



## Ethical compliance of reality TV shows in Nigeria: Weighing big brother Nigeria on the regulatory scale of national broadcasting code

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**Recommended Reference:** Michael, O.P. (2025). Ethical compliance of reality TV shows in Nigeria: Weighing Big Brother Nigeria on the regulatory scale of the national broadcasting code. *African Quarterly Social Science Review*, 2(3), 16–22. *African Quarterly Social Science Review*, 2(3), 36–43. <https://doi.org/10.51867/AQSSR.2.3.3>

### ABSTRACT

The popularity and acceptance of reality television has spread worldwide. They are created and aired using actual individuals in real time. Many of its viewers, especially young people in our culture, have developed some form of addiction to it. Broadcast ethics are regulations that are essentially necessary to put some level of checks and moral guidelines to every broadcast content, and Big Brother Nigeria as a broadcast programme expressly requires ethical codes. The focus of this study therefore, was to investigate if the Big Brother Nigeria show agrees with ethical regulations of National Broadcasting Commission. The objectives developed were to ascertain the extent BBN reality show falls under the ethical compliance of the NBC regulations; to find out if there are contents of the BBN show that undermine the NBC code; to know to what level BBN conforms to the NBC code. The social responsibility theory was found ideal to anchor the study. A population of 201 was drawn from the Ogun State chapter of Nigerian Union of Journalist-NUJ. Using the Slovin's formula, and applying the 0.5 confidence level, a sample size of 134 was realised. Also, the study relied on document analysis of the NBC code and subjected the document to textual analysis which was then cross-referenced with the survey results. The findings revealed that (97%) agreed BBN falls under the regulatory control of the NBC. It was agreed by (97.2%) of the respondents that BBN does not comply with the ethical guidelines of the NBC code. From the results, it was concluded that BBN show falls very short of the ethical and professional requirements of TV broadcasting in Nigeria. The study recommended that media self-censorship should be adopted and massive sensitization campaign be carried out to educate complying with ethical ratings of such broadcast contents that may offend their sensibilities. The study also indicated that strict regulation and control should be applied to BBN show by the NBC, as well as, incorporating NBC standards into the BBN house rules for housemates.

**Keywords:** Broadcast, Big Brother Nigeria, Ethics, Ethical Codes, Regulations, Reality TV

### I. INTRODUCTION

Reality television genre has become the new trend in television programming in recent age. The format of the programme permits unscripted situations and actual occurrences, and often features a previously unknown cast. It often highlights personal drama and conflict to a much greater extent than other unscripted television shows (Laitto, 2015). Reality television shows have become so popular and accepted globally. They are produced and broadcast in real-time with real people. It is a genre of television programming that has grown over the years and has become an addiction of some sort for many of their viewers especially youths in our society (Wyatt & Bunton, 2012).

This new genre has become the order of the day, attracting and wooing the audiences in all age-groups (Baruh, 2010). One of such reality shows in Nigeria is the Big Brother Naija (BBN) which is the focus of this study. Although Big Brother Naija is tagged a game show (reality TV), the intrigues in the house portrays the reality of life in our modern society characterized by alcoholism, nudity, sex entertainment and vulgarity even as multi-choice, the organizers of the show admit that the show is for adult viewers only.

Reasoning along this line, Ojoko (2013) writes that Big Brother reality show has no doubt generated a lot of controversies in recent times. George Orwell warned that big brother reality TV programmes tactics might be morally ambiguous. There have been a list of ethical difficulties and considerations posed by a reality show such as Big Brother Nigeria (Poniewozik, 2012). Most questions have been raised in the aspect of public exposure and scrutiny usually with violations that occur before and during live broadcast which can seem to also affect other significant areas such as humiliation, indecency, ethical regulations and issues with cooperate sponsorship of the program (Mast, 2016).

