We are in the World but not of the World: An Investigation into the Popularity of Christian Videos among Born-Again Christians in Nigeria

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Abstract: This paper investigates the popularity of Christian videos among born-again Christians in Enugu, Nigeria. This study is anchored on the theoretical foundations of reception analysis. Following a qualitative research design, the research adopted a three-stage research method, namely, qualitative content analysis, focus group interviews, and in-depth individual interviews. The study found that because Christian videos are primarily embedded in the scriptures aimed at addressing various aspects of their lived experiences, their viewers see their portrayals as a true definition of reality. For this reason, the study established that Christian video consumers watch these videos in the hope of being strengthened, encouraged, challenged, and guided in their faith. From the study, Christian videos perform a political work in that it serves as an alternative domain of resistance against the hegemonic discourses advanced in secular Nollywood videos.

Keywords: Born again, Christian, Nigeria, reception, videos

Introduction

'Nollywood' a term patterned after the American film industry, Hollywood and Indian film industry, Bollywood, the Nigerian film industry, took the entertainment world by storm through its distinctive films deeply entrenched in Nigerian cultural traditions and social contexts that center on community life (Esan, 2008; Onuzulike, 2009). Nigerian video stories are told drawing on African idioms, costumes, proverbs, artifacts, African imageries, and cultural displays (Onuzulike, 2009). Its genres include but are not limited to comedy, urban legend, myth, horror, historical epic, juju, melodrama, love, and romance (Onuzulike, 2009).

Though the film industry had had a long history in Nigeria dating back to 1903 when Nigerians witnessed the first film screening at the Glover Memorial Hall (Akpabio, 2007), the emergence of Nigeria video, as we know it today, is traceable to the production of *Living in Bondage* by Kenneth Nnebue in 1992 (Emejulu & Amadi, 2014; Haynes & Okome, 1997). Filmmaking in Nigeria has previously been hindered by the economics of celluloid film production and marketing (Adesanya, 2000). Ukah (2003) explains that the death of feature film production in Nigeria made the advent of videos inevitable. Video production in Nigeria began as a low budget enterprise that only required Video Home System (VHS) cameras and several Video Cassette Recorders (VCRs) for editing (Onuzulike,

2009; Ukah, 2003). This technological experimentation with video production in Nigeria became successful as it coincided with a period of increased availability of VCRs as a compact unit connected to an existing television set (Ukah, 2003). Thus, it became a cynosure of every home. The phenomenal growth of the Nigerian video industry is widely acknowledged by several scholars (Emejulu & Amadi, 2014; Alamu, 2010; Okome, 2007; Ukah, 2003; Obododimma, 2002), driven mainly by its penchant for a retelling of the story of the people (Okuyade, 2011). The growth witnessed in the industry cuts across technical, artistic, and financial aspects of the field. In recent times, Nollywood videos are shot using state-of-the-art digital cameras.

In contrast, modern editing software is used in the post-production processes, thereby producing video films that are almost comparable to its Hollywood counterpart (Onuzulike, 2009). The distribution mechanism of videos has improved with the emergence of online video distribution platforms like *Iroko* TV *and Ibaka* TV that enable global viewing of Nollywood videos (McCain, 2016). On the artistic side, some artists and production crew have undergone short-courses in Hollywood on various aspects of the trade. The impact is that Nigerian videos have become a regular feature on channels that focus on the black and African audiences through satellite or cable such as Multichoice Nigeria, BEN TV-Sky channel 194 (Esan, 2008). At present, the Nigerian video industry occupies number two spots, having overtaken the U. S. in terms of the volume of production per year (Emejulu & Amadi, 2014).

Despite these success stories, the industry has its critics. Nollywood is criticized for being financially-driven (Anyanwu, 2000) as opposed to pursuing any ideological goal. Veteran Nollywood director, Chika Onu affirmed this position when he acknowledged that "the home video is not about morality but about giving the people what they want to see. The filmmaker is in business, and that defines his goal" (Emejulu & Amadi, 2014, p.7). The assertion above lends credence to the lamentation by former Nigerian Minister of Information, Mr. Frank Nweke, on emphasis on negative themes claiming that it gives the nation a negative image (Akpabio, 2007). Consequently, the National Films and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) has been in the vanguard for the curtailment in the vulgarity of language, the obscenity of images, and the portrayal of violence in Nigerian videos (Akpabio, 2007).

