PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNICATIVE REGGAE: VESTIGES OF THE VINTAGE?

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Popular anti-prejudice music, powerful global communicative force, Reggae message, Reggae music, ‘shifting sands’ world, social change, social reality.

ABSTRACT

Music is as old as humanity. It is a veritable source of communication. Music is one of the most powerful ways to influence, enhance, educate or destroy people’s minds. This is especially so with young minds. By itself, music is neither good nor bad but, depending on the lyrics and beat, it can be an influence for either. Reggae music has flowed out of Jamaica for over 50 years as a powerful global communicative force for social change. How influential is this popular anti-prejudice music genre in today’s ‘shifting sands’ world? Our study sought to empirically establish the influence that reggae music, as a form of communication, has on youth perception of social reality. We designed our study as a cross-sectional survey. Survey questions were used to elicit answers from 399 students, drawn from student communities in the North, West and East of Nigeria, in regard to their exposure to reggae music; understanding of the reggae message, as communicated by eminent reggae musicians, and the influence of the reggae message on their perception of social reality. Results suggest that a little above two-thirds of our respondents appreciate reggae not just for the lyrics but the messages that communicate social realities.
INTRODUCTION

Humanity’s inhumanity to humanity is as old as humanity. For instance, the Trans-Atlantic slave trade constituted a crime against humanity [1]. A little above 12.5 million Africans were sold into slavery during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade [2]. These humans knew oppression in the lands they were taken. For over 400 years, able-bodied African men and women slaved away in plantations in the Americas [3]. Slavery ensured full blown colonialism; and these twin evils took oppression and underdevelopment of peoples and societies at the receiving end to unimaginable heights [4]. The third United States president, Thomas Jefferson is credited with having said “when injustice becomes law, resistance becomes duty”[5]. Oppression invariably engenders resistance. The oppressive systems of slavery and colonialism were resisted by victims [6][7].

Music was a critical aspect in organizing early slave uprisings. When slaves were brought to America, they continued the use of drums for communication as they had been used in Africa. Messages were spread by slaves in rhythmic languages, indecipherable by whites and this helped them to organize revolts both on land and slave ships [8]. African Americans frequently used music to counter the dehumanizing treatments dealt out to them by their white masters. This culture of using music to fight oppression and social injustice would go on for centuries all the way to the era of Black American civil rights movement, African decolonization and Apartheid.

Protest music expresses popular thoughts and feelings against social or political injustice. The term “protest song” gained currency in the U.S., in the 1960s, for voices which felt expressions of protest about some social or political injustice, real or imagined, or about some international events which evoked strong emotions [9]. This has the tendency to mobilise people for action. Joe Hill, popular American songwriter, at one time opined that “a pamphlet, no matter how good, is never read more than once, but a song is learned by heart and repeated over and over; and I maintain that if a person can put a few cold, common sense facts into a song and dress them . . . up in a cloak of humor to take the dryness off of them, he will succeed in reaching a great number of workers who are too unintelligent or too indifferent to read a pamphlet or an editorial in economic science” [10]. This comment suggests the potential of songs as tools to galvanise people to protest or take certain actions. When we read the lines of the track title, Vietnam, by reggae star, Jimmy Cliff, they are spiced with protest flavour:

Hey, Vietnam, Vietnam Hey, Vietnam, Vietnam Vietnam, Vietnam, Vietnam/ Vietnam, Vietnam, Vietnam/ Yesterday, I got a letter from my friend fighting in Vietnam/ And this is what he had to say/ ”Tell all my friends that I’ll be coming home soon/ My time’ll be up some time in June/ Don’t forget”, he said, ”To tell my sweet Mary/ Her golden lips are sweet as cherry”/ And it came from Vietnam, Vietnam/ Vietnam, Vietnam, Vietnam/ Vietnam, Vietnam/ Vietnam/ It was just the next day, his mother got a telegram/ It was addressed from Vietnam/ Now mistress Brown, she lives in the USA/ And this is what she wrote and said/ ”Don’t be alarmed”, she told me the telegram said/ But mistress Brown your son is dead”/ And it came from Vietnam, Vietnam/ Vietnam, Vietnam/ Vietnam/ Vietnam, hey, Vietnam/ Somebody please stop it/ Vietnam, Vietnam, oh/ Vietnam, Vietnam, oh oh/ Vietnam, Vietnam, hey, Vietnam, aha/ Vietnam, oh oh, yeah/ I wanna say now somebody stop that war/ Vietnam, oh yeah, aha.

Reggae, the focus of the present discourse is a native of Jamaica. Reggae music was born as a form of protest communication against colonial and imperialist forces operating within the Jamaican society [11]. Reggae music has done much to promote the reggae spirit expressed through Rastafarianism and protest, globally. Rastafarianism is a religious movement close to a century old. It has its roots in the black political movement that began in the ’20s and ’30s. Rastafarians believe in Ras Tafari Makonnen, the late emperor, Haile Selassie of Ethiopia; have a sworn hatred for whites; believe in black superiority; the sacrament of ganja (marijuana), referred to as the “wisdom weed” and the eventual return to Africa [12]. Bob Marley, the Jamaican Reggae star, did much to promote Rastafarianism through his disposition as a heavy pot smoker and the embedding of Rastafarian beliefs and values in his songs.

Reggae became a truly international protest phenomenon through the musical performances of stars like Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Jimmy Cliff and a host of others, whose influence saw the emergence of non-Jamaican stars like Nigeria’s Ras Kimono and Majek Fashek; and South Africa’s Lucky Dube, into the reggae class of musicians. In the ’70s, ’80s and ’90s these reggae artistes held sway; with their popularity and influence not in doubt. But what is the situation now? We’re in the era of fluid international politics. The American civil rights movement seems to have reached a crescendo with the election of Barack Obama as the first non-white president of the United States. Aparteid, one of the major issues addressed by the reggae message directed at the international audience has collapsed. Our world has new forms of fears rooted in globalization, climate change, epidemics and Islamic fundamentalism. Is reggae still communicating in the 2000s?