So, from a professional standpoint, the reality show's ethical dilemma stems from the detrimental implications of its premises, which cannot be justified by citing a broader societal benefit given the supremacy of commercial and entertainment values. Big Brother Naija has been perceived to be a symbol of the Nigeria's moral deterioration. The



housemates have been accused of demonstrating behavioural patterns that may seem to be in direct opposition to what parents educate their children about (Olaopa, 2019).

One of the tools employed by society to monitor media content and depiction is regulation. The path in which a country's rules take is determined by its political system. By Decree 38 of 1992, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) was founded in Nigeria to register, regulate, and oversee broadcasting. The commission is statutorily empowered to carry-out regulatory duties to check the activities of broadcast media in Nigeria. The NBC plays a crucial role in guaranteeing compliance with established norms of conduct and practice. The body is also responsible for ensuring that broadcast programming is appropriate for the interest of the public. It does this by prohibiting any broadcasting medium whose content is not beneficial to the public (Onebunne & Okeke, 2020).

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Broadcast programmes exist amidst stiff regulations and control. Reality TV programmes fall among the set of programmes that generate so much controversies. The whole essence of ethical regulations are mainly to promote decency, justice, and impartiality while also supporting the fundamental democratic principle of freedom of expression. Other objectives include protecting minors and avoiding harm to viewers and listeners (Agiogh, 2018 in Onebunne & Okeke, 2019).

In view of this, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) stipulates that broadcasting in Nigeria should represent the best and discourage the worst aspects of society. Private broadcasting stations in Nigeria are bound by the aforementioned (Ariye, 2010). The challenge, may however be in the areas of balancing ethical standards with commercial interest.

As a result, the works of Anorue et al. (2019); Wyatt and Bunton (2012); Weiland and Dunbar (2016) have clearly indicated that there are various ethical lapses in the *Big Brother Nigeria* reality show. Some of these studies found the contents of the BBN to be inimical to children and minors, while a number of other scholars affirmed that the show promotes immorality, nudity and other social misnomers. In relation to this, Yakubu-Hammer (2017), reported Ruben Abati, who insisted that that Big Brother Nigeria, promotes debase values, which are adultery, prostitution, love of money, nudity, and sex. This was clearly supported by the findings of Anyanwu and Ekwerigwe, (2021) which found out that the BBN reality TV programme has a tendency to slant young people's moral beliefs and sense of judgment and attitude toward decency, sexuality, morality, attire, language, respect for elders and indigenous cultures. With all these, not much has been done to establish the level of compliance of Big Brother Nigeria to the ethical code of conduct of the national Broadcasting Commission. This study will accordingly fill this gap.

### 1.2 Research Questions

- i. To what extent does the Big Brother Nigeria reality show fall under the ethical regulations of the National Broadcasting Commission?
- ii. What are some contents of the BBN Show that undermine NBC ethical standards?
- iii. To what level does BBN Show conform with the National Broadcasting Code?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

#### 2.1.1 Social Responsibility Theory

The Social Responsibility Theory of mass media was created in the mid-twentieth century and is mostly employed by developing and developing countries. The Hutchins Commission on the Freedom of the Press brought the notion to light in the United States in 1949. Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm published *Four Theories of the Press* in 1956, which formalized the notion. It advocates for complete journalistic freedom without restriction. However, it also suggests that media be governed in accordance with their societal obligations and responsibilities. The theory's proponents believe that media material should be censored by government mandates and involvement (Bajracharya, 2018).

According to social responsibility philosophy, the media is for the people and society. The media is viewed as a platform for the voiceless to have a voice, and it is viewed as a tool for social progress rather than an aim in itself. As a result, the goals of media are to inform, chronicle, analyze, interpret, mediate, and mobilize people via the creation and discovery of solutions. The media should construct and follow a code of conduct that they produce, as well as design and implement acknowledged norms in practice for the development of society.

