

INFLUENCE OF DOCUMENTARY FILMS ON LEARNING CULTURAL AWARENESS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN UYO, NIGERIA

EYO, N. A.

*Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Selangor,
Malaysia.
e-mail: nsinieyo[at]gmail.com*

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Abstract. The study explores the influence of documentary films on learning, awareness, and cultural consciousness of undergraduate University students in Uyo Akwa Ibom State Nigeria. Documentaries, portraying real-life scenarios, serve to educate, inform, and entertain audiences. Six focus group discussions with undergraduate students at the University were conducted and interview questions were guided by review of literature and Priming Theory to facilitate discussions. Data from the focus group discussions were tape recorded, transcribed verbatim, coded, and thematically analyzed. Findings from the study revealed that students gain new knowledge, experience emotional arousal, and develop empathy through exposure to documentary films. Furthermore, documentaries serve as platforms for information dissemination, behavior shaping, and reinforcement of viewers' beliefs. Globalization and technological advancement have led to the wide spread of Western cultural values, while Nigerian indigenous cultural heritage faces decline, particularly among the youth. Documentaries emerge as essential tools for raising awareness and fostering cultural consciousness and countering the erosion of local traditions and values. On the premise of dominance of western culture, social polarization, and declining cultural values among youth, documentaries can help reignite interest in societal norms and help to preserve the culture and traditional heritage of the people in Akwa Ibom State.

Keywords: *documentary films, learning, awareness, cultural consciousness, undergraduates*

Introduction

In an era where visual media exerts an unprecedented sway over societal narratives, the profound impact of documentary films on education, awareness creation, and cultural consciousness emerges as a compelling subject of inquiry. Amidst the vibrant academic landscape of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, this study delves into the intricate interplay between documentary viewership and student learning thereby probing not only how these films serve as pedagogical tools but also how they shape perceptions, ignite curiosity, and foster a deeper understanding of diverse cultures. Thus, unraveling the multifaceted ways in which documentary films serve as catalysts for intellectual growth, social awareness, and the cultivation of culturally minded youths is important amidst the growing influence of cultural imperialism of the west. As such, documentary films are an important medium for information spread and awareness creation. Similarly, documentary films are capable of provoking dialogue among viewers, inducing emotions as well as educating viewers on culture and history of the past. To uphold, preserve and sustain traditional and cultural practices, documentary films have become a means for awareness creation and preservation of culture in Nigeria (Ibrahim Ahmadu and Joshua, 2016).

Much of Nigerian cultural values and identity are entrenched in the daily activities of most Nigerians. However, globalization, technology advancement, population explosion and social institutions have subdued the strength and depth of traditional belief systems and cultural consciousness particularly among Nigerian youth (Adebayo, 2019). The

intrusion of foreign culture via internet, entertainment, and cable television along with poverty has led to death of several cultural practices in Nigeria (Inyang, 2017). In the last decade urban migration has become a common practice in most Nigerian cities of which Uyo is not an exemption (Ekanem and Umoh, 2021). Documentary films have proven to awaken viewer's interest on social issues (Ogheneruemu, 2015). In the last two decades educational documentary films have been used by practitioners and scholars as learning/ teaching tools. Educators use documentary films to garner student interest to learn and make learning fun as well as expose students to real issues. Thus, documentary viewership enables students to have a sense of relevancy and develop critical thinking abilities with perspective-taking that empowers them to form and have disposition on issues (Alfian and Herdjiono, 2019).

Similarly, Moura et al. (2016) posit that documentaries are complementary means of communication because they enable information search and communication in a manner that ordinary communication cannot. Consequently, documentaries generate attention among viewers including students because it exposes viewers to new information/knowledge on social issues (Jones et al., 2019). Although research indicates that YouTube, films, and audio-visual simulate student participation and response in class particularly when deployed as teaching aids or resources in Nigerian (Ibe and Abamu, 2019; Almurashi, 2016). Existing literature provides valuable insights into the media's influence on the broader cultural expression and identity of Nigerians through films. The Nigerian movie industry predominantly showcases fictional plots and cultural representations, contributing to cultural awareness (Onuzulike, 2007; Ukadike, 1994). As such, the limited research on the impact of documentary films in Nigeria restricts our understanding of their influence on cultural consciousness.

Efforts by various entities such as Nollywood and independent movie producers to mitigate disappearing cultural identity and consciousness particularly among youth in Nigeria is daunting given the influents of ICT and foreign television networks (Tobechukwu, 2009). However, individual efforts geared at generating support for social causes are commendable. One great way of creating cultural awareness within the Nigerian polity has been through documentary films and programs. Documentary films have gained great viewership and attention around the globe (Bagos et al., 2017) due to their ability to deliver evidence base information about people's experiences, events, places, and issues (Oyalowo et al., 2021). Consequently, it is imperative to explore how documentaries influence student's awareness of social issues, learning and cultural consciousness of undergraduate students. Documentaries have emerged as powerful tools for shedding light on prevalent social issues in Nigeria, including housing shortages, informal settlements, and environmental sanitation challenges (Oyalowo et al., 2021). While mass media and public discussions have long familiarized Nigerians with these issues, documentaries have recently gained prominence for uncovering lesser-known societal vices and providing a platform for marginalized voices. As such, Nigerian scholars are increasingly turning to documentaries to advocate for change, rallying support from students, public and private entities, and policymakers (Okoye et al., 2020).

