



# Reality Television, African Identities and the Big Brother Africa show: An Experiential Inquest

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined how Big Brother Africa has promoted the unique elements of African identities and multicultural images of Africa. This study was anchored on the cultivation theory to explain the nature and influence of Big Brother Africa as a reality TV show. The survey research method was adopted and the questionnaire served as an instrument of data collection. The results indicated that 90% of the respondents had watched BBA Hotshot, while more than 87 % of the respondents indicated that they had watched past editions of BBA. Also, the result indicated that more than 83% believed that BBA promoted African identities in the area of problem solving purposes. This study recommended that there was a need for more reality television shows that promote the indigenous languages and communal living among individuals.

**Keywords:** Africa, Big Brother Africa, Identities and Reality TV

## INTRODUCTION

Across the globe, Reality TV has defined and dominated the media landscape. Scholars agree that Reality TV has defined media consumerism by providing real-time entrainment that reflects current realities (Andrejevic, 2004; Stober, 2006). Importantly, Reality TV is characterized by non-professional actors, unscripted dialogue, surveillance footage, hand-held cameras and real time display of events in front of the camera (Hill 2005). For example, Dragon's Den is a reality TV programme that depicts how successful entrepreneurs serve as venture capitalists for start-ups and budding entrepreneurs.

In the African continent, Big Brother Africa serves as the most popular reality television show. Scholars agree that Big Brother Africa is the most watched indigenous reality TV show, with more than 30 million viewers in the African continent (Chikafa & Mateveke, 2012; Igbinoba, 2014; Nwafor & Onyekachi, 2015). Scholars such as (Chikafa & Mateveke, 2012) observed that there have been several editions of Big Brother Africa, such as Big Brother Africa (Revolution), Big Brother Africa (All Stars), Big Brother Africa (Amplified) and Big Brother Africa (Hot Shot).

Interestingly, there have been several studies on the influence and nature of Big Brother Africa in the African continent. Some studies explored the influence of Big Brother Africa on the behavior of young Africans (Igbinoba, 2014; Nwafor & Onyekachi, 2015), while other studies have examined the nature and adaptation of the Big Brother Africa reality show (Oloka-Onyango, 2005; Lengnan, 2013; Sarah, 2017). However, there are few empirical researches that examined the potential role of Big Brother Africa for promoting elements of African identities. In essence, there is a need to examine how Big Brother Africa has defined African identities in the African continent. This is in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), which recognizes that cultures are significant enablers of sustainable development initiatives. This study, therefore, examined how Big Brother Africa has promoted the unique elements of African identities. Furthermore, this study examined the attitude towards the multicultural images promoted on BBA, using BBA Hot shop as a study example.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

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The objectives of the study were to:

1. Determine the level of viewership of BBA Hot shop
2. Examine the recurring elements of African identities promoted in the Reality TV
3. Evaluate the attitude towards African identities projected in the Reality TV;

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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1. What is the level of viewership of BBA Hot shop?
2. What is the recurring element of African identities promoted in the Reality TV?
3. What is the attitude towards African identities projected in the Reality TV

## HYPOTHESES

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Hypothesis One: There is a significant relationship between the level of viewership and attitude towards the multicultural images promoted on BBA.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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This study was anchored on the cultivation theory to explain the influence of reality television on individuals in most modern societies. This theory was propounded by George Gerbner in the 1960s. According to Vinney (2019), "this theory is most frequently applied to television viewing and suggests that frequent television viewers' perceptions of the real world become reflective of the most common messages advanced by fictional television". In essence, the theory stipulates that the frequency of viewership of television among individuals will influence their judgment on issues of social reality. Thus, the more people watch television, the more likely their worldview will be of television images.

This theory expounds television as a powerful agent of socialization compared to other channels of communication. Television can shape the perceptions of individuals towards perennial issues. The thrust of the cultivation theory emphasize that the power of television is linked to frequent viewership of the individual in any modern society.

As it relates to this study, reality television can serve as a purveyor of multicultural images and elements of African identities. Reality TV shows such as Big Brother Africa can integrate elements of African identities and project these identities to African audience. Invariably, due to the frequent viewership by the audience, they are likely to adopt these African identities.

## AFRICAN IDENTITIES

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African identities are major components that describe the principle of being among Africans. Scholars agree that there are certain identities that describe the behavior of Africans; these identities describe the traditions, values, conventions and beliefs of Africans in the African continent and across the globe (Chikafa & Mateveke, 2012; Djinnit, 2018; Kanu, 2013; Lengnan, 2013; Middleton, 2010; Wong, 2016).

Scholars such as Kanu (2013), describe African identities in six major perspectives. These perspectives are: (a) African black civilization- Africa contributed to the civilisation of the world; (b) African black backwardness- black Africans are associated with underdevelopment; (c) Africa color based identity- African identities are linked to the pigments of the skin; (d) African pragmatic recuperated identity – African identities are linked with the idea of pan-Africanism; (e) African community based identity- African identities are linked to communal living; (f) African geo-numeric identity- African identities are interlinked with the geography of the African continent. From these interjections, african identities can be defined by the history, location, ideologies and traditions of Africans.