In such a setting, media information is analyzed and evaluated in such a manner that consumers may consume accurate, true, and uplifting products. Finally, this promotes societal peace. The acknowledgment of the media as a self-regulating institution is the fundamental focus of this theory in regard to the research (Uzuegbunam, 2013). With



this, the media is more concerned with providing pleasure than with fulfilling its job to create a society that values good behavior. The media, as part of its social function of fostering social peace and societal growth, has the obligation to control itself.

In effect, the tenets of this theory dictates that the media owes it as a duty to the society to be socially responsible and ethically compliant. That all broadcast and Television programmes, including reality shows such as BBN be strictly censored and monitored for any ethical infraction and distasteful content. The producers and sponsors of BBN should then endeavour to adopt the principles of social responsibility theory, especially in pursuing the highest common good and in edifying our sociocultural values fully entrenched in the NBC code.

## 2.2 Empirical Review

Reality TV shows have become popular forms of entertainment genre on television in the 21st century. This whole ideal of this kind of programme is to broadcast the lifestyle of known people or celebrity or allow live audience perform everyday tasks in real-time to vast majority of audience. With such preponderance, there have been many issues associated with regulatory and ethical compliance of this kind of show in recent times (Allen, 2017).

Reality television shows, in all of their forms, raise a serious moral concern. Authenticity, transparency, honesty, truth, trust, and accountability are among the problems raised, as are other questions of right and wrong, particularly in the context of religious and cultural beliefs in Africa, notably Nigeria. Reality TV shows, according to the literature studied and the theoretical frameworks employed in this study, raise a number of issues. The authenticity or truth of reality TV shows is another reason to research morality and reality TV (Weil & Dunbar, 2016). Therefore, the media have a significant obligation to produce material that, in addition to being entertaining, addresses pressing societal issues.

Morality in the African setting refers to the shared value systems of African civilizations. These ideals are based on African religious and philosophical concepts (Okpara, 2019). Reality television shows have been accused of encouraging unfit, immoral, and uneducated models who are then converted into celebrities. This is especially true of reality TV entertainment shows like *Big Brother Nigeria*, where competitors who may have engaged in immoral conducts are recognized and named competition champions, so glamorizing immorality and obscenity.

According to Adebayo (2023) a show like *Big Brother Naija* may potentially corrupt and degrade societal values and normalizing questionable practises. Chukwuebuka and Chizoba (2024) surveyed 400 respondents to know relationship between reality TV (BBN) and youths' moral development. Majority affirmed that reality TV shows can corrupt and degrade quality cultural practices in any society. Similarly, Onebunne and Okeke (2020), used secondary data to prove that BBN show can easily lessen societal values.

Ojeifo (2017) further disclosed that *Big Brother* does not in any way transmit good moral values to the youths and even the adults. He described the show as one that places high premium on the celebration of immorality. In addition to this, a study by Abati (2017) confirmed that *Big Brother Nigeria*, promotes debase values, which are adultery, prostitution, love of money, nudity, and sex. Furthermore, Abati stated that the organizers of the show made money by devaluing other human persons and in the process, they made alcoholism and pornography a legitimate sport.

In the work of Okpara, (2019), her findings shows that reality television entertainment should be designed to promote moral values and customs that are acceptable in any given society. The relevance of *Big Brother* in Nigeria cannot be disregarded, but the show can include morals that are acceptable in Nigeria. This is because of the general belief by various stakeholders that *Big Brother* promotes values that are not in conformity with the Nigerian cultural and moral system. She further went on to recommend that Reality TV entertainment in Nigeria should represent the social, cultural, and religious values that exist in Nigeria's and Africa's cultural and social systems. Moral rules for roommates' anticipated behaviour should be created and enforced. Sanctions should be imposed on housemates or contestants who act or behave in ways that violate the rules.

