001). Comparing the actual structure of society with the structure portrayed in the message (s) of the media is a way of testing how reflective of society the content (s) of the media is/are. As social institutions, the mass media have been regarded as conveyors of culture. Therefore, the mass media is expected to be sensitive to the cultural needs/demands/values of the environment within which it exercises its jurisdiction.

*Big Brother*, as a new format in factual entertainment, has been subject to much speculation in the press, on TV, the internet, and by the public. As the *Big Brother* (BB) format was quickly adopted by different countries, this speculation focused primarily on the negative: was *Big Brother* voyeuristic? Following such trend, it has become a necessity to discover how BBA II Reality TV show in particular is perceived by a part of the Nigerian audience- the CU academic staff/students- in relation to African moral/cultural values. The major challenge confronted here, therefore, is whether or not CU staff/students have in any way been able to consciously accommodate or positively associate themselves with BBA II message content(s) as portrayed in the mass media. The study would ascertain, based on the overall impression of CU staff/students about BBA II, whether the Reality TV show was able to appeal to a significant number of the study population.



Big Brother Africa II is a well-known example of a reality-competition show and is globally-syndicated. It belongs to the *Elimination/Game shows* type of reality programming in which cast members live together in the same house, with participants removed at regular intervals by either the viewing audience or, in the case of the American version, by the participants themselves. It has been argued by some commentators outside the country that *Big Brother* is popular because it is voyeuristic. Others have argued that *Big Brother* is popular because it is interactive—the audience decides the winners and the losers. There are so many other reasons that would be generated if Nigerians were to be asked about the popularity of *Big Brother Africa*. However, that is not within the purview of the study.

Going by Lizardo (2007):

*'Like the previously dominant mass culture paradigm, the contemporary media imperialism approach attempts to draw an unproblematic line of connection between oligopolistic and Western dominated popular culture industries and homogenizing, dehumanizing and ideological culture consumption practices on the part of dominated peripheral masses. Most research has shown that on the contrary, the consumption of Western cultural products can coexist happily with practices of resistance, opposition and even indifference toward the West on the part of non-Western populations...'*

Religion is an important social factor affecting the Nigerian culture in particular and the African culture in general. "First, religion shapes people's systems of values and beliefs. This is important in defining cultural and social behaviours and norms in a particular place... Nigerians are generally deeply religious people" (*Reality Tv*, n.d). The religious state of Nigerians would not tolerate most Western values i.e. public kissing, bathing, intercourse, etc as portrayed in the just concluded BBA II Reality TV Show aired in some of our Nigerian TV media; such are not actual representations of the African culture as a whole.

Most of us depend upon mass communication products for a large majority of all the information and entertainment we receive during life (Rivers et al, 1980). In continuation, Rivers et al (ibid) see the passing on of society's culture to its members as one of the functions of mass communication. They further establish the fact that the mass media drive various cultural influences on individuals in society via their messages. The media are usually described as the most pervasive and one of the most powerful influences. "Woven throughout our daily lives, media insinuate their messages into our consciousness at every turn" (Wood, 1998).

The mass media are expected to function responsibly; their audience is heterogeneous. The audience of the mass media cannot, however, generate uniform reaction (s) towards a particular message/information because it constitutes individuals with different attitudes, beliefs and backgrounds.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Of critical relevance to this study are the theories of selective processes, cultural norms, commodification of culture and social construction of reality. However, the groundwork of this study is based on the social construction of reality theory.

Essentially, the cultural norms theory holds that a person's behaviour is normally guided by the individual's perception of cultural norms while the mass media, through selective presentation and emphasis, establish audience impressions of such common cultural norms (Real, 1980). The theory charged that, through selective presentation and tendentious emphasis on certain themes, the mass media created the impression among their audiences that such themes were part of the structure or clearly defined cultural norms of society (Folarin, 2005).

The cultural norms theory charged that, through selective presentation and tendentious emphasis on certain themes, the mass media created the impression among their audiences that such themes were part of the structure or clearly defined cultural norms of society (Folarin, ibid). This implies that vulnerable individuals in society are likely to align their behaviour with behavioural patterns (whether good or bad) presented in the media.

A good number of youths in the country delight in affairs that are usually illicit and explicit as well as watching/reading pornographic content. As the Nigerian media transmit programmes that feature obscene images and pornographic characters to the audience, the youths that form part of such audience are likely

reactions. There are, however, typifications (that is mental images that enable people to quickly classify objects and actions and then structure their own actions in response) that are capable of distorting and biasing the experiences of these individuals even though they aid easy interpretation of individual experiences.

Under the social construction of reality theory, news is perceived as a tool used to validate the existing state of affairs in that the professionalism that accompanies it places some limitation on how various life events are looked at. Schlesinger (1988) cited in Devroe (2004) notes that news "is particularly relevant because of its social function: the construction of reality for people who are not present at a news event". International research findings show that the news audience has a high level of trust in news content; particularly in the case of television news in which 'real images' are shown (Mullan, 1997).