Additionally, platform, audio-visual platforms such as YouTube and documentaries television programs have been employed to enhance history education in Nigerian schools, aiming to bolster students' comprehension and interest in the subject amidst declining enrollment rates (Azor et al., 2020). Recognizing the shortcomings of traditional teaching methods and government policies, educators and communication

practitioners have embraced documentaries to reinvigorate student engagement and instill moral and cultural awareness (Emmanuel et al., 2021). The burgeoning documentary industry in Nigeria reflects a growing demand for empathetic storytelling and cultural preservation efforts. In the dynamic urban landscape of Uyo, the capital city of Akwa Ibom State, rapid development and demographic shifts have spurred a reevaluation of cultural identity and heritage preservation. Scholars, traditional leaders, and policymakers have voiced concerns over the erosion of native languages and customs, advocating for the revitalization of indigenous practices and ceremonies in the state (Uyo, 2019). Against this backdrop, the significance of documentaries in shaping cultural consciousness among undergraduate students at the University of Uyo becomes paramount. This study seeks to explore the influence of documentary programs on the cultural awareness and identity of students in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, amid a backdrop of societal transformation and cultural revitalization efforts.

Theoretical underpinning

The premise of priming theory holds that exposure to certain stimuli, such as words, images, or experiences, can influence individuals' subsequent thoughts, perceptions, and behaviors (Hoewe, 2020). These stimuli often the media can activate related mental representations or concepts, influencing cognition and behavior in subtle ways. Priming effects can occur both consciously and unconsciously, thereby impacting various cognitive processes like memory, judgment, and decision-making (Dhawan, 2020). Through the activation of relevant concepts, themes, and perspectives, documentary films prime viewers to engage more deeply with the subject matter, fostering greater awareness of social issues, cultural diversity, and historical contexts. Furthermore, by examining the mechanisms through which documentary content can influence viewers' perceptions and interpretations, priming theory sheds light on the potential for these films to evoke emotional responses, challenge preconceptions, and stimulate critical reflection. As such, priming theory offers a valuable framework for analyzing the multifaceted impact of documentary films on student learning outcomes and cultural consciousness.

On the premise of priming theory, the common assumption is that media messages (print and broadcast) influences audience decision making and reinforce positive attitudes (Nnadiukwu, 2020). As such, documentary films and television shows can become custodians of local culture in that their content can help in creating awareness and awaking audience appeal and consciousness culturally. In addition, indigenous content on documentary films through priming can help salvage cultural decay among local population especially in an era where popular culture is continuously emanating from the West. Thus, cultural appeal emanating from indigenous beliefs when portrayed on documentary and local films can encourage viewers to protect their cultural heritage.

Review of literature

Documentaries and social awareness

Documentary films have surged in popularity in the last three decades, reaching new heights with the rise of digital media (Eitzen, 2018). Their ability to candidly portray people's experiences captures attention, drawing audiences due to their educational and enlightening appeal. Essentially, documentaries serve as a powerful means to communicate and engage viewers (Dowling and Miller, 2019). Scholars, such as Melzer

(2018), contend that documentary films, as a form of art, possess immeasurable influence on audiences beyond measurement metrics. Documentary films are categorized as home videos because they educate and inform viewers/audience on issues that are not commonly reported on the news (Obong, 2019). Although documentary films are broadcasted in both public and private stations in Nigeria, the liberalization of broadcast media in the mid 2000's paved the way for localized content and objective reporting (Oparaugo, 2021). Independent media production took advantage of the media liberalization by deploying documentary films as medium of communication and agent of transformation by exposing societal issues while at the same time projecting the cultural values and heritage of the people (Nnadiukwu, 2020).

Evidently, most educational documentary films inspire viewers to act for social change (Oyalowo et al., 2021). As such, awareness creation through documentaries is a cognitive strategy geared towards achieving a worthy cause (Agbana et al., 2021). However, impact assessment in terms of the roles of documentary on student's social awareness and perhaps how documentary films is perceived by students in Nigeria is limited. Consequently, elements such as voice analysis, narratives, and pictures are not merely meant to persuade, but also to transfer new knowledge and information to viewers. Equally, the entertainment element of documentary films cannot be ruled out because images and actions can be amusing enough to generate interest (Nnadiukwu, 2020). Thus, the first research question is RQ1: Does documentary films influence student awareness of social issues?

Documentaries and knowledge acquisition

Deregulation of broadcasting media in Nigeria led to media partnerships and private ownership, bringing the responsibility to educate and inform the public. Television played a crucial role in enhancing educational services and elevating quality and teaching standards. Technology integration in media delivery expanded content creation platforms, shifting instructional materials and classrooms from traditional settings to cyber class models (Nemine and Akintunde, 2019; Rose 2018). Media liberalization in Nigeria boosted the popularity of documentaries, aided by technological advancements in classroom media aids, transforming locations, styles, and materials. This shift significantly improved education through diverse methods, including audio and visual materials (Anekwe, 2017). Animated and visually appealing educational documentaries and TV programs capture students' interest more than traditional chalkboard settings, enhancing both physical and emotional aspects of learning (Abidoeye et al., 2013; Ogochukwu, 2010).