Accordingly, not every Nigerian is enchanted by Nollywood videos. Some of the people who avoid it are Christians preferring Christian videos. This variant of the Nigerian video industry is popular with born-again Christians. This study adopts Lindhardt's definition of born-again Christianity as "referring broadly to Pentecostalism and Pentecostal-inspired, charismatic revivalism within mainline Protestant churches and the Catholic Church" (2010, p. 241). This paper starts by delineating the boundaries of Christian videos, review previous works on Christian videos. It outlines the basic tenets of reception theory and the methodology adopted for this study. The paper concludes with a discussion of findings and conclusions. The broad objective of this study is to interrogate the popularity of Christian videos among born-again Christians in Enugu. Specific objectives of the study are to:

(i)   Examine the processes of reception that have a bearing on the use of the content of the Christian videos by comparing audience data with content data
(ii) Explores the attractions and uses of Christian videos in terms of the value of its content to the audience's everyday life

(iii) Investigate how the audience negotiates their identity as born-again Christians using Christian videos.

Overview of Christian Videos

Lindvall (2011, p. 1) defines Christian films as "films of, by, and for the people of the church, not aspiring to high aesthetic values nor aiming for economic profit, but seeking to renew, uplift and propagate." This definition is partly true because it offers a parochial conception of the Christian film's audience. Though the primary audience for Christian films could be Christians, they are equally deployed for the evangelistic purpose for non-Christians. Despite this parochial conception, Lindvall's definition provides a starting point on what Christian films aim to achieve. Described as tribal films, Lindvall (2011) explains that their stories are told and retold within their community to maintain their mores and values. Christian filmmakers produce a genre of religious film that is markedly political as it seeks to subvert the "secular city by envisioning, however inartistically or superficially, the City of God" (Lindvall, 2011, p. 1). They provide alternative ways of looking at life by offering ideological views marginalized by the dominant media corporations (Lindvall, 2011). Constructed essentially to preach rather than to entertain, Christian films highlight moral and religious values as opposed to aesthetic delights. As Lindvall (2011) rightly noted, the Christian film industry's great potential was to propose an alternative definition of reality as well as offering a means of guiding 'sojourners' along the media way.

There are two schools of thought on the origin of the Christian videos industry in Nigeria. Though they may appear divergent, on a closer look, they are entirely complimentary. First is the school of thought, which holds that the Nigerian Christian videos emerged from a tradition of staging Christian drama from church services to concerts (Obododimma, 2000). One known account of this type of development is the advent of Mount Zion Faith Ministries International (MZFMI), which began as a drama ministration group performing live in Christian programs before transforming into a video production ministry (Adogame, 2008). The author explains, "one of the earliest MZFM initiatives was the transmission of Mount Zion Films on television stations to reach a wider audience" (Adogame, 2008, p. 151). It should be noted, however, that MZFMI first had television drama ministration whose success provided sufficient impetus for the production of their maiden video *Agbara Nla* in 1994 (Adogame, 2008).

The second strand of the development of Christian video in Nigeria is attributed to the global Christian movement, which previously engaged the Nigerian literate public through books, tracts, and pamphlets but utilized the agency of videotapes of television broadcasts of celebrated American evangelists such as Oral Roberts, Jimmy Swaggart and Robert Schuller (Ukah, 2003). As Ukah (2003) noted, these tapes were imported in their numbers and appropriated comprehensively by young university-educated Christian leaders of the post-war campus fellowship era. Many of the university campus leaders became pastors of proliferating Christian bodies, largely "self-trained or video-trained …of American televangelist whom they regarded as role models" (Ukah, 2003, p.211). Having been trained through videotapes, these pastors also exposed their members to the same medium. Ukah writes, "these young pastors' small circle of followers gathered at the house of the pastor or on the church premises to watch some religious videotapes usually brought in from the United States of America" (Ukah, 2003, p.211). As a result, VCR and television became

instruments of proselytization and propaganda. Having appropriated videotape for evangelism, the emergence of Christian video witnessed little or no resistance from the church. It thus became a mechanism for reaching the unreached with the gospel and strengthening the saved.

