



Viewers' Perception of the Psychological Effect of Nudity in *Big Brother Naija* Reality Television Show in Calabar South, Cross Rivers State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Background: Reality television has become a dominant feature of contemporary media culture in Nigeria, with Big Brother Naija (BBN) ranking among the most widely viewed programmes. Its frequent portrayal of nudity and sexually suggestive content has generated intense public and academic debates concerning morality, cultural values and audience perception, particularly within local communities.

Objective: This study examined audience perception of the portrayal of nudity in the Big Brother Naija reality television show among residents of Calabar South. Specifically, it sought to identify the reasons for viewership of the programme and to ascertain how viewers in the study area perceive nude content in the show.

Method: The study adopted a survey research design. 34 BBN viewers residing in Calabar-South were sampled using purposive sampling technique. The participants were selected from the Calabar South local government area. Data were collected using an interview while analysis was done thematically.

Results: Findings revealed that many residents watch Big Brother Naija primarily for entertainment, excitement and social interaction. The study further found that audiences perceive the programme as promoting nudity and indecent dressing, which they believe contradict traditional African values of morality and decency. However, some respondents viewed nudity as a strategic element used to attract viewers, enhance brand promotion and sustain audience patronage.

Conclusion: The study concludes that audience opinions on the portrayal of nudity in Big Brother Naija are divided among residents of Calabar South. While some perceive the content as morally offensive, others regard it as a commercial and entertainment-driven strategy that enhances the programme's popularity and relevance.

Unique Contribution: This study contributes to media and communication scholarship by providing community-specific, audience-centred insights into how nudity in reality television is interpreted within a culturally sensitive Nigerian context, an area that has received limited empirical attention.

Key Recommendation: The study recommends that viewers who find the programme offensive should exercise selective exposure by avoiding the channel, while regulatory bodies and media producers should strengthen content advisory mechanisms to guide audience choices, given the commercial nature of the programme.

Keywords: Audience perception, big brother naija, nudity, reality television, media influence.



INTRODUCTION

Big Brother Naija television programme is among the most popular reality programmes in Nigeria and Africa at large. The study draws the attention of the public to examine and assess the unscripted media contents influence on the behaviour of the audience. Media influence has gathered concern because audience are likely to emulate the behaviour of the participants, in their speech, dressing, gestures, relationship lifestyle, alcoholic lifestyle and their interaction with humans (Nwafor, & Ezike, 2015). This is to say that *BBN* reality show has influenced social development of viewers, especially young audience. This issue of media influence on viewers has brought in the development of different communication theories. These communication theories were propounded to show the relationship and the link between media content and how it affects the lives of the viewers. According to O'Rork (2006), "television viewers in most cases emulate the behaviour and exhibition they watch or see in the media to burst their lifestyle in the society. To him, "audience members lifestyle is influenced by attitude of the media personalities which they follow, viewers try to emulate the same lifestyle of their favourite media personality or fans" (p. 72).

Many Nigerians expect the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) to ban the viewership of certain reality shows in Nigeria because of the unscripted nature of the programme, which projects nudity and sexual behaviours that can directly affect young people in the society. Reality television is unscripted programmes that allow participants to live their life on media as it is in the real world (Allen, 2017). According to Iyorza (2021), reality television of recent, has generated a lot of debate since the introduction of *BNN* into reality programmes. This could be because some people in Nigeria are against live display of unscripted content on television while some others are for it. The history of reality television in Nigeria started from *Big Brother Africa* reality show where many Nigerians were part of the event. It is through this programme that *Big Brother Naija* came into existence. Today, the programme is the widest celebrated life performance in Nigeria and Africa because of the economic and political relevance that accompany housemates after the three months competition in the *Big Brother* House in Lagos.

The first season of the programme was launched as 'Big Brother Nigeria' on 5th March, 2006, and it took place for a period of ninety-one days. This season had 12 housemates in attendance at first. Two housemates however joined the league in the course of the competition. The second edition of the programme started on 22nd January 2018, while the 2021 edition held between 24th July and 3rd October 2021. DSTV and GOTV hosted the programme on satellites platforms (Folayan, Ajibade, Adedoyin, Onayinka & Folayan, 2019).