Television and radio play a pivotal role in educational broadcasting in Nigeria (Abubakar and Adebayo, 2014). Both formal and informal educational films and TV programs target a broad audience, encompassing children and adults, thereby reaching both literate and illiterate Nigerians with new information (Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2016). Although Andem (2019) argued that television has both positive and negative effects on Nigerian culture, however the dual effect of promoting societal values or undermining them dependent on one's perspective. Thus, educational broadcasting fosters a desire for knowledge, promotes awareness of values, assists teachers, and encourages individualized learning. While the popularity of documentaries continues to grow in Nigeria, traditional media as a tool for mass education continues to disseminate information and shape orientation as well as engage viewers including students in a service-oriented manner (Effiong et al., 2020). Similarly, social media significantly

influences knowledge acquisition and student learning through tools like virtual classrooms, short films, and home videos, both inside and outside traditional classrooms. Research in Nigeria shows teachers have a positive perception of educational films and TV shows, correlating with student academic performance regardless of gender (Cornelius-Ukpepi and Odey, 2019). However, the applicability of these results in different demographics or specific subjects hasn't been empirically confirmed in Nigeria. While it's widely agreed that instructional media impacts students' learning attitudes (Sylvanus, 2018), using the same approach to instill cultural consciousness and identity is equally crucial, though empirically unexplored.

For instance, The National Open University of Nigeria utilizes satellite-based remote campuses with prerecorded audio and video conferencing for teaching and training tutors (Achimugu et al., 2010). Documentaries address distance learning challenges and serve as instructional tools, offering examples for assignments through the integration of visual and auditory elements like text, videos, sound, graphics, images, and animations, enhancing communication and educational content for students. Consequently, documentaries are impactful learning materials, as seen in the BBC documentary "Sex for Grade," which exposed and addressed sexual harassment in Nigerian universities, empowering students to speak up and fostering a healthy academic environment (Ezegwu et al., 2020). Documentaries stimulate students' interest (Alfian and Herdjiono, 2019) and vividly present issues not covered in traditional classes, providing insights, and suggesting ways to mitigate future incidents. Hence this leads to the second research question RQ2: How does viewership of documentary programs influence student learning?

Cultural sustenance through documentaries

Grof et al. (1999) argue that the materialistic consciousness of culture in modern society is evolving to adapt to changes brought by modernity. Cultural evolution makes it challenging to maintain certain value systems due to ongoing changes in the world. The 21st-century media evolution, driven by information and communication technology (ICT), has led to the development of educational content like tele-education. This creates a classroom within a classroom, exposing students to diverse information, methods, and learning tools that enhance consciousness (Udie et al., 2022). Documentary films and television shows, beyond entertainment serve as channels for cultural learning. This is because the content in these mediums reflects real-life situations (Okpadah, 2021). While some TV shows delve into fictional worlds, others provide non-fictional real-time information and visual content of documentaries allows viewers to perceive, interpret, and decide the authenticity of the images presented (Olaseinde and Ogwuche, 2022). Documentary films are often tailored for specific audiences (Litinska, 2019) and they provoke audience thoughts (Kwon and Lee, 2020). Documentaries are akin to cultural shelves as they play a crucial role in shaping and preserving cultural records. Research by Rodman (2004) and Obong (2019) discusses both the positive and negative impacts of television and films, emphasizing that their effects are subjective, depending on individual appeal, reasoning, and needs.

Subsequently, McCormack et al. (2021) and Kritikos and Mania (2022) contend that visual content, such as films and television shows, heightens personal and social anxiety, prompting viewers to take actions based on their accumulated feelings. Scherer and Thelen (2017) argue that the content of films, movies, and drama series serves as a crucial instrument for spreading national identity. However, there is limited empirical

research in Nigeria on documentary films as tools for cultural consciousness and identity. Most studies on the impact of television on cultural consciousness in Nigeria reveal a poor attitude towards presenting, preserving, and promoting cultural values (Agboola and Abah, 2020). Oko-Epelle et al. (2022) noted that many Nigerian youth associate local culture with backwardness, attributing their preference for Western cultures to modernity. According to Gerbner et al. (1980), documentary films serve as crucial mediums for narrating everyday stories, combining communication elements like live shows, audio, and visual elements to engage the audience. The use of local language in content presentation reflects the indigenization of content, projecting specific cultures rather than mere description (Ekpe, 2017). Chioma (2013) suggests that employing indigenous language in films attracts specific audiences, even though others can still relate to it. Despite arguments about the potential difficulty of understanding indigenous language in films or TV shows without interpretation, Ekpe (2017) contends that indigenous content has signature elements such as sounds, music, and dialects that provide insight into the portrayed culture.