Pharo (2007) provides supporting evidence to confirm that what is reality for an individual or group may not necessarily be what is reality for another individual or group since social knowledge determines reality. He notes that "social knowledge itself depends on common typifications peculiar to various cultures." As a result, any behaviour or activity that deviates from established norms within each of the various cultures is labeled unacceptable and would be sanctioned accordingly. As noted in Bandura (2001), "social practices are not only being widely diffused within societies, but ideas, values, and styles of conduct are being modeled worldwide. The electronic media are coming to play an increasingly influential role in transcultural change."

## **METHOD**

Survey was adopted to elicit data for this study. All academic teaching staff plus the students of Covenant University constituted the population of this study. The total number of CU staff amounted to about 300 while that of the students amounted to 6, 815 thus making a sum total of 7115. A sample size of 300 respondents was used to make for effective collation and assessment of the questionnaires within the limited time frame of the study.

The stratified sampling technique was employed in this study. Both groups- CU staff/students- of the sample population were issued questionnaires according to their college classifications- CHD (College of Human Development), CBS (College of Business and Social sciences), and CST (College of Science and Technology). A total of 80 students each were randomly selected from the three colleges stated above amounting to the distribution of 240 questionnaires among the students of CU. While a total of 20 lecturers each were randomly selected from the various colleges amounting to the distribution of the balance of 60 questionnaires.

Questionnaire was used to measure the research data in this study. A 30-item questionnaire was designed containing four (4) open and 26 close-ended questions. Responses of respondents were coded and analyzed through simple percentages. To validate the research instrument, the questionnaire was given to a few experts in the Department of Mass Communication, one of which was the Head of Department, Covenant University, who ensured all questions were easy to comprehend and that comments and corrections effected during review were properly noted.

## **DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

Statistical tables and component bar charts would be used for data presentation while SPSS and simple percentage would be used to analyze data. This study generally seeks to discuss how the Big Brother Africa (BBA) II Reality TV show was conceived in the minds of CU staff/students and it is also an attempt to test if BBA II, as broadcast by the mass media, has any correlation with the cultural values of Nigerians in particular and Africans at large.

Out of the 300 questionnaires distributed among CU staff/students, only 207 copies of the questionnaire were returned. In studying the "Public Perception of the Cultural Value/Relevance of the BBA II Reality TV Show", the selected responses were analyzed using SPSS, statistical tables, simple percentages and bar charts. Discussion follows afterwards.

About 47.3% (98) of the respondents saw the BBA II show as a threat to the African culture; about 31.9% (66) did not see the TV show as a threat to the African culture. 20.8% (43) of the respondents were undecided.

**Table E- Significant Gain from BBA II TV Show**

	Frequency	Percent %
Yes	61	29.5
No	111	53.6
Undecided	35	16.9
Total	207	100

About 29.5% (61) of CU staff and students claimed to have benefitted significantly from the BBA II show; 53.6% (111) did not gain anything significant from the TV show; while 16.9% (35) were undecided.

**3. Do the values portrayed in BBA II Reality TV show correspond with Nigerian cultural values?**

**Table F- BBA II as True Reflection of Nigerian Moral Values**

	Frequency	Percent %
<i>strongly agree</i>	22	10.6
Agree	25	12.1
strongly disagree	81	39.1
Disagree	50	24.2
Undecided	29	14.0
Total	207	100

From the table above, about 10.6% (22) of CU staff and students totally agree that the BBA II TV show is a true reflection of Nigerian moral values; about 12.1% (25) agree to some extent; about 39.1% (81) strongly disagree; about 24.2% (50) disagree to some extent; 14% (29) were undecided.

**Table G- BBA II Contradicts African Moral Values**

	Frequency	Percent %
Yes	105	50.7
No	46	22.2
Undecided	56	27.1
Total	207	100

The respondents that believed the BBA II TV show contradicted African values were almost 50.7% (105); about 22.2% (46) do not see the TV show as a contradiction while those that were undecided were about 27.1% (56).

**Table H- BBA II as Celebration of Pornography/Voyeurism**

	Frequency	Percent %
Yes	107	51.7
No	60	29.0
Undecided	40	19.3
Total	207	100



values. Majority of the respondents, which amount to 105 (50.7%), also perceived BBA II as a contradiction of Nigerian moral values in particular and those of Africa in general. 51.7% (107) considered BBA II TV show as a celebration of pornography/voyeurism though 29% (60) did not see it that way.

#### **Research Question Four:**

What impression (negative/positive) do the CU staff and students have on the BBA II Reality TV show?