Housemates go home with several gifts and money to get them started in the world of work, while some of the housemates get contracts and turn to be brand ambassadors for many companies in the society. Even for the fact that the show projects some nude contents, some persons still glorify the programme because it has come to be the only programme that gives life to young people and seeks youth development since the country has neglected youths in leadership and in other sensitive positions in the society.



Multi Choice is the media organiser of the show and it had set aside ninety million naira as grand cash prize. The host also provided as part of other prizes, thirty-million-naira cash prize- cash in an Abeg digital wallet and bitcoins courtesy of Patricia for those who won the season's sixth edition. As related by the programme organisers, there were other items of prizes and these included a two-bedroom apartment made available through the auspices of business men and women in Nigeria. While some present gifts in vehicle, others presented houses to the housemates and leisure trip to countries of their choice. Folayan, et al opine that such gifts drive youths into the programme because it is a path to greatness and prosperity despite its dysfunctions and criticisms in the society (3).

Contemporary discourse surrounding reality television has birthed polarized perspectives among communication scholars: scholars who appreciate the positive effects and those who criticize the medium for its negative impact on the audience. In the words of Iyorza, "the television medium, like other electronic media of communication, has been at the receiving end of the strongest criticism. This is owing to the dysfunctional role played by television in its attempt to share meaning with its audience members, because every communication is expected to either appeal to the emotions of the viewers or entertain, inform and educate them with issues around their environments." (p. 2). Communicators generally appreciate television's role to inform, to interpret news and to entertain the audience while transmitting social and cultural values and persuading the audience in adverts. Rabi (2017), however throws diatribes at the medium for its dysfunctional roles in encouraging and persuading audience members to adapt to a particular opinion. He also cast aspersions at it for promoting homogenisation of culture, debasement of sexuality, manipulation or falsification of reality (p. 201).

No doubt, TV programme is one of the oldest media of mass media that transmits both audio-visual messages to viewers. It instructs people to learn easily when they see transmitted images. The images when seen remain permanently in the viewers' mind more than auditory cues. Based on this, some scholars have supported the continuous censorship of media contents. This is why the government of Nigeria established "National Broadcasting Commission" (NBC) and assigned them with the responsibility to rate and censor media content especially unscripted media works and ensure such meet the acceptable standard and it promotes indigenous contents. Iyorza gives more exposition on the functionalities of the show and I quote:

The product of every television programme is to entertain, inform and educate the audience and possibly satisfy the needs of the viewers. However, it is difficult to satisfy the viewing needs of heterogeneous audience members. It is believed that, environment constitutes to the behaviour of an individual, which means people from different background may not perceive information or give interpretation to information the same way those from the same cultural backgrounds do. In addition, what a particular audience of a reality TV show may consider disgusting and bad, others from a different locality may appreciate it and accept it as part of their lifestyle. So, it becomes too difficult to satisfy all the viewers of the programme with what they expect of the show. The programme is a global programme with people viewing it from different tribes and ethnic group we do not expect every audience member to react in the same manner. (Iyorza, 2021, p.73).



Irrespective of all these, Nigerian youths seem to develop strong obsession with reality show of *Big Brother Naija*. Juvenile folks and young ones express strong wishes to follow the people who are recognized and do what they do in order to be noticed; sometimes, they focus on the misdemeanour of the housemates and strive to be part of it. To achieve economic goals and means of livelihood, parents and guardians are always out for work; their absence at home give children and adolescents at the allowance to watch unscripted contents without appropriate guidance. Albeit most of these reality shows have ratings on them, little or no attention is paid to them, as they are readily available for viewing on satellite television or even the internet:

Housemates who should entertain and educate their audience are now showing explicit sexual contents and nudity, many Nigerians are seeking for the ban of the programme because of the uncontrolled nudity portrayal by nudity, some housemates expose their private parts and attempt sexual intercourse on screen. Many Nigerians still fasten their seatbelts on the nudity content of the reality TV show as the basic reason people patronize the show, even though the programme entertain viewers, advertise products, create fame for housemates, give cash donation to housemates and expand the economy of the house mates and the organiser (Iyorza p.70).