Based on priming theory, the general assumption is that media messages (print and broadcast) influence audience decision-making and reinforce positive attitudes (Nnadiukwu, 2020). Documentary films and TV shows act as custodians of local culture by raising awareness and culturally awakening audience appeal and consciousness (Ufuophu-Biri, 2020). Indigenous content in documentary films helps combat cultural decay, particularly in an era dominated by Western popular culture (Amenaghawon, 2023). Consequently, the cultural appeal stemming from indigenous beliefs in films encourages viewers to safeguard their cultural heritage. Due to limited empirical studies on the impact of documentaries on cultural reawakening and consciousness in Nigeria, the third research question is posed as follows: RQ3: How do documentary programs influence the cultural consciousness of students?

Materials and Methods

The study adopts a qualitative research approach focusing on understanding the impact of documentary films on participants' learning and cultural consciousness. Purposive sampling technique was deployed in selection of participants in the study to ensure that only participants capable of providing rich insights into the influence of documentaries on learning and cultural consciousnesses were selected for the study. As such, criteria for election were based on studentship in the University of Uyo, acquaintance with the cultural practices to ensure a diverse range of perspectives within the focus groups. Data was gathered through focus group discussions and thematically analyzed using an interpretivist approach to make sense of participants' cultural consciousness and learning. The interview guide was developed based on the objective of the study and priming theory perspective, ensured participants stayed on topic. The research questions provided specific answers to questions and the interview questions were pilot tested with eight students for vocabulary uniformity prior to the main study. Balasubramaniam (2019) suggests that the size of a focus group depends on the complexity of the topic, recommending four to six individuals for less complex issues and six to twelve per group is suitable for a complex issue.

Participants

A total of 48 undergraduate students (22 male and 26 female), with eight students per group and ages ranging from 18 to 30 years, participated in the study (*Table 1*). Group discussions were held in English language as the official language of Nigeria. Discussions were moderated by the researcher at locations chosen by participants, often near the university campus. Participants were primarily undergraduate students at University Uyo, chosen purposively through open invitations as the researcher visited the campus. University Uyo was selected due to its cosmopolitan nature, attracting people from various cultures and ethnicities within the state. Participating students presented their student ID card and registration slips confirming their eligibility as students before discussions. The selection process involved identifying respondents, inviting them to participate, and agreeing on the location for the discussions. Introduction of bias in the study and ensuring impartiality was ensured given that the researcher was not part of the examined group. And to ensure that no single participant dominated the group discussion and to maintain confidentiality, participants in each group were assigned pseudonyms indicating their group number, speaker's number within the group based on the order of speaking to reduce interruptions and facilitate discussion in an orderly manner. Duration of discussion ranged between 40 to 60 minutes and discussions were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim into a Word document. Participants in the study all voluntarily consented to participate in the study by signing the consent form before commencement of discussion.

Table 1. Participant demographic information.

Groups	Participants	Gender	Age	
1	8	Male (5)	18-22	3
			Female (3)	24
		25		1
		26		1
		2	8	Male (4)
Female (4)	18			
	20			2
	22			2
25	1			
3	8	Male (3)	30	2
			Female (5)	18
		19		2
		20		2
		4	8	Male (4)
Female (4)	24			
	26			1
	20			2
22	2			
5	8	Male (2)	24	1
			Female (6)	20
		21		1
		22		2
		24	1	
27	1			
			28	1

6	8		30	1
		Male (4)	19	1
		Female (4)	20	1
			23	1
			25	2
			27	1
			28	1
			30	1

Transcription

Before the commencement of coding, participants were member checked with the researcher returning transcript to participant for affirmation of their views and opinions respectively. Participants' views were transcribed verbatim to include all spoken words, along with voice tone, pauses, and inflections to offer valuable clues into the emotions and attitudes of the participants. Equally, participants' mannerisms and non-verbal cues during the discussions were observed and noted down as notes. Transcription included all speakers in the group including the dominant voice within each group.

Coding

Transcribed discussions were imported into Atlas.ti 8 software for coding and analysis. The process included capturing interruptions, interjections, and agreements or objections among speakers including non-verbal cues like "hmm," "uh," "yeah," and "um," ensured the accurate representation of participants' views. Comparative method was used to compare codes across all groups, categorizing them for similarities and differences which led to six major themes: (1) New Information/Knowledge, (2) Invoke Emotions, (3) Behavioral/Attitudinal Orientation, (4) Diffusion Mechanism, (5) Reinforcement of Beliefs, and (6) Vehicle for Critical Thinking. The coding and analysis process followed Braun and Clarke (2006) six steps, including data familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and report writing.

Results and Discussion

The first research question explored whether documentary films impacted student awareness of social issues. The analysis identified two primary themes describing the influence of documentary films on awareness of social issues as introduction of new information/knowledge and emotion inducement. All groups in the study affirmed the significance of these themes on student awareness of social issues as stated by participants in group 3 below.