As a testament to the popularity of Christian video in the propagation of the gospel, Ukah (2003, p. 214) observes that "almost all Pentecostal churches have been involved in the commercial production of videos." According to Ukah, mega-churches such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), The Redeemed Evangelical Mission (TREM), and Winners' Chapel have been engaged in the growing production, distribution, and consumption of Christian video films to cater for the entertainment needs of this segment of society drawing on Pentecostal themes, the strong visibility of its practices and material culture (Ukah, 2003). No doubt, Christian videos have their loyal patrons. Such audiences, Ukah (2003) argues, believe that Christian videos represent a source of truth and value. Ukah (2003, p.225) suggests that part of the attraction of Christian videos concerns "how they relate the African worldview to contemporary lives of individuals, reinventing these cultural ideas through images and giving them concreteness and poignancy."

Literature Review

Scholarship on Christian videos has been sparse. Gustafsson (2017) examined Christian themed documentary films about the Rwandan genocide. Located within a historical framework, the study found that the combination of films that promote Christian values with the theme of genocide can have a significant influence on the audience's historical consciousness due to its enhanced truthfulness. For his part, Foubiri (2017) undertook a close reading of Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen's *Private Sin.* The study found that vices were portrayed in a negative light while virtues were positively represented. It, therefore, contends that Christian videos can serve as a veritable platform for advancing societal value systems, thus making a case for the production of more Christian genre videos that would improve the moral state of Nigerians. Drawing from auteurist, structuralist, and encoding/decoding theories, Endong (2017) critiques three famous Christian films (*The last temptation of Christ, The passion of the Christ,* and *The Bible: Joseph*), mainly from a scriptural point of view by examining to what extent these three Bible films artfully interpreted and deconstructed the Holy Scriptures. It contends that the two first films present opposing versions of the life and mission of Jesus Christ on earth and have a high measure of ideological and doctrinal coloration. This coloration seems, to a fairly significant extent, to obscure or distort the evangelical message of the films. The study equally found that the third film (Roger Young's *The Bible: Joseph*) is highly sexualized, defiantly to the Bible, which portrays sex in a mostly implicit manner. Olayiwola (2019) carried out the genre classification of Christian videos with a particular focus on Mount Zion Faith Ministries International productions. The study identified the two most prominent genres in Christian videos as the sermon genre and the film of the spirit. The study noted that while the sermon genre drew extensively from the scriptures, the spirit films genre explores the operations of the spirit world.

Ukah (2003) examined how Nigerian Pentecostalism embedded in the production of Nigerian Christian video negotiates both the local and the cultural marketplace. The paper contends that the rhetoric of Pentecostalism depicted in Nigerian Christian videos is

instrumental to the changing consumer tastes and behavior. The author, however, attributed the limitation of Pentecostal advertisement to the hermeneutic filters viewers bring to their viewing, particularly their active and creative interpretation. Similarly, Obododimma (2002) investigated how Yoruba Christian videos perform a deconstructive work by employing other religious customs and semiosis to reinvent and legitimize itself in other cultures. Okuyade (2011), who appraised the role of women in evangelical videos, argued that though women are a potent instrument for evangelism, they are usually depicted as agents of destruction used by marine spirits and witches to unleash devastation and pain on humanity. It also identified the strategies filmmakers deploy to effect the notion that women are objects instead of the subject in these videos to include representation of female characters as possessed by marine powers pre-set for seduction or mothers who bewitch their husbands and children to become useless. Elsewhere, Obododimma (2000), who analyzed the use of war paradigm in the rhetoric of *The great mistake,* highlighted how war paradigm was articulated in the portrayal of the destruction of the Christian ministry of Brother Bayonle Adeola by the forces of darkness. It demonstrated the constant battle going on between Christians and agents of Satan, adding that these agents do not necessarily appear in their proper form but camouflage themselves to perpetuate their nefarious activities (Obododimma, 2000). Discussing Christianity could be termed in the lenses of marginalization.

Moreover, it can be critically understood in the broader spectrum of visuals, including TV shows and films. A study on the depiction of Islam and Muslims can be worth-citing here. Hayat and Wahab (2016) assert that the representation of Muslims in CNN and BBC is shifting its course when compared to earlier discourses. From the studies reviewed thus far, none has focused on understanding the meaning Christian video viewers make from these films; this paper, therefore, makes a modest attempt at contributing to this scholarship.