In line with the above position, it is never a standard of an African man or woman to expose his/her body in public spaces. In fact, it is an abominable act for people to expose their bodies publicly. However, civilization and media imperialism have overshadowed Nigerian cultural values while popular culture has become a norm in today's society.

Many people in the society today are obsessed with what they do. The impact of mass media as an avenue that enables people to promote, develop and spread their contents to the entire world can never be undermined (Nwafor, & Ezike, 2015). The advent of the Internet has aided to improve the effectiveness of the media. Mass media channels are the fastest means of disseminating information to heterogeneous audience through social media, the Internet or other forms. Arguably, information dissemination has become very simple and easy since the inception of mass media.

Although a considerable body of literature exists on reality television and media influence, most scholarly investigations have largely examined the phenomenon from a generalised or macro perspective. Existing studies have predominantly focused on issues such as moral decline, youth delinquency, media effects theory, westernisation of culture, and the economic or entertainment value of reality television programmes such as *Big Brother Naija*. Several scholars have explored audience exposure, gratification, and behavioural imitation using broad national samples or urban centres such as Lagos, Abuja and other metropolitan cities. While these studies provide valuable insights into the general influence of reality television, they often treat viewers as a homogeneous group and fail to sufficiently account for localised viewers' perceptions, particularly with respect to culturally sensitive issues such as nudity. Consequently, there exists a noticeable gap in the literature concerning viewers' perception of nudity in *Big Brother Naija* within specific Nigerian communities, especially in less-studied locations such as Calabar-South.



This study seeks to fill the identified academic lacuna by extending existing scholarship beyond dominant locations, approaches and thematic emphases, thereby contributing context-specific empirical evidence to the discourse on reality television and media influence in Nigeria.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following objectives were what this work sets out to achieve:

1. To find out the level of exposure to nude scenes in BBN among viewers in Calabar-South
2. To investigate the gratifications derived from viewership of *BNN TV* programme by viewers in Calabar South;
3. To examine the perception of Calabar South viewers on nude content in the *Big Brother Naija* TV show

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was guided by the perception theory of mass communication. The theory of perception looks at peoples' reactions to situations from personal view and understanding. The theory was propounded and developed by Han Robert Jamus in 1982 while Stuart Hall in 1982 applied it to a media discourse and Susan Bennet in 1990 applied it to a theatrical performance. It was excellent and acceptable by the audience and theatre scholars. The position of the theory is that people understand situations differently based on their cultural backgrounds and life experiences. In relating the perception theory to the study on *Big Brother Naija* reality show and audience perception of the nudity contents, it shows that not everyone sees what is being shown on the screen or the attitude of housemates as example of nudity. Viewers have their own understanding and decisions on the issues.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study adopted a survey research design. The population of the study comprised all viewers of the *Big Brother Naija* (BBN) reality television programme residing in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State. A sample size of 34 respondents was drawn from the population using purposive sampling method to ensure fair representation of BBN viewers in the study area. Data were collected using an interview guide as the main instrument for data collection. The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by experts in mass communication to ensure its appropriateness and relevance to the study objectives. The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot test conducted among 10 BBN viewers outside the study area, and the result showed that the instrument was reliable for the study. Data generated from the interviews were analysed in themes.

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This phase of the study is a discussion of the findings of the study in relation to the research questions that were formulated by the researchers.

Level of Exposure to Nude Scenes in Big Brother Naija among Viewers in Calabar South

Findings from the interview sessions revealed that viewers in Calabar South are highly exposed to nude scenes in the *Big Brother Naija* (BBN) reality show. Respondents indicated that many residents, particularly students, frequently watch the programme because of their preference for contemporary media entertainment. One interviewee noted that a major attraction of the show is



its obscene and nude content, which draws viewers and sustains their interest (Mpkouto, interview, 2023). This suggests that nudity plays a significant role in influencing viewership patterns among BBN audiences in Calabar South. This finding supports existing studies which argue that nudity in television content attracts audience attention. Klug and Vigar-Ellis (2012) affirm that nude and sexually suggestive scenes increase audience curiosity and viewership. Similarly, Iyorza (2021) observed that some viewers justify their exposure to such content by arguing that the programme is rated 18+ and that viewing is a matter of personal choice. The study further observed that most viewers fall within the 18–35 age bracket and are particularly drawn to party scenes characterised by sexual displays and nudity. While some respondents view this exposure as mere entertainment, others believe it encourages indecent dressing among youths. This variation in perception aligns with perceptual theory, which holds that audiences interpret media content differently based on individual and social factor.