New information/knowledge

The first speaker in the conversation above set the tone for discussion citing the documentary "deadly superstition". Notably, participants observed that many social issues are not frequently covered in the news and consequently, documentaries serve as a crucial source for viewers to learn about and explore social issues which also sparks further research. All study groups acknowledged that watching documentary films enabled them to acquire new insights beyond their classroom knowledge. This aligns

with findings from studies by Oyalowo et al. (2021) and Özlem (2020), highlighting the role of documentaries in broadening perspectives on social and international issues. Furthermore, the information gleaned from documentaries prompts thoughtful consideration and inspires proactive measures to address potential risks. These films also play a vital role in dispelling misconceptions about cultural beliefs, allowing students to form their own perspectives on issues directly or indirectly affecting them.

G3S5: Aah... I had the impression that those kids usually roaming the streets begging were witches because they look dirty, shabby, and abandoned {Smirk}after watching deadly superstition documentary, my views on some of our African belief changed and I think it is time we abolish some practices, but we need more orientation and education for effective changes.

G3S8: I agree with you because the story line in documentary films is educative and informative and reveals things rarely heard or seen or known to us as viewers.

G3S1: {Laughter}Just like there are various genres of films, me personally I like documentaries that are entertaining.

G3S4: I agree with the first speaker “deadly superstition” is very sad...mmh... to see kids abandoned and roaming the streets aimlessly just because a child is born with deformity the child is perceived as bad omen. But I like the fact that at the end of it the producers included where and how to reach out for support and that is something I learnt and needed as a viewer to know how to reach out to those kids.

G3S6: Yes...As previous speakers have all said, and as viewers we learn new things watching documentary films like things not taught in class and things the news is afraid to report. Aha... culturally child abandonment over here is made worst by superstitious beliefs.

G3S2: I am not a fan of documentaries they are boring {laughter} but the few I have seen gave me better perspective on issues I did not know like female genital mutilation, and it spur me to research more, and I know better now on that subject.

G3SP1: Hmm...sorry to interrupt you, speaking of female genital mutilation, it is our tradition here and my grandma had it, my mom had it and I had it too. So, I don't see anything wrong, because we have been doing it for ages and it is part of our culture. But after watching the documentary series on female genital mutilation, I am open to abolishing it because I think it can be unhealthy especially for women if not done properly.

G3SP3: Ahhh...I agree with you because there are things not reported on the news and things not taught in class and some things are considered as taboo here. But we get to see, hear, and know these things watching documentaries and documentaries are the undercover police for social issues the news can't report {laughter}....

Emotional inducement

Emotional inducement emerged as the second theme with participants stating that they developed empathy as documentaries often shed light on societal issues. Expressing sadness about depicted events, some argued against blaming African customs for the victims' predicaments. Despite some participants having firsthand experiences and having lived through certain situations, they did not perceive traditional practices like female genital mutilation as inherently wrong, as highlighted by group six below:

G6S2: Umm...every society has its own peculiar issues...hmm...some people can't afford to send their children to school and those children must join their parents to make ends meet by hawking to survive instead of being in school and this is the reality of life here. I am trounced by the plight kids unable to be in school, but we have to accept that when times are hard you have to join the family business.

G6S5: I agree with you, the plight of anyone suffering resonates with me because I would not be here today if not for my parents and so I feel very sorry for kids who don't have guidance or parents it is the worst feeling a child can have {Sad face} ...

G6S7: Hmm...I will disagree with you a bit because not all documentaries invoke sadness. If you watch a sad documentary, you will be sad and if you watch the fun one you will be glad too {Raucous laughter}. It is true that social issues draw emotions, but don't forget that documentaries are films, and they use actors and words to induce emotions.

G6S3: Ahh...very true that some documentaries involve acting, but we cannot ignore the message and events portrayed. Imagine kids abandoned, people getting killed, poverty induced by corruption. You cannot but feel sorry for people irrespective if it is script acting or real-life event.

G6S1: I agree with what the last speaker said and apart from local news and events, we also know of people in other places and what they faced after watching documentary films. Personally, I have never traveled abroad {Rowdy laughter} but, I know what some people go through protecting endangered animals and I was emotionally drained watching activist get murdered as they fought against elephant tusk poaching.

G6S4: Unfortunately, the few documentaries I have seen were not in class, but I identify with the narratives because they focused on real life events. So as humans it is natural for us to express our emotions when we encounter unpleasant and sad things and social issues induce sympathy because it concerns people like us.

G6S8: Yes, very true, sad stories and events surely draw emotions like violence against women is not a good, happy, or funny story. Put yourself in that position or situation, let's say your sister, daughter, or mother as a victim of domestic abuse, I am sure it will draw your emotions, and this is what documentaries can do.

G6S7: Speaking of emotion, documentaries and films also use characters and elements of dramatization. I mean role-playing by actors in a documentary film is

not necessarily meant to induce viewer's emotions, but more to sending messages and these messages fuel viewer's emotion and sympathy especially if it depicts occurrence around us.

Based on the discussions above participants acknowledged that most documentaries they watched evoked sad emotions. However, some also argued that not all documentary films elicit negative emotions, as sad stories can prompt empathy for victims, leading to supportive actions. Moreover, given the limited attention social issues receive, documentaries serve as essential platforms for bringing these matters to public awareness. This aligns with Briciu (2020) study, emphasizing that empathy extends beyond emotional expression, rooted in the inter-subjective understanding and relatedness among people. Despite the presence of actors in documentary films, it is the message that enhances students' empathy, as these films engage viewers, fostering interaction and encouraging students to become involved. The second research question focused on how viewership of documentary films/programs influences student learning. The findings revealed two dominant themes: information transfer and vehicle for critical thinking.