Theoretical Framework

The relationship between media texts (video, music, news story, etc.) and the audiences have been the subject of inquiry among media scholars since the dissemination of the first message to the mass media audience. These debates, which often emerge from empirical studies, ranging from those that indicate that media messages exert enormous influence on the audience (Powerful Effect Theory) to the ones that show that media messages had minimal impact on the audience (Minimal Effect Theory). The theoretical influence from Uses and Gratification theory and the Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham has inspired a transition from an inquiry into what the media message does to an individual to what the individual does with the media message, effectively moving from passive audience model to active audience model (O'Sullivan, Dutton, & Rayner, 1994). As opposed to the media being perceived as an all-powerful wielding impact on the audience, an active audience perspective recognizes audiences as capable of appropriating media to meet their needs and that they are made up of individuals whose membership should not be overlooked (Ang, 1990).

The study is anchored on the theoretical foundations of reception analysis. This is a stream of audience researches that took place within communication and Cultural Studies during the 1980s and 1990s (Mabweazara, 2006). Reception analysis owes its theoretical

parentage to Hall's encoding/seminal decoding thesis, which conceptualizes the communication process as a complex and non-linear signifying process. The insight provided by Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding thesis was significant in that it laid a basis for thinking about media message as constitutive of signs and symbols which have meaning within the framework in which the message is encoded. It also offered possible positions in which media messages could be read, thus emphasizing the dynamic nature of the media audience.

Reception theory is concerned with the exchanges that occur in text-reader nexus. Barbatsis (2004) explains that this interaction is a site of meaning production, and it is the process that takes place here that reception theorists identify as the goal of their investigation. There is recognition in the meaning-making process that the text does not live in isolation to 'reading' and 'response' (Barbatsis, 2004, p. 271). According to Barbatsis, the reception framework sees the audience as active and texts as indeterminate, while meaning is considered belonging to neither a text nor a reader. The idea that purpose is something that is made or constitutive of reader-text interaction, as Barbatsis (2004) explains, has significant implications for how we think about the text and their readers. In this respect, the reception framework commences by an acknowledgment that in mediated communication interplay, the text is separated in its production from its reception, which results in two divergent. Yet, complementary approaches to the role the reader plays in determining the meaning of media texts (Barbatsis, 2004). First is the group that adopted a reader-oriented perspective focusing on how a media text shapes active participation in producing meaning; the second relates to reception analysis. This is concerned with the reception aspect, and it is focused on audience sense-making (Barbatsis, 2004). Scholars within this framework focus more on the audiences, try to make sense of how audiences understand media text and how this sense-making contributes to the social construction of reality. This study is located within reception analysis as it seeks to investigate the meanings born-again Christians make from Nigerian Christian videos. This study, therefore, will draw on reception analysis insights in making sense of the popularity of Christian videos among born-again Christians in Enugu.

Methodology

This study examines the meaning derived from watching Christian videos among 'born-again' Christians in Enugu metropolis. To do this, this research follows a qualitative research design embedded in reception theory, as outlined in the previous section. Thus, prominence is placed on comparative empirical analysis of media discourse (Christian videos) with audience discourses to appraise the processes of the reception, which have relevance to the use of Christian videos in Enugu metropolis. Reception research relates to the experiential study of social production of meaning in peoples' interactions with media discourses (Mabweazara, 2006). It combines a qualitative approach to media as texts, producing, and disseminating essence in society, with an empirical focus on recipients as co-producers of meaning (Jensen, 1988). The goal of reception methodology is to illuminate the audience's practices and experiences by bringing those involved to narrativize them freely in ways consistent with the research interview (Schroder, Drotner, Kline, & Murray, 2003).

To achieve this, a three-stage research design was adopted. The methods included qualitative content analysis, focus groups, and in-depth individual interviews. Given that

reception research deploys interviews to study how people make sense of a media product, it was important we acquainted ourselves with a measure of knowledge about Christian videos to be able to conduct a meaningful and well-directed conversation with the respondents concerning it (Schroder et al., 2003). Hence, we conducted a qualitative content analysis of Christian videos to familiarise himself with its contents to equip us to function fittingly as a facilitator of focus group and in-depth individual interviews, respectively. We explored meanings that are embedded in these Christian videos. The choice of these Christian videos is informed by Lindvall's (2011) definition of Christian videos.