Probing further, the work of Anyanwu and Ekwerigwe, (2021) revealed that the BBN reality TV programme has a tendency to slant young people's moral beliefs and sense of judgment and attitude toward decency, sexuality, morality, attire, language, respect for elders and indigenous cultures, and perceptions of women and violence against them. BBN might also be teaching abduction techniques and accidentally increasing cohabitation among unmarried young people, as well as the rise in rape, gangsterism, and rascality in society. It also promotes drug misuse, teen pregnancy, the spread of sexually transmitted illnesses, abortion, and juvenile mortality, among other things, and is detrimental to Nigeria's cultural legacy.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted multi-method approach which utilized survey method with the use of online questionnaire-Google form to reach the original population of the study who are mostly Nigerian broadcast Journalists registered with the Ogun State Nigerian Union of Journalists chapter. The purposive technique was used to select the 201 broadcast professionals registered to the Ogun State chapter of NUJ. They mostly constitute the consolidated radio and TV Journalists, the federated group, NTA chapel, the state broad cast Journalists' chapel, as well as the National Orientation Agency chapel. The primary instrument (online Google questionnaire) was then administered through respondent-driven sampling (RDS) chain referrals technique, which involves the recruitment of an initial contact/respondents for the study, and subsequently this contact will recruit other partakers or respondents. The online questionnaire was distributed along 11 chapels of the NUJ chapter with the help of their group admins and chapel leaders.

Also, the study utilized document review of the National Broadcasting Code as amended in 2020. This document contains the official broadcast code that provides ethical and regulatory framework for broadcasting in Nigeria. Other materials from published journals were utilized alongside the NBC code, to provide empirical data to validate the provisions of the NBC and to efficiently discourse the survey result in the light of evidences in the secondary data. Along with the document analysis, the research subjected the NBC code document to text analysis to indicate key infractions against what the sections of the code stipulate to determine the level of ethical breach. The text analysis was curated using with the help of an Ai.

The sample size for the survey was derived by using the Slovin's formula as cited by Ellen (2022). This formula provides the sample size ( $n$ ) using the known population size ( $N$ ) and the acceptable error value ( $e$ ). Fill the  $N$  and  $e$  values into the formula  $n = N \div (1 + Ne^2)$ . The resulting value of  $n$  equals the sample size to be used. To determine the sample size for this work is represented as follows:

$$N = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2} = \frac{201}{1 + 201(0.05^2)} = \frac{201}{1 + 0.5025} = \frac{201}{1.5025} = 133.79$$

Consequently, the desired sample size for this study (134) reflects high confidence level, 95% and just an error margin of 5%. It can then be concluded that the sample size is representative enough for this study given its high confidence level (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000).

### IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Findings

A total of one hundred and thirty-four (134) copies of questionnaire were properly filled and returned, representing 100% of the sample. This is because majority of the professionals are knowledgeable about the BBN reality TV in Nigeria and are conversant with the provisions of the National Broadcasting Code, and all that is stipulated for professional broadcast programme in Nigeria.

In order to establish if *Big Brother Naija* show falls under the regulation of NBC, the majority of the respondents, who made up 100% of the total respondents strongly agreed that BBN falls under the regulatory control of the NBC; in the same vein, all of the respondents were very sure that NBC regulates all reality shows in Nigeria.

Likewise, the study set to ascertain if some of the contents of the show are below ethical standards, 89.2% of the respondents strongly agreed that, some contents in the BBN show are below moral and ethical guidelines. Moreso, 89.7% of the respondents strongly agreed that BBN show encourages contents that may corrupt morals, while 86.6% of the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that BBN has a reputation for promoting wrong values.