Viewership of *BNN* TV programme by viewers in Calabar South

Findings collected from the respondents through interview session also confirmed that Calabar South residents love watching the show because the area is predominantly dominated by students who subscribe to new media entertainment viewership tendencies. Most of these residents who love watching the show are drawn by the obscene contents in it. (Mpkouto, interview 2023). This is to say that Calabar South audience's drive for watching *BBNaija* is the nudity in the production and this attracts the audience to the production. This is in support of what an idea that was reviewed in the literature.

Klug and Vigar-Ellis (2012) affirmed that the use of nudity in television move draw attention of the audience members especially the opposite sex (20). The view here is that when naked pictures are televised, it moves audience to see what is on-going. Now, the organisers of BBN have gotten feedback from the masses that nude content is bad, yet they allow it because it moves audience to watch the show because during their leisure time. And many of these audience members do not see anything wrong with the nude because it gives them joy and happiness. This is in line with the finding of Iyorza (2021) that some of the respondent agree that, the programme is rated 18 and whosoever that find the programme disgusting should not tune in to the channels that project the programme. This is to say that nudity is perceived differently, just as the perceptive theory which anchored this work stated that people see things differently from their own point of analysis and if someone wants to judge, he or she may be wrong.

The researcher observed that majority of the viewers of *Big Brother Naija* show are the young population from age (18-35). This group of persons perceive *BBNaija* from the nude perspective and always subscribe to watch the evening party that has fun, sexual exhibition and nudity. This therefore indicates that some of the residents are lover of the *BNN* reality show, as they are drawn to it for entertainment. However, some argued that the show promotes nudity and indecent dressing among young people in Calabar South - a position that is captured by young people as observed who ardent viewers of the programme are.



Perception of Calabar South viewers on nude content in the *Big Brother Naija* TV show

Despite the nude social life in the programme, some of the respondents disagreed. This is in connection with a response from Nsikak, one of the respondents whose organization works with young people in Calabar South. She noted thus:

The consecutive viewers see nudity as portrayed on the show as immoral and un-African. While the other side see it as entertainment value or westernization. Personally, with my cultural and religious inclination, nudity to me, especially among ladies, portrays them as sex purveyors, a shameful act that can be avoided. Nudity does not add value to anyone especially here in Nigeria but rather will allow the society to watch you with disdain. For conservative viewers, *BBNaija* reality show portrays nudity. What is the moral justification for two adults walking naked in glare of everyone on reality show without any iota of shame? This makes the society wonder if morality has been eaten up by dogs (Nsikak interview, 2025).

Another respondent, Amarachi, who lives in Calabar South noted that:

I would say the audience couldn't care less. Maybe the touts may want to claim like that is not something they had appreciated, and they might even go as far as insulting these TV personalities for the nude displays, but in the actual sense, they really couldn't care less. From my own point of view, I do not classify it as anything too serious either. It's a reality show for a reason. People are living their everyday lives, only this time, with a bunch of cameras. Off camera, we still go to clubs, pools, beaches, etc and we dress to suit the occasion. We even take pictures for the gram! So why should I judge someone doing the same thing I do because they're in front of cameras? (Amarachi interview, 2025).

The attitude corroborates the theory of perception used in this study which looks at peoples' reactions to situations from personal view and understanding. The theory was propounded and developed by Han Robert Jamus in 1982 while Stuart Hall in 1982 applied it to a media discourse and Susan Bennet in 1990 applied it to a theatrical performance and was excellent and acceptable by the audience and media scholars. The position of the theory is that people have divergent views and believe what they see especially on the media, people understand situations differently based on their cultural backgrounds and life experiences.