Consequently, Mount Zion videos were predominantly chosen for analysis because they are the most prominent Christian film group (Olayiwola, 2019). For the focus group interviews, 18 persons (eleven female and seven male) were purposively selected from those who watch Christian videos through snowballing to participate in a carefully planned discussion on the meaning they make from watching Christian videos in the hope of producing data and insight through group interaction (Macun & Posel, 1998). Although Hansen, Cottle, Negrine & Newbold (1998) suggest that one should have a minimum of six focus groups, until comments start to recur and few new materials are produced, for this study, five group discussions with participants ranging from seven to twelve were conducted because of time and financial constraints. Twelve participants (five male and seven female) for in-depth individual interviews were purposively selected from participants in the focus group interviews who were most articulate and enthusiastic. The interviews were semi-structured, and it lasted for 45 to 70 minutes each. Both focus group discussion and interview were audio-taped and was later transcribed for analysis.

Findings

This section presents findings from the qualitative analysis of Christian videos in Nigeria, focus groups, and in-depth individual interviews.

Content of Christian Videos in Nigeria

Christian videos, like their secular counterparts, reflect the lived experiences of their audiences. The Nigerian Christian videos cover the whole gamut of Christian life ranging from End-time events, youth and children, family, mission field, and its challenges. Others include waiting for mothers, single sisters/ brothers, and the challenges of courtship, fruitfulness in evangelism, fulfilling one's vows, overcoming challenges, and demonic attacks. Born-again Christians believe that the coming of Christ would be unexpected and are, therefore, enjoined to be always prepared (Luke 12:40).

Videos such as *The beginning of the end*, *Waiting for the prince*, *Tribulation night*, *Perilous times,* and *Invasion from hell* deal on this theme. For instance, *Tribulation night* relates to the story of a group of people and a well-known preacher who discovered that they have missed the Rapture of the Saints and had to live through the horrors of the Tribulation Period. The youth and children is an important theme in Christian videos. Examples include *Running against the wind*, *Youthful lust*, *Sunset* at *midday*, *Forces against my soul*, *Change of taste, Back to zero points*. These videos usually highlight the consequences of Christian youth deviating from Christian doctrines. For instance, *Sunset at midday* mirrors the lives of most pastors' children schooling in higher institutions. It is a tale

of ordinary double life laced with perfected deceitfulness and flagrant disobedience common among the youths of this time. *Running against the wind* chronicles the life of a young university female student determined against all the odds to live above board and running against the wind of compromise and unrighteousness on campus. A male lecturer who had vowed to break her will eventually get captured by her strong moral virtues. The family is a vital component in Christendom. This explains why Christian videos address family-related issues in their productions. Examples include *Busy but guilty*, *Enemy of my soul*, *Storms of life*, *Stormy seas 1-4*, *Crack in the wall*, *Filling the crack*, *Foothold,* and *Resolution*. *Busy but guilty* relates to the life of a woman of God who abandoned her family's responsibility in her quest to serve God and was rebuked for doing that. It emphasizes the importance of balancing one's service to God and the need to take care of one's family.

The mission field and its challenges have received ample attention in Christian videos. This is because mission work remains the only assignment Jesus gave to his disciples (Matthew 28: 19-20). Videos that addressed this theme are *The gods are dead*, *Ultimate power 1-5*, *Agbara Nla 1-4*, *Forgotten ones,* and *Shadows of death*. *Forgotten ones* relay the challenges faced by a couple who left their professions for mission work in the hinterland and were overlooked by the people who were supposed to support them. They lived in penury until God remembered them. Ministers of God and the church theme features prominently in Christian videos in Nigeria. Videos such as *Blood on the Altar 1-4*, *Blood covenant*, *Busy but guilty*, *Accursed children 1-2*, *Invasion from hell,* and *The foundation*. *Accursed children* is a story of distrust and betrayal within the church, as seen in the life of Assistant Pastor Joshua working against his senior pastor to take over and fulfill his long time inordinate ambition of becoming the senior pastor of a large church. Though through evil scheming, his dreams were realized, but he sadly discovers that what he desperately sought for was turning against him in ways he never imagined. The issue of barrenness or delayed childbirth is a growing concern in the Christian community in Nigeria and as such, videos dealing with this topic are not only timely but essential. These videos include *Captive of the mighty*, *Covenant child*, *Omo majemu,* and *Hell razers.* *Covenant child* is an account of a woman who had been childless for many years had made vows before God to surrender her child unto the service of God if God could answer her prayers and give her a child. However, it became a struggle between her and God, when she found it hard to fulfill her vows of allowing her only child to serve God full time. Though she repented of her sins, it was too late to reverse the consequences.