Finally, the study weighed the show against key indicators like indecent and pornographic contents; alcohol use and drunkenness; smoking and tobacco use; homosexuality, lesbianism, LGBT and other anti-social behaviours; attitudes that portray greed and ostentatious displays. The study found that 96.1% of the respondent believed that BBN does not comply with the ethical guidelines on X-rated and pornographic contents according to NBC standard. Also, 96.4%, which is the majority of the respondents believe that BBN have a very low compliance with the NBC guidelines on alcohol use and drunkenness; 95.9% of the total sample believes BBN show portrays prostitution, homosexuality and other forms of social aberrations. The findings of the study further show that the majority of the respondents, that is, 95.9% of the population affirmed that BBN condones heavy smoking and tobacco use, while majority of the respondents, who represents 95.9% of the population believes that, BBN okay attitudes that portray greed, ostentatious display and indecent expressions against NBC standard regulation.

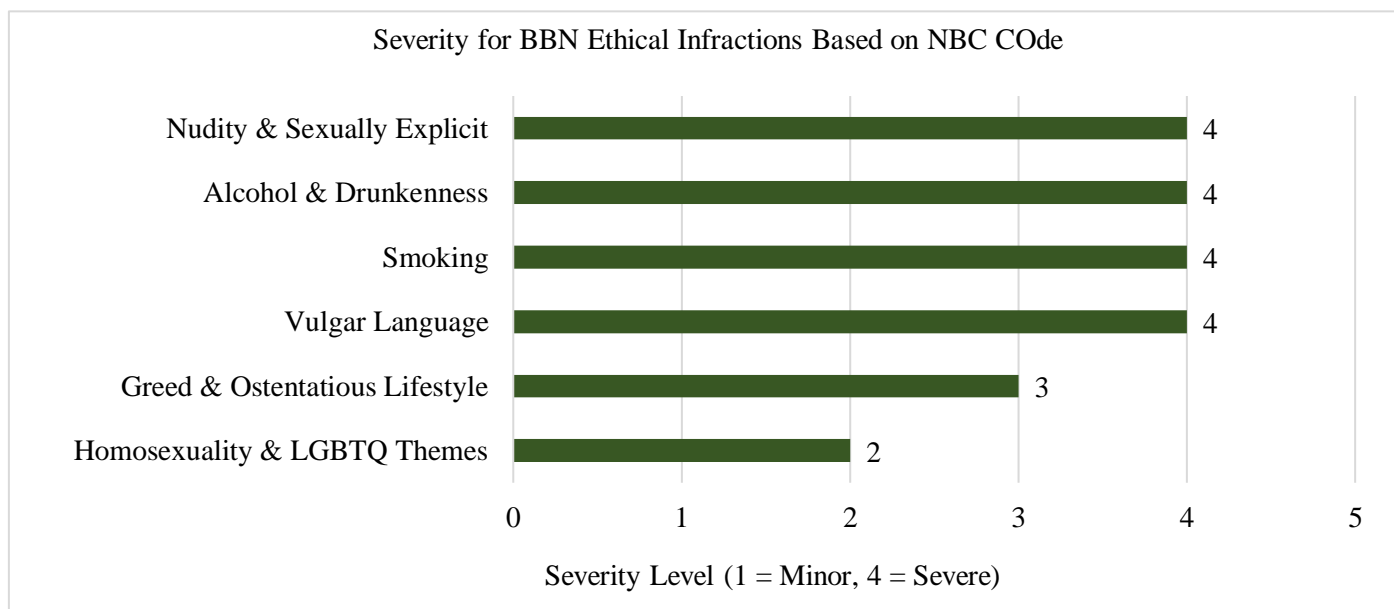
However, as indicated above, 95.5% of the sample believes that BBN show presents lesbianism, LGBT and other anti-social behavior as destructive behaviour in compliance with the NBC standard.