In relating the perception theory to this study, the reaction of the respondents shows that nudity is viewed differently by the respondents while some enjoyed it, others do not. While some are influenced positively by it, others are influenced negatively. While some see it as beautiful, trending and normal part of societal life, others see it as aberrant, abominable, reprehensible or morally unacceptable. This decision of dislike can generate because of individual, cultural, religious differences in background and environment in which one grows up. For instance, a girl who visits club every weekend may see nothing wrong in the nudity but rather develop interest in viewing nude and other salacious aspects of social life; meanwhile a girl who is restricted to church life and home activities may not get same percentage of interest in such social activities like the former. Thus, people perceive situations differently based on their culture and



environment which define their disposition, inclinations and personality traits in the society. Mkpoutu, confirmed this in an interview and noted thus:

Yes, it projects and adds fame to the housemates, because unfortunately that is the content the youths of today are hungry for. So the more a housemate shows nudity, the more popular the house mate becomes during the course of the show and even after. Some housemates even adopt nudity as strategy in the show to gain popularity and remain relevant to the viewers in the show (Mkpoutu, interview, 2025)

The discourse of perception differs, as many see things differently from the way others see it. There is no specific conclusion on the reactions of the respondents to condemn the attitude of the housemates; rather some are okay with it while some dislike it. However, the percentage of the non-admirers surpasses the others. This further takes the discussion to the Perception Theory applied in the study. However, it is important to note that the survey also found that 41.2% of respondents agreed that the nude content of *Big Brother Naija* show strengthens audience patronage of the programme. This highlights the need for media producers to consider the ethical implications of some qualities including nudity in their content while also considering the impact it has on the audience and their patronage.

CONCLUSION

Based on the information provided, it is clear that opinions about the portrayal of nudity in *Big Brother Naija* reality show are divergent and divided among residents in Calabar South. The presence of nudity on national TV is too explicit and could be regulated to edify the mature viewers and to provide valuable insight into issues surrounding gender roles and body positivity in the society. Interestingly, many Calabar South residents find public displays of intimacy offensive and believe it is a bad influence on young people. It is, however, important to note that these opinions stem from a variety of cultural and religious beliefs and values. The *Big Brother Naija* reality show has been seen as an affront to some cultural and religious beliefs, damaging to young people's mental health and also seen as a bad influence on young minds who may replicate such behaviours due to its widespread coverage on television.

Television producers and broadcasters have not considered these different perspectives and have not striven for a balance that would not only entertain the audience but also be respectful of the cultural and religious beliefs of the viewers. Hence, until there is a consensus among viewers, this topic will continue to be contentious in Nigeria's television landscape. This study also concludes that the presence of nudity on national TV is too explicit and should not be allowed because of the negative influence exerted by the housemates, as they tend to dress indecently as to reflect the lifestyle of their role model in *Big Brother Naija*.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of these findings, this study makes the following recommendations:

- i. *Big Brother Naija* should improve on the entertainment quality and contents of the programme in order to make it more engaging for the Calabar South audience and by extension, the Nigerian audience in general. In this regard, the programme hosts should consider the incorporation of traditional, indigenous and theatrical performance elements such as storytelling, poetry, dance, and pantomimic arts into the programme to enhance its entertainment values and aesthetics.
- ii. The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) should align with the hosts of the *Big Brother Naija* show and lobby for the infusion of sanity in the programme while pressurising them against projection of obscene materials, particularly the nudity portrayals and expressions of the housemates, which adore sexual immorality, impurity and indecency. Also, there should be censorship on the contents of the programme to ensure that nudity and indecent dressing are reduced to an acceptable level for public viewership. The programmes and activities in the show need to be attuned to promote morality and moral values in the society rather than promoting nudity and indecent dressing.
- iii. The *Big Brother Naija* reality TV show should bring in programmes and activities that encourage positive values for the Calabar South and Nigerian audiences. Housemates should be orientated to fashion their lifestyles in manners that make them positive role models rather than negative influences on the viewers.

Ethical clearance

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions

David and Linus conceived the study, including the design, Helen and Lawrencina collated the data, and Edadi and Emuru handled the analysis and interpretation. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft, and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.



Availability of data and materials

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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