How Christian sisters and brothers choose their life partner and how they conduct themselves during courtship has attracted sufficient attention to Christian videos. Titles like *Story of my life*, *Costly games*, *Back to zero points*, *Great mistake 1-2*, *Just a little sin*, *One careless night* 1-5*,* and *Haunting shadows 1-5* address this subject. In *Great mistake,* a young man anointed by God to do exploits made shipwreck of his ministry because he moved by sight, married an agent of the marine world. There are some Christian videos that relate to fruitfulness in evangelism. They include *Fruitless tree* 1-4*, The Gods are dead, Unprofitable servant.* As cited above, *The Gods are dead* is a story of how the manifestation of God's power led to the salvation of a community. Conflict in these Christian videos, Ogunleye (2003) observes, is usually depicted as a spiritual or moral one which can only be resolved through recourse to biblical principles. In these videos, the Christian way of life is portrayed

as desirable, peaceful, and rewarding (Ogunleye, 2003). Verrips (2001) argues that Christian videos advance Pentecostal ideals by teaching Christian values and highlighting the consequences of its violation.

New Life, New Taste

This study primarily examines the popularity of Christian videos among born-again Christians in Enugu metropolis. There are two broad categories of people who watch Christian videos: the first comprises those who watch it alongside secular videos, the second are those who only watch Christian videos. The first category includes Christians and non-Christians; that is, those that are exposed to Christian videos through the process of proselytization. This second category of people considers secular videos to be injurious to them as Christians. For them, Christianity and the viewing of secular videos are incompatible. This study is particularly interested in the second category of Christian video consumers to understand why Christian video is popular with them. This group traces their foray into the viewing of Christian videos to the point of their repentance. Theophilus, a middle-aged civil servant, gave an account of his journey into Christian videos in the following words:

> I started watching Christian videos when I became a Christian because when I was not a Christian, I watched a lot of foreign movies ... but when I became a Christian, I began to look into Christian film. I tried to cut down the other ones (referring to secular movies) because they have the exposures of nudity and all these immoral things.

In prodding further to establish the rationale behind the change of taste in videos, Theophilus, referring to secular videos, stated that:

> If you consistently watch these things, it will come to play in your mind. I remember when I was an unbeliever, I watched a lot of these secular movies, but when I became a little bit spiritual, not born-again, I closed my eyes, and before I knew it, I was lost in the world of these movies. A lot of pictures in my head are trying to prevent me from concentrating on praying. So, those pictures come to play, the mind records and keep them. So, they affect your spiritual life strongly (negatively). So, that's why I tried to distance myself from them.

Similarly, Ifeoma, a university undergraduate, while acknowledging that though secular videos could be beneficial in certain respects, maintained that the new life in Christ demands the abandonment of secular videos. In her words:

> When I gave my life to Christ, I began to see reasons to drop all those things in the sense that even though they are beneficial, secular videos will not take me far (in Christianity {*emphasis mine*}). So, it is better I drop it and pick the ones I know that even when I am dreaming about it, I know I'm dreaming something good.

Lamiri, an IT technician, offered a much-related reason for preferring Christian videos to secular ones after conversion. In his words:

> Before now, I don't use to take pleasure in watching Christian videos because the production quality is not really to my taste. But being now a newly regenerated person, I discovered that it is only in it now that has that which I

> can say is my entertainment world. This is because they project a worldview I
> now share.

From the above excerpts, it seems to suggest that the point of conversion signals a break with the viewing of secular videos among born-again Christians. Though some of the respondents admitted that secular videos are exciting and have better production quality, they argue that these factors were not sufficient in retaining their viewing loyalty. Richard, who recently graduated from the university, in highlighting the inappropriateness of secular videos to born-again Christianity, stated, "If anybody is looking for something that will take him to eternity, something that will help him spiritually, it is not the secular films." Thus, it could be argued that the respondents' new identity as born-again Christians has resulted in a reappraisal of secular videos. The excerpts above lend itself to Lindvall's assertion that Christian filmmakers produce a genre of religious film that is markedly political as it seeks to subvert the "secular city by envisioning, however inartistically or superficially, the City of God" (2011, p. 1).