**Table 1**  
*Textual Analysis: Contradictions Between NBC Code and BBN Practice*

NBC Code Requirement	BBN Practice	Nature of Infraction
No nudity, X-rated content, or sexual display (3.6.1a)	Displays of nudity, suggestive dances, and sexual activity	Severe breach
Smoking and alcohol use only if portrayed as negative (3.6.3)	Open smoking and alcohol consumption shown without consequence	Severe breach
No vulgar, indecent language (3.5.1a)	Frequent use of lewd and profane language	Severe breach
No glamorization of greed or materialism (3.6.1b)	Housemates rewarded for manipulative or greedy behaviour	Moderate to severe breach
Present LGBTQ themes cautiously and contextually	Presented in polarizing ways, sometimes normalized or criticized	Context-dependent, mixed compliance
Promote morality, family life, and Nigerian cultural values (0.2, 3.5.1b)	Content often contradicts traditional moral and cultural norms	Major ethical misalignment
Obey time belt restrictions for adult content (e.g., after 10pm)	Content sometimes appears outside watershed belt via highlights or social media	Technical breach

Table 1 above shows specific aspects of the BBN show the survey has indicated to contravene the ethical requirement and the professional standards of the NBC. The table indicate the extent of breach as against the code of ethics. So, from the seven indicators that the reality show was judged with, the study found that BBN severely fall short of five, while the other two have been noted to be technical infraction or subject to mild inconsistencies.



**Figure 1**  
*Interpretation of Text Themes Based on Identified Infractions*

**4.2 Interpretation of Ethical Infractions**

- \*\*Nudity & Sexually Explicit Content\*\***: Severe breach – explicit scenes without discretion.
- \*\*Alcohol & Drunkenness\*\***: Severe breach – glamorized with no negative framing.
- \*\*Smoking\*\***: Severe breach – normalized and not portrayed as anti-social.
- \*\*Vulgar Language\*\***: Severe breach – vulgarity frequent and unfiltered.
- \*\*Greed & Ostentatious Lifestyle\*\***: Moderate to severe breach – rewarded in-game.
- \*\*Homosexuality & LGBTQ Themes\*\***: Mixed compliance – presented controversially.

The NBC code provide statutory guidance and enforces commitment for professionals and broadcast programmes to uphold moral, cultural and social values. The code clearly abhors broadcast contents that encourages indecency/nudity, sexual depravity, substance abuse and other antisocial behaviours. The evidences from the text analysis was based on the sections of the NBC code and the survey reports, clearly show that BBN programme runs contrary to the ethical provisions of broadcast codes in Nigeria.



From the survey data, respondents affirmed that these violations are in high proportions, indicating complete drift from ethical standards as provided in the NBC code, which clearly show that BBN ignores critical moral indicators. The promoters of the shows have been found to be more interested in their commercial and entertainments appeals rather than uphold ethical and moral standards that promote cultural and ethical responsibilities. At this point, the results further raise critical regulatory questions as to how effective NBC's enforcement of and control have been in checkmating flagship shows like BBN which has been found to repeatedly violate key provisions of the NBC with no visible sanctions.

#### 4.3 Discussion

The findings of this study expressly indict *Big Brother Naija* reality show of committing regulatory infractions that undermine NBC standards. With 100% of the total respondents that strongly agreed that BBN falls under the regulatory control of the NBC and others in the majority indicating 89.2% of the respondents who confirmed that some contents in the BBN show are below moral and ethical guidelines. Moreso, 89.7% of the respondents strongly agreed that BBN show encourages contents that may corrupt morals, while 86.6% of the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that BBN has a reputation for promoting wrong values.

In the light of all these, section 0.2.5 of the NBC Code, the National Broadcasting Commission was established to regulate the entire broadcast industry with section 0.2.8 adding, the National Broadcasting Commission shall co-operate with, encourage and protect Broadcasters, but will firmly ensure adherence to all the provisions of the NBC Act, The Code and any other regulation as made from time to time by the Commission.

Also, section 3, subsection 3.6.1 of the NBC code under Morality and Social Values, stated that the portrayal of nudity, sexual scenes and expressions is justifiable only in context; however, it shall be presented with tact and due discretion. Cruelty, greed, selfishness and revenge are not to be portrayed as desirable human values. Section 4 of the NBC also clearly states that broadcasters should not transmit a programme which violates social values, shows disrespect for law and order or departs from an honourable life-style as well as programmes that are sexually explicit or have obscene material.