Information/knowledge transfer

Participants stated that documentaries are avenues through which information is conveyed and transferred to students as viewers. Participants also acknowledge that stories portrayed in documentaries are often not taught in classrooms, but they serve and provide valuable life lessons. Thus, the opportunity to uncover the world outside the classroom is embedded in documentary films. According to discussion in group one below:

GIS1: "Words alone are not enough to explain certain things and often, I struggle to explain certain things to my nephew and even my grandma, but as a student when the message is understood knowledge is transferred and that is what happens watching documentaries".

GIS7: "I totally agree with you. Documentary films educate and transform your mind as a student. For example, "Music Is the Weapon" a documentary of late music icon Fela Kuti documents how he used his music to campaign against corruption and advocate for better governance at the time. His songs and stage performance ushered in creative speaking in Nigeria and documentaries like these offers creative and expressive ideas and transfer knowledge to viewers.

GIS8: "I agree with you because documentary films expose hidden secrets, give you something to ponder about and make you think outside the box critically. Importantly, the thinking process is transactional in that you can either accept or reject what you see, hear, or feel watching a documentary".

GIS3: "Being exposed to new information is something that is certain about watching documentary films although we viewers have the choice to regard or discard the information but after viewing "deadly superstition" and I did some research; I was shocked to my bone marrow the rate of child poverty and deprivation in the state".

G1S6: “Just to add to what the last person said, documentaries are real- and true-life events and experiences of people. Even though they are told and acted out as films, they inspire and trigger action from viewers. When you are motivated or inspired to act based on what you view there is a level of knowledge gained which is why people advocate for social changes because they have concerns”.

G1S2: “Let me share my experience with you. I was involved in a community project that required investigating the causes of delinquency and restiveness in my community. But coming up with community-based initiatives to help troubled youth was not easy and so we adopted an idea from a documentary film suggested by one of our team members and it was well received. So, the ability to convert information into actions is like when you know better you can also do better {Smile}”.

G1S4: “Yes, even as students we don’t only listen to explanation in class and personally, besides attractive visuals and melodious sound, actions in films stimulate my thoughts because I have gained new information off what I viewed and so my action is informed by what I saw”

G1S5: “I don’t have much to say but I believe that we can learn a lot from watching documentaries because they are educational and informational, and they offer students the opportunity to learn and know something new and, in that process, knowledge is transferred”.

From the above discussions, participants concurred that watching documentaries enables them to learn new things. Elements such as music, storyline, visual graphics, and actor performances provide students with motivation to learn, fostering the exchange of ideas and uncovering previously unknown information. This finding supports Adanah (2018) study, asserting that documentaries serve as instructional tools for students, aiding in the development of problem-solving skills and encouraging critical and creative decision-making beyond the classroom. Additionally, Caputo and Luz (2022) discovered that documentaries swiftly became a reliable educational resource during the COVID-19 pandemic, addressing the need for alternative learning environments due to preventive measures. The advent of virtual learning spaces has extended the classroom experience, enabling the application of acquired knowledge in addressing real-life issues.

Behavioral/attitudinal orientation

This was the next theme with participants stating that viewership of documentary films altered their attitudes and perspectives on specific issues. Importantly, they highlighted that documentaries go beyond those assigned in class or as projects, encompassing those viewed outside the classroom, as discussed in group five below:

G5S3: “As you know freedom of speech is difficult to practice, but documentary films are the most creative ways to criticize and expose things like corruption without getting arrested {loud laughter}” ...remembers sex for grades documentary....

G5S7: Yes, very true sex for grade documentary is a documentary because it exposed things rarely discussed and changed my perception even as a student.

G5S6: Hmm...I think the essence of documentaries is to highlight social issues and when we have knowledge of things around us, we can support it if it is good and reject or take action if it is bad and so our reactions sometimes are based on the experience.

G5S1: I agree with your point because I was actually moved to vote for the first in my life because of injustices and oppression by our politician and so situation like this orients your attitude and reactions.

G5S8: I think besides highlighting social issues documentaries also provide solutions and so when we have new information like how to deal with a particular societal issue our attitude also changes especially if it affects us directly.

G5S2: I agree with all the speakers because corrupt cases involving big people often don't make the news and so documentaries are like creative ways to expose these things and prompt willingness to act or adopt new attitude towards things.

G5S4: In addition to the last speakers point you see; African men are too shy to report domestic abuse against them {smile} because it makes them look weak and so most documentaries highlight things like this that are barely reported.

G5S5: Like the popular saying goes knowledge is powers so exposure to new information elevates your knowledge and changes your attitude for good.