Videos We Can Use

This study reveals that Christian attraction videos hold for born-again Christians stems from the fact that they reflect their reality. Born-again Christians place a premium on the word of God as it serves as the guiding principles for their lives. In her classification of Christian videos, Olayiwola (2019) identified the sermon films genre and spirit films genre and suggested that the latter's appeal extends beyond members of the church. For the sermon films genre, Olayiwola (2019, p. 8) explains that these are Christian videos in which "one can easily pin a biblical passage as a text for each sermon genre film." These Christian videos' dialogues and themes are scripture-based and therefore considered very important by the viewers. Reflecting on the centrality of scriptures to Christian videos, Onyebuchi, a Masters degree student of Computer Science posited that:

> It is essential because that is the basis of every Christian video. That is what
> makes it a Christian film because it is scripture-based. So, if the scriptures are
> not being used, that means it is a secular film...It is the bedrock of every
> Christian film.

Sharing a markedly similar perspective, Angela, a middle-aged lady who works with Enugu state Ministry of Education, contends that it is the word of God that distinguishes secular videos from Christian videos. In her words:

> It is essential because that is what makes it a Christian movie. Without the
> Bible in it, it is a secular movie. Because all these Americans can do Christian
> movies by the mere portrayal of something about God, but there are no
> scriptures. People, these days, preach the gospel without Christ. They talk
> about ethics and human rights and try to remove the scriptures from there.
> But when they apply the scriptures, it makes it real Christian movies.

For these respondents, the use of the scriptures remains a vital distinguishing feature between secular and Christian videos. Concerning sermon film genre, Olayiwola's (2019, p.3) posits that:

> Most of those who consume these videos see the video as the word of God; those
> who act in these videos see themselves as enacting the word of God, and those
> who fund the production see themselves as promoting God's word and work.

The main appeal is that these scriptures are not indiscriminately used instead; they are deployed in a context-specific manner to address real-life situations. This is why some of these Christian videos are an exposition on a particular verse of the Bible, as seen in *The storm's* life (Matthew 8: 23-27), *Captive of the mighty* (Isaiah 49: 25), *Youthful lust* (I Peter 2: 11). Samuel, a tailor, captures this in the excerpt below:

> It is vital in the sense that they quote the Bible according to the situation on the ground. So, in some cases where you are going through a similar situation, even if you cannot remember exactly the way it is quoted, but you remember so so and so was said, it also encourages you.

Corroborating the view expressed above, Rhoda, a teacher, who posits that Christian videos are themed based on the Bible, suggests that:

> It is so important because it tries to teach us the practicality of that scripture concerning real-life situations… To me, it is so important because not only do I have the opportunity to come in contact with new scriptures, it also explains the reality to me. It gives me an idea of how possible the application and implication of it can be.

As a source of truth and value (Ukah, 2003), born-again Christians see Christian videos' definition of reality as a guide. This is why they watch Christian videos with different goals in mind. Theresa, a secondary school student, noted that the reason she watches Christian video is to:

> To get better: to know the scriptures much better, to understand how to react in real-life situations, and to improve on my good character. To me, it is a kind of discipleship. It is to learn something.

> [Lamiri] One of the things I hope to get from Christian videos each time I watch is the (Kingdom) {*emphasis mine*} principles. I try to ask myself, 'what principles are they trying to pass across, what is the message?' Is this film trying to caution me as regards to now, or is it something that I need to understand the reality of the aspect of life? I also aim to understand the practical ways of achieving certain realities. Take, for instance, this film, *The Barren Land…*it was in that film that I understood that there is a need for patience. In summary, I hope to get the message, the life application, and the principles of the word of God.

> [Ifeoma] One, I hope to get encouragement; I hope to be challenged. Just like the *Akpoti eri* and *The Accountant,* they questioned my life.

As seen from the excerpts above, born-again Christians do not watch Christian videos merely to be entertained; instead, they are used for their didactic values. These videos, to them, constitute an extension of the Bible. It was for this reason that Lindvall (2011) described Christian videos as tribal films explaining that their stories are told and retold within their community to maintain their mores and values. This accounts for why they hope to draw biblical principles from these videos to be strengthened, challenged, encouraged, and guided in their faith. Some use their depictions as a reference point to Christians as Theophilus' comment suggests:

> …because most of them are inspired, and they follow biblical principles in most of the things they do, I believe they are standards for living. Just like how the young man in the *Ignition* proposed to the lady, he had prayed and had

gotten a conviction that Ngozi is his God-given life partner. They serve as bible standards for marriages, child upbringing, and relationships in marriage and the rest of that.