In the same vein, Scholars such as Mazrui (1986) and Chikafa and Mateveke, (2012), classified African identities according to three unique elements. These elements of African identities are: (a) Christian Africa- this element describe african identities having similar values with the Christian religion (b) Islamic Africa- this element describe african identities having similar values with the religion of Islam; (c) Traditional Africa- this element describe african identities linked to the ancestral values and tradition of Africa. In essence, african identities are interlinked with religion, which influences the beliefs, values and traditions of Africans.

Similarly, scholars agree that african identities can be clearly understood by the societal roles and expectations of an individual in an African society (Chikafa & Mateveke, 2012; Djinnit, 2018; Wong, 2016). Chikafa and Mateveke, (2012) pointed out that an ideal African woman should have sexually restrained behaviour i.e. she is not expected to have sexual relations with different men, but remain loyal and sexually faithful to her husband. Also, among the Ibo community in Nigeria, a young man is expected to be the protector of his family, while an elder is expected to be the custodian of the customs and traditions of the community.

## **BIG BROTHER AFRICA**

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Big Brother Africa is an adaptation of the Reality TV show Big Brother which originated from Netherland. Big Brother is an allusion to George Orwell's book "Nineteen eighty four" which depicts a dictatorial society in which an invisible eye watches the actions of everybody in the society in order to ensure conformity. Nwafor (2015, p. 4) observed that there are several versions of Big Brother such as "Celebrity Big Brother for Netherland and Teen Big Brother for Britain. Others include: Big Brother Germany, Big Brother Switzerland, Big Brother Sweden, Big Brother Italy, and Big Brother Africa, among others."

Scholars agree that Big Brother Africa was premiered on Sunday May 25, 2003, featuring 12 housemates from 12 different African countries (Chikafa & Mateveke, 2012; Nwafor, 2015). It ended on September 7 of the same year, lasting 106 days. This was a major milestone as the iconic Big Brother TV show worldwide will be created using participants of different nationalities from one continent. So far, Big Brother Africa has had 8 seasons and is presently on the ninth season. The Big Brother House is Located and produced in South Africa. The intent of the show is to have housemates from different parts of Africa (initially 12 countries but later increased to 14 in the fourth season) live together in a house for nothing less than 3 months.

The production of the BBA reality TV ensures that cameras and microphones are put in place in the house which serves as the invisible eye or "Big Brother". Contestants are usually isolated and cut off from reality and strive to avoid eviction from the house by the viewers. Big Brother Africa is a constructed reality. The house they live, the circumstances in which they live and the concept of an invisible eye dictating their actions is unreal. However, the events that go on in the house are to an extent real, in the sense that, the behavior or reaction of housemates is not rehearsed, scripted or pre planned. Concurring with the stance of the authenticity of Reality TV shows by Winston (1995), the realism of Big Brother Africa is a function of audience perception. The audience decides who they believe is putting up a show for the sake of the cameras and the prize and who they believe is being real irrespective of the cameras.

Interestingly, there have been several studies on the influence of the Big Brother Africa in the African continent. For example, Igbinoba (2014) examined the perception of Nigerians towards the cultural relevance of Big Brother Africa. This study found that a significant number of Nigerians were ardent viewers of the reality TV show. The study also indicated that some activities done in BBA were contrary with the cultural values of Nigeria. In a related study, Nwafor and Onyekachi (2015) examined how Big Brother Africa influenced young Nigerians, using Ebonyi State University undergraduates as a study example. The study found that BBA had a unique influence on the attitude and behavior of young Nigerians. The study indicated that young Nigerian learnt co-habitation skills as well as sex education issues. Similarly, Sarah (2017) investigated the adaptations of the Big Brother Africa Reality Show in Africa. The study maintained that the adaptation of the reality TV show in the African continent has significantly increased the involvements, engagements and participation of the African youths towards local and global issues.

## METHOD

Survey method was adopted to achieve the study objectives. This method was suitable for the study because it captured the views and perception of people on how they feel about the nature of Big Brother Africa reality show. Survey is an excellent method for measuring behaviour in a large population. The population for this study was young Nigerians, who have watched several episodes of Big Brother Africa Hotshot. The sample size of 300 is considered appropriate because, according to Wimmer and Dominick (2000), a sample size of 300 is a good sample for a population more than 100,000. The research instrument employed was the online questionnaire.

The purposive sampling technique was used to select the respondents for this study. the criteria used to select the respondents were: (1) the respondents had watched Brother Hotshot (b) the respondents were followers of Big brother Africa facebook pages (3) the respondents had voted for one or more contestants of Big Brother Africa hotshot.

The study adopted both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics to analyze the data. The descriptive statistics were univariate and bivariate analysis, while the inferential statistics was correlation analysis. The bivariate analysis was used to analyze data on viewership patterns and attitude towards BBA hotshop, while the correlation analysis was used to test a hypothesis on the correlation of the level of viewership and attitude towards the multicultural images promoted on BBA. Furthermore, Spearman correlation test was used to ascertain the correlation between the variables, while Somer D measure was used to ascertain the strength of correlation between variables.