This question was answered in tables I, J and K. Besides respondents that were not sure of the opinions to give, only 57 (27.5%) see BBA II as true reality whereas a total of 76 (36.7%) do not view programmes like BBA II as a reflection of true reality. In the same vein, majority of the respondents represented by 91 (44%) believe the Nigerian should be discouraged from transmitting such a programme unlike the 35 (16.9%) that believe the media should be encouraged to transmit such reality TV shows. The number of respondents in support of the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) banning reality TV shows like the Big Brother Africa (BBA) II from being transmitted by the Nigerian media is 107 (51.7%) and this outweighs the 73 (35.3%) that are not in support. It is not surprising that 122 (58.9%) respondents never liked BBA II while a lesser number claimed to like the reality TV show.

#### **Interview Transcriptions of the Cultural Relevance of BBA II by Selected Nigerians**

There are different shades of opinion to this issue of concern; "the cultural value/relevance of BBA II to the Nigerian culture. According to Omolade (2007) the exploits of the housemates in BBA II Reality TV show have been labelled, by many, as obscene and falling short of what it is expected to achieve — promoting African culture and values. The sample of divergent views (i.e. opinions/comments) made by selected Nigerians, as presented by Omolade (2007) in an online version of the Nigerian Tribune, to corroborate this fact are as follows:

*I just need to say this that most Africans are pretenders when it comes to the matter of morality. Take the case of Big Brother Africa II for instance, they are the one to quickly condemn the shower hour and also the first to watch it with a great attention. MNET is at liberty to show the content of Big Brother Africa as long as the content does not violates the age restrictions. The TV station put the age restrictions on the screen and this shows that certain category of people should be restricted. TV is meant to entertain and relax from a hard day's job and it goes to show that what is a one man's meat is another man's poison. What some people are quick to condemn is another person's fantasy. Truth is, if the content of Big Brother Africa II is too much to bear for those who are complaining, let them just switch to other channels or better still block the channel. Enough of shifting blame to other places for what we ourselves have absolute control over. - Twins Taiye*

*The show should be banned and not be encouraged in our society. They are exposing the youngsters to prostitution, which is against the African culture. 'Big Brother Africa' show is not decent at all in all ramifications. Transmitting live what ought to be private is not decent. They should prove themselves sensible to the viewers across the African countries by simply relaying to the viewers how the African culture and values, which they claim to protect, should be protected and not spoiling the age long-built image of Africa. And to the Directors of the TV show, I will advise them to look for prostitutes that befit the scene of nudity when it is to be acted rather than degrading the dignity of our youngsters.*

**Doyinsola Daramola, UNILORIN.**

*Big Brother Africa is a good concept, aimed at promoting African Unity by bringing people from different African countries, all fighting the same goal. But the Directors of the show lack the approach to this concept, which has given it another meaning to what the masses, who are to be entertained and enlightened by it, expected. Some viewers have been angered by the show for housemates' numerous engagements in illicit and outrageous acts, which are against African culture and the societal values and norms. I want to suggest that the show should be stopped; pending the time a reform will take place. —Abosede Daudu, Self employed.*

*The show is against the will of God and should be totally scrapped. The show was purportedly meant to entertain people and to promote African culture, but had been turned into an avenue of exposing youngsters to bad and outrageous*



*state, where the intention is to seek mildly pleasant stimuli, and past experience with the same or similar content becomes a strong determinant.*

The recipient of a message is believed to play a very active role in the assigning of meaning to that particular message. Meaning is said to be something 'invented,' 'assigned,' 'given,' rather than something 'received'. 'Our experience of reality 'is an ongoing, social construction, not something that is only sent, delivered, or otherwise transmitted to a docile public (Baran & Davis, 2003).

### CONCLUSION/ RECOMMENDATION

From the study data presented and analyzed previously it is obvious that the perception of CU staff/students on BBA II is not favourable in any way. The BBA II Reality TV show is not just negatively perceived by the CU staff/students but also considered as irrelevant to the Nigerian cultural values in particular and the African cultural values in general.

Based on findings and observations in this study, which singled out the television as the dominant source of exposure to BBA II among CU staff/students, it would be a laudable effort by regulatory bodies in the country such as the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) to be more aggressive in checkmating the activities of the Nigerian electronic media especially the television stations. The NBC should not hesitate to censor each programme item scheduled for transmission in both private and government owned electronic media in this country.

The Nigerian electronic media, also, should do their homework well by carrying out a pilot study (if possible) to know the actual demands of the individuals who happen to be their target audience and ensure that whatever they transmit to such target audience is considered acceptable in society and significantly useful at that point in time. In this light, the Nigerian electronic media are encouraged to consciously imbibe ethical principles guiding the journalism profession that are tenable with the cultural expectations of the African society and avoid generating for themselves a bad public reputation in any form. The Nigerian mass media, at large, should uphold the cultural heritage of the Nigerian society and help to further transmit our cultural values in positive light via their programmes and messages contents.

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