Based on the preceding discussion above, it is evident that watching documentaries not only introduces students to new information but also motivates them to modify their attitudes and behaviors. Additionally, it helps them prepare for and acquire the necessary tools to navigate such situations in the future. The results of this study are consistent with Kubrak (2020) research which indicated that while watching documentary films can influence attitudes, the changes in attitudes observed after viewing may not be long-lasting. This is because individual differences in form of age and possibly educational status as indicators of psychological characteristics play a significant role in the impact of societal issues on individuals. Likewise, Lindsay (2023) found that storytelling of documentaries is rooted in real communities and serves as agents of change, engaging viewers cognitively, psychologically, socially, emotionally, and politically. As such, documentaries are potent medium for prompting discourse, reflection, and behavioral change. The third research question asked whether documentary programs influence cultural consciousness of students revealed two dominant themes: diffusion mechanism and reinforcement of beliefs.

Diffusion mechanism

Participants stated that documentaries serve as a medium for conveying culture and traditional values, particularly to the youth. Exposure to various documentary films varied, with some viewing them during class lectures, others as assignments, and some for entertainment outside of class. Participants agreed that documentaries focusing on

cultural practices had the most significant impact, as they raised awareness of previously unknown cultural practices and traditions. Overall, participants agreed that documentaries not only store and transmit culture but also inspire the preservation of these practices. According to group two discussions below:

G2S1: Ahh... documentaries are very organic in the sense that it paints a picture of the real issue, I mean like what is the problem, how it stated and how it can be managed or settled and so the moment we come across beliefs or practices we either identify with it or reject it and diffusion sets in.

G2S4: Let me share my experience with you.... Hmm...I held the belief that idol worship was sinful then I saw a documentary film where a catholic priest collected and preserved idol figures as traditional artifacts. The priest was criticized and while I don't support idol worship, but preserving such figures is like preserving history for generations unborn so that they get to know what our ancestors considered as gods and the experience and choices of the past.

G2S7: I support what the last speaker said...Personally, I like being trendy {Laughter} and most of the trends I follow did not originate from here, but I copy them because they are nice. I understand that we lose a lot of our culture to modern trends because we use to have masquerades like during traditional festivals but now, we seldom see masquerades especially in cities and so it nice to see these things in documentaries films because it gives me a sense of tradition and something to identify with.

G2S2: I agree with you because most traditional crafts are disappearing because of urban development, like we had a weaving shop in my village but since the old man who owned the shop died, no one has been able to take over and continue the shop and if these types of skills are not documented it may not be possible to preserve it and I think in situations like this documentary films helps to restore cultural consciousness and activities we have missed out as youths.

G2S6: For me, if we look at it from a communication position just like sending and receiving messages, we can see that documentaries are like messages sent out to viewers to enhance conformity to such messages and I think that documentaries, especially those portraying cultural beliefs and traditional practice are a reminder of the past and preserving it for the future.

G2S8: I believe that our generation should not be the only people to be reminded of past cultural practices because as we leave this earth, someone else will take our place and so documentaries can be a good way of record keeping.

G2S3: Just to add a what the last speaker said... ahh... even though the internet enables us store and retrieve information at any time or location but still we have lost a lot of our culture and traditional practices to colonialism. Based on the few documentary films I have seen, surely documentaries are like storage device because they hold information viewers need and information diffusion starts when we come across something new and for me documentaries are reference for the future.

G2S5: Yes, I agree because the knowledge available today is more than what our ancestors had, and it is our responsibility to preserve what we have now and today for tomorrow. Like the last speaker said, documentary films offer us the opportunity to discover new things and we must pass on the knowledge for the diffusion process to continue.

Reinforcement of beliefs

The next theme reinforcement of beliefs saw participants stated that documentary films help them identify practices of the past and reinforce their beliefs and identity. According to group four:

G4S1: Umm, lately we are experiencing a lot of shaming incidents especially on social media and a lot of advertisements glorifying unconventional things. slimness. For instance, the trend of slimming is the current standard of beauty and a lot of our African women especially the youth follow this trend because they either do not know or they have forgotten that fattening up ladies before marriage is in fact an African cultural practice. So, we need documentaries like this to reinforce our beliefs and awaken our cultural consciousness.

G4S2: You are very funny {Loud Laughter} but on a serious note, cultural documentary film arouses positive attitude that enables viewers to embrace cultural practice and beliefs towards dying practice like the one mentioned by the previous speaker.

G4S3: In addition to what have been said earlier, documentaries help break up some stereotypes. For example, dog meat is a local delicacy in my village...{Smile}...but some people may not accept that and so my point is this how can you condemn something or someone if you don't understand their culture? So, documentaries are a good and practical way to remind us of our customs and traditions that are almost forgotten.

G4S4: Hmm.... Let me speak for myself because lessons I learn from movie scenes, especially those on culture, are unforgettable for me. Documentary films seem so real because real life experiences possibly influence the storyline and so the presentation can stir up stereotypes or break them and that is the beauty of watching documentaries.

G4S5: Hmm... as the popular saying goes seeing is believing ... I believe that the originality of documentaries strengthens beliefs. Personally, the documentary deadly superstition made me think deeply about some traditional practices we must stop but I say this only because I am educated but I can't say the same for others who are not me.