These representations are seen not as a figment of the filmmaker's imagination that could be treated with levity but as a true depiction of the Christian's life, which calls for sober reflection when the depictions are negative and aspiration to attain such height when they are positive. Christian videos accentuate what is written in I Corinthians 10:11, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world have come." This is why Verrips (2001) explains that Christian videos propagate Pentecostal ideals by instructing Christian values and emphasizing the results of its violation. Christian videos' appeal to its viewers emanates from its resonance with the viewers' lived experiences.

The Gains Of Christian Videos

Producers of the sermon film genre consider "themselves as ministers, called to preach the gospel through drama" (Olayiwola, 2019, p.4) and so place a strong accent on the piety of their crew members. Reflecting on how people working in the sermon films genre perceive themselves, Olayiwola notes as follows:

> Several producers and actors I spoke to described themselves as ministers, called to preach the gospel through drama. One thing that struck me in the series of interviews I had with actors and producers of evangelical films is their manner of introducing themselves: they all say their name and quickly add 'I am a drama Minister' (2019, p. 4).

From the above, it is clear that the primary purpose of their work is not to entertain but to convey biblically-based principles to their viewers. Since Christian videos are designed to propagate Pentecostal ideals (Verrips, 2001), born-again Christians appropriate the messages encoded in them to their everyday lives. A number of the respondents recount what they have learned from and how they have used these messages in their everyday lives.

> [Onyebuchi] I have learned how to be prayerful, I have learned how to be evangelical, I have learned how to show real love, how to be courageous, how to be a responsible father, even though I'm yet to become one, how to show forgiveness, how to be persistent, persevere. I have learned also how to take up issues of life to God in prayer and never to struggle with men but rather present the problem I am having with men before the Lord and several other things.

> [Ifeoma] … I have also learned that life is not always straight; there are some times life may choose to go down, and there are some time life may choose to go up, and in those periods, what I should do is to hold on to God, blame no-one and know that God has a purpose for that. I had equally learned how to handle some issues, mostly when I watched the *War Room.* In that film, I saw a woman that knew what to do and how to do it.

By imbibing these attitudes in their daily living, born-again Christians, through the agency of Christian videos, conform to the new identity they have taken. It is instructive to note that the two excerpts above share a standard feature, which is not attributing one's challenges

to other people but instead looking unto God for a solution. As Degbe (2014) rightly observes, spirituality, strongly encapsulated in Pentecostalism, epitomizes a definite means of transiting from self-centredness to God-centeredness in which born-again Christians' recourse to God is portrayed as the solution to all human problems.

Conclusion

This article investigated the popularity of Christian videos among born-again Christians in Enugu metropolis by examining the meanings these viewers gain at the point of consumption, how they appropriate these videos in negotiating their new identity as Christians and how these videos resonate with their every lived experience. It emerged that Christian videos cover every aspect of a born-again Christian's life. By drawing from the scriptures in encoding their messages, viewers of Christian videos see these depictions as a true definition of reality. The study found that preference for Christian videos begins at conversion as the yardstick for judging a video shifts from artistic consideration to message-driven one.

As opposed to escapism, which secular videos can offer its viewers (Addis & Holbrook, 2010), Christian videos' ability to reflect the viewers' everyday lives becomes a point of attraction. Christian videos provide their viewers with ways of coping with daily struggles and challenges as born-again Christians. It keeps born-again Christians constantly in check as it reminds them that though they are in the world, they are not of the world. It achieves this by mirroring the disastrous end of those who deviate from biblical principles while highlighting the blessedness of living according to the dictates of the Bible. In appropriating these encoded messages in Christian videos to their day-to-day living, born-again Christians learn new things from the scriptures and reinforce what they already know. Beyond being entertained, born-again Christians watch these videos in the hope of being strengthened, encouraged, challenged, and guided in their faith. Finally, Christian videos perform a political work in that it serves as an alternative domain of resistance against the hegemonic discourses advanced in secular Nollywood videos. Thus, Christian videos afford safe space to born-again Christians where they could enjoy the expressions of their faith without the 'corrosive' influences of secular videos.

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