## RESULT

This data-based study analyzed how Big Brother Africa program influenced African identities. This study had 290 data entries of an online questionnaire, which represents an attrition rate for this study was less than 4%.

**Table 1** shows that almost 90% of the respondents had watched BBA episodes of Hotshot, while more than 87 % of the respondents indicated that they had watched previous editions of BBA.

**Table 1.** Viewership of Reality TV

Response	I have watched BBA episodes of Hotshot	I have watched past editions of BBA
Very large Extent	77.6%	78.0%
Large Extent	12.2%	9.8%
Rarely	10.2%	12.2%
Never	0%	0
Total	100% n=290	100% n=290

**Table 2** shows that almost 55% of the respondents indicated that Christian Africa was a recurring element of African identities, while more that 37% of the respondents believed that Traditional Africa was a recurring element that was promoted in BBA.

**Table 2.** Elements of African identities promoted in big brother africa

Responses	Christian Africa	Islamic Africa	Traditional Africa
Strongly Agree	14.9%	9.2%	17.9%
Agree	24.6%	20.5%	20.5%
Neutral	30.2%	30.8%	29.8%
Disagree	19.0%	22.6%	21.0%
Strongly Disagree	11.3%	16.9%	10.8%
Total	100.0% n=290	100.0% n=290	100.0% n=290

**Table 3** shows that more than 60% indicated that African languages were promoted compared to foreign languages. Also, **Table 3** shows that almost 60% believed that African identities were portrayed to be communal in nature. Interestingly, the result indicated that more than 83% believed that BBA promoted African identities in the area of problem solving purposes.

**Table 3.** Respondents’ attitude towards African identities promoted on BBA

Response	African languages are promoted than foreign languages	African identity is promoted for problem solving purposes	African Identity promotes communal living
Strongly Agree	31.3%	53.3%	22.6%
Agree	31.3%	30.5%	36.9%
Neutral	16.9%	9.6%	29.7%
Disagree	14.9%	4.1%	7.2%
Strongly disagree	5.6%	2.5%	3.6%
Total	100%	100%	100%
	n=290	n=290	n=290

**Table 4** shows the Spearman correlation coefficient test. The test shows that the data were normally distributed at a significant level less than 0.05. Thus, the two variables have a linear relations and significant at 0.000.

**Table 4.** Correlation Test

Response	Level of viewership	Attitude towards the multicultural images promoted on BBA		
Level of viewership	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.393**		
	N	290		
attitude towards the multicultural images promoted on BBA	Pearson Correlation	.393**		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001		
	N	290		
<b>Symmetric Measures</b>				
Categories	Value	Asymp. Std. Error <sup>a</sup>	Approx. T <sup>b</sup>	Approx. Sig.
Pearson's R	.581	.068	5.921	.000 <sup>c</sup>
Spearman Correlation	.392	.067	5.921	.000 <sup>c</sup>
N of Valid Cases	290			

## DISCUSSION

African identities are powerful components that reflect the traditions, beliefs and values of Africans across the globe. The popularity of Big Brother Africa reality TV has a unique influence on African identities. This study examined the potential role of Big Brother Africa for defining African identities by projecting multicultural images.

For research question one, the results indicated that a significant number of respondents had watched past versions of BBA as well as BBA hot shot. The result showed that the level of viewership was intense and significant. This result supports the position of Lengnan (2013) position, who maintained that BBA is unarguably one of the most watched/followed indigenous TV reality shows on the African continent.

For research question two, the results indicated that the major elements of African identities were Christian Africa and Traditional Africa. Furthermore, the results indicate that African identities were more linked to Christian values and beliefs than African traditional beliefs. In essence, African identities encapsulate the idea of a supreme God, monogamy, the celebration of the birth of Jesus, the belief of heaven and hell, etc. This result supports the position of Chikafa and Mateveke (2012) that maintained that there were varied african identities that dominated the BBA house. However, there is need for more afrocentrism to re-focus Africa agenda for Africa.

For research question three, the results indicated that African language and communal living was promoted as major aspects of African identities. The idea of communal living was hinged on the need to help and support one another. This result supports the viewpoint of Ubuntu, which refers to “the quality of being human.”. It also refers to the spirit of willing participation, unquestioning cooperation, warmth, openness, and personal dignity demonstrated by the indigenous black population.

For the hypothesis test, which tested that there is a significant relationship between the level of viewership and attitude towards the multicultural images promoted on BBA, was upheld. **Table 4** shows that a connection exist between the two variables. The table indicates that there is a strong and positive correlation between the two variables at .000<sup>c</sup> and 000<sup>c</sup>, which is less than 0.05. The implication of this result is that reality television

can serve as potent channels for education and orientation of cultural identities in any modern society. Reality television can integrate elements of cultural identities so as to shape the perceptions of individuals.

## CONCLUSION

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Reality television serves as an edutainment platform, which educates and entertains individuals on socio-cultural happenings in the society. Also, reality television can serve as a purveyor of cultural identities to promote the traditions, beliefs, norms and conventions of a race or ethnic group in any modern society. Importantly, there is a need for more reality television shows that promote the indigenous languages and communal living among individuals.

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