G4S6: I agree that some local beliefs and practices can be viewed as unhealthy and superstitious especially to people who are not from here and some educated minds especially after acquiring new knowledge watching documentaries. But I also believe

that documentary films can strengthen our beliefs because they give you a different perspective from what we previously know.

G4S7: I'll go with what the last speaker just said because the few cultural documentary films I have seen were reflections of past eras and for me they were historical record of past practices that occupied the consciousness of people at that time. So, documentaries can revive the consciousness of youths like us to know the past and protect it for the future.

G4S8: Most of what I've seen and learnt from documentary films are things not commonly taught in the classroom and in a cultural context, it prevents cultural shock because I am aware of such practices already.

The study reveals that documentaries influence students social issue awareness, and further revealing that viewing documentaries provides new information, evoking emotions, and empathy. The second question addresses the impact on student learning, with participants unanimously agreeing that documentaries facilitate knowledge transfer and shape behavior and attitudes. The third question examines the influence on cultural consciousness, finding that documentaries serve as a mechanism for dispelling misinformation and reorienting beliefs about cultural practices. Equally, findings from the study show that documentaries inform students of issues around them and information gain induces action, emotions and empathy for people and situations portrayed in the film. Similarly, documentary films influence student learning in that information gained watching documentaries shapes attitude and behavior of student because knowledge has been transferred. Likewise, Documentaries have become instrument for diffusion of information in that it clarifies aspects of cultural practices and beliefs that were either unknown, misunderstood or deemed malicious by students.

Documentaries, especially those focusing on culture elevate students' knowledge level and orientate them of beliefs they must hold on to. While documentary film aid student learning outside the physical classroom, Rose (2018) noted that not all documentary film impart knowledge or induce positive attitude or empathy because majority of documentaries only highlight issues without addressing the root causes of issues portrayed. As such, findings from this study affirm academic, social, and personal experiences of students as it relates to the role of documentaries on cultural awareness which is relatively unexplored in the Nigerian context. Equally, a key contribution of this paper lies in the fact that it offers evidence based on student experiences that documentaries stimulate their cultural awareness and consciousness.

Implications

Findings from this study extend beyond student learning and awareness on social issues but also extend to media professionals and the public. Besides highlighting documentary films as medium for learning and preservation of culture, the study also advocates for practical actions to continually project and protect local culture and traditions to viewers. Gaining new information, knowledge and awareness from viewing documentaries is mainly attributed to students. On the other hand, projecting local tradition and cultural content to the public counteracts media and cultural imperialism. Similarly, the study propels collaboration between communities and media outlets to produce cultural related content to promote and preserve cultural identity of the local

communities. Likewise, independent media outlets can take advantage of projecting local culture through documentaries to disseminate information devoid of censorship thereby preserving the past and present for the future.

Theoretically, findings from this study align closely with priming theory and suggest grounds for future research. While priming provides information that shapes audience perspectives, it overlooks the rationale behind cultural practices. For example, media's portrayal and preference for slimness as beauty negates traditional practices like fattening women before marriage which is a cultural practice in Uyo. Thus, priming in this regard shapes false narratives and influences cultural perspectives as well as reinforces negative practices such as body shaming and beauty standards. This notion of alteration of standards via priming is echoed by Iacobucci et al. (2021) who observed that media helps in the creation of false narratives and promote new norms. Equally, Ravary et al. (2019) shared the same view noting that priming in pop culture contributes to fat-shaming and introduces new culture. Thus, further research is needed to ascertain how cultural documentaries accurately portray cultural and historical events like communication patterns and behaviors of the past without bias.

Conclusion

The study affirms the premise that documentary films expose students to new information and enable them to learn and at the same time become culturally conscious. While change is inevitable, globalization and information technology has further changed in time and space. As Nigerian inches closer to achieving its millennium goals, some of its cultural practices and beliefs systems have diminished over time. As a result of this, the media, and independent bodies like NGOs must take up the task of preserving and protecting the culture identity of the various ethnicities within the country. Thus, documentary films have become one of the common avenues through which beliefs, values, communication patterns and practices of the past are preserved and transmitted to the audience. While priming offers accounts of occurrence and events, it can also be used to propagate new culture, ideologies, and practices while at the same time reproofing practices of the past that serve as history. Although the extent to which differences manifest considering priming theory, may not be the same across the board, however research questions in the present study were generic in the sense that they were developed from a priming perspective. The main findings from this study prompt pertinent theoretical questions such as priming without prejudice especially as it concerns practices of the past. Accuracy in such an instance is debatable which is why the impact of priming cannot be overlooked. While findings of the study align with priming theory expanding the scope of the study to include large population pool, postgraduates as well as deductive approach is desirable to validate findings. Furthermore, while the paper focuses mainly on undergraduate students and as such there is a need to broaden the scope of study to include postgraduate students as well. Likewise, although small sample size, contextual data, and subjective interpretation hinder generalization in qualitative studies, there is a need to investigate learning, awareness, consciousness, and the accuracy of primed culture and traditions in a broader population.

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Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest in this study. This study was conducted without any commercial or financial contributions from external parties, except for the author's personal efforts and resources, ensuring the absence of conflicts of interest.

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