In agreement with this, Media Rights Agenda (MRA, 2009, submitted that the NBC monitors content and ensures that the code ensure that programmes, be it family programmes, theatrical releases, and advertisements must be free of sex or overt sexual behaviour, nudity, violence, bloodletting, smoking, alcohol, drug abuse, denigration of womanhood, offensive, lewd, or vulgar language, expression, and presentation, among other things.

The study of Iyorza, (2021) revealed that the programme encourages immorality and is damaging viewers' moral standing. Supporters of the BBN's ban argue that the programme encourages immorality in the form of sexual actions, nudity, and vulgarity. In support of this, Anorue et al. (2019) wrote that with Big Brother Nigeria, there are issues that bother on morality, indecency, religious insensitivity, nudity, vulgarism, and other social cultural and ethical infractions, which some have identified to be an area of concern and undermine ethical standards of the NBC.

Furthermore, the survey discovered that 97% of the respondent believed that BBN does not comply with the ethical guidelines on X-rated and pornographic contents according to NBC standard. 97% of the majority of the respondents concluded that BBN have a very low compliance with the NBC guidelines on alcohol use and drunkenness. The data showed that 96% reached a conclusion that, smoking and tobacco use are encouraged by BBN as against the NBC regulation while 96.1% of the population believes that, BBN okays attitude that portrays greed, ostentatious display and indecent expressions against NBC standard regulation.

To establish a strong case of ethical negligence against the *Big Brother Naija* show, section 3.6, of the NBC Code, clearly states that broadcaster should ensure that drunkenness, drug addiction and other anti-social tendencies, are not presented except as a destructive habit to be avoided and denounce liquor consumption, smoking and ostentatious lifestyle are shown only when consistent with plot of the programme as anti-social and unacceptable. Section 7.4 in the NBC Code, states that broadcaster should ensure that alcoholic product is not aired between 6.00am and 8.00pm on radio, and between 6.00am and 10.00pm on television.

Reasoning along this line, Ojoko (2013) concluded that Big Brother reality show has no doubt generated a lot of controversies in recent times. Oghenetega (2024) ascertained that by portraying attitudes and behaviour that are perceived not to strengthen social and moral norms, as well as national self-understanding, Big Brother Nigeria have been variously been alleged to further worsen Nigerian youths' moral decay as well as influencing the bulk of the society, negatively.



## V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

The study has been able to examine the level of compliance of the *Big Brother Naija* show in contrast with the established code of conducts found in the National Broadcasting Code regulating Nigerian broadcast industry. With this research, we have been able to see that the show and its producers have fallen short of the ethical requirements of the industry. Majority of the programme contents are also in direct conflict with NBC code, revealing a gross ethical dilemma for the show itself. However, since the show has become grounded in Africa and has been mostly accepted as a popular entertainment programme among youths, we can only then begin to look for ways the show can be sanitized to become more ethically compliant and responsible.

### 5.2 Recommendations

From the results of the study, the following recommendations were made; that the NBC should work with the Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation to create a massive campaign to educate Nigerians on the importance of avoiding viewing certain channels that may offend their moral sensibilities. Also, strict regulation and control should be applied to BBN show by NBC, a heavy fine should be imposed on the producers and sponsors of BBN if should any way go against the NBC standard. In addition, adequate training should be given to all participants and the house mate crews of BBN on NBC ethical provisions.

Moreso, inter-agency regulation and control with a body like APCON to regulate alcohol and other infractions. While at it, Multichoice should sit with NBC to determine applicable standards to see how the code should be reworked and reviewed to become robust and ill-inclusive to address Pay-Tv contents and production. In a swift and immediate response, the organizers should restrict certain content, such as nudity, smoking. These images or scenes can be blurred out or removed all together. A form of on-screen censorship. They can censor nude and indecent exposure or images.

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