When asked, in an interview with Nigerian Punch Newspaper [13], what she had to say about her dad’s music defining the socio-political consciousness of Nigerians, Ogechukwu Onwubuya, Ras Kimono’s first child said:
I’ll say he made a very huge impact, especially in the 80s and 90s. Often times, we find out that a lot of Nigerians are afraid to come out boldly to speak about what they want or don’t want. I would give kudos to musicians like my dad, Majek Fashek, and others who stood out and became voices who spoke out about the need for change in our country. They actually encouraged a lot of people to stand up on their feet and speak out too. I remember some of his songs like, We don’t want this, Kill apartheid, Whatta gwan in our country, and so on. My dad’s songs are still as relevant today as they were in the 80s and 90s when they were first released. People still recognise him everywhere he goes and say they will like to hear more of his kind of music.

The kind of music we hear these days is really empty. It’s so sad it is happening in our generation. It wouldn’t be bad to have the likes of my dad and others to come back and tell us to keep the faith and not lose focus. I admire him because he still remains consistent. He is not trying to deviate to any genre, but staying true to himself and still doing reggae music.

And when asked what she thought about the relevance of her dad’s style of music (Reggae) today, she said:

His music is still relevant to those who want to hear the truth. A lot of us are living in denial; that is the problem we are having in this country [Nigeria]. A lot of people want to lead fake lives. But my dad’s music is still as relevant as it used to be to people who appreciate the truth.

These foregoing excerpts reveal that Reggae was an art form that was used to communicate the feelings of ordinary Nigerians about observable social malaise; it was like an inspirational platform motivating people to demand for social change in the ‘80s and ‘90s; but the prevailing attitude of living in denial, in contemporary Nigeria, makes it that only a few might still yearn to hear the blunt messages of dysfunctional social realities that Reggae stands for; and be motivated to demand for a better society.

If we look at the lyrics of the commonest Reggae title tracks by popular Reggae artistes, they’re full of meaning and advocacy:

Old pirates, yes, they rob, I.Sold I to the merchant ships, Minutes after they took IFrom the bottomless pit/But my hand was made strong/By the ‘and of the Almighty/We forward in this generationTriumphantly/Won’t you help to sing/These songs of freedom?/Cause all I ever have/Redemption songs/Redemption songs/Emancipate yourself from mental slavery./None but ourselves can free our mind./Have no fear for atomic energy/Cause none of them can stop the time/How long shall they kill our prophets/While we stand aside and look?/Some say it’s just a part of it/We’ve got to fulfill the book/Won’t you help to sing/These songs of freedom?/Cause all I ever have/Redemption songs/Redemption songs/Redemption songs/Redemption songs/Redemption songs/Redemption songs/Redemption songs/Redemption songs/Redemption songs/Emancipate yourself from mental slavery/None but ourselves can free our mind/Have no fear for atomic energy/Cause none of them can stop the time/How long shall they kill our prophets/While we stand aside and look?/Some say it’s just a part of it/We’ve got to fulfill the book/Won’t you help to sing/These songs of freedom?/Cause all I ever had/Redemption songs/All I ever had/Redemption songs/These songs of freedom/Songs of freedom.

At one time or the other in world history there were clear cases of slavery — Israelites enslaved by the Egyptians; the Greeks and Romans keeping slave servants; Africans being carted away to foreign lands to toil in plantations; and when this type of slavery ended or was abolished, slavery in reverse by way of neo-colonialism, imperialism and dictatorships materialized. Here, Bob marley’s redemption song appeals to the minds of listeners to crave and rally for emancipation from the shackles of these encumberances — very meaningful lyrics to listeners of those years of struggle, perhaps.

Everyone is crying out for peace, yes/None is crying out for justice/Everyone is crying out for peace, yes/None is crying out for justice/ I don’t want no peace/I need equal rights and justice/I need equal rights and justice/I need equal rights and justice/Got to get it, equal rights and justice/Everybody want to go to heaven/But nobody want to die, Father of the Jesus/Everybody want to go up to heaven/But none of them, none of them want to die/Don’t want no peace/I don’t want equal rights and justice/I got to get it, equal rights and justice/ I really need it, equal rights and justice/Just give me my share, equal rights and justice/What is due to Caesar/You better give it all to Caesar, yeah, yeah, yeah/And what belong to I and I/You better give it up to I/Cause I don’t want no peace/I need equal rights and justice/I need equal rights and justice/I have got to get it, equal rights and justice/I’m a fighting for it, equal rights and justice/Everyone is heading for the top/But tell me how far is it from the bottom/Nobody knows but everyone fighting for the top/How far is it from the bottom/I don’t want no peace/I need equal rights and justice/I need equal rights and justice/I have got to get it, equal rights and justice/I really need it, equal rights and justice/Everyone is talking about crime/Tell me who are the criminals/I said everyone is talking about crime, crime/Tell me who, who are the criminals/

In his song equal rights, Peter Tosh sums up the essential ingredients for peace — equal rights and justice. If the leaders did not know and if the followers are oblivious, they should be reminded when they hear his persistent chants for equal rights and justice. When Tosh sings “Everybody wants to go to Heaven but nobody wants to die,” he mocks the sensibilities of those who believe peace will somehow be achieved without equality and justice being met.

Wonderful world, beautiful people/You and your girl, things could be pretty/But underneath this there is a secret/That nobody can reveal/Take a look at the world/And the state that it’s in today/I am sure you’ll agree/We all could make it a better way/With our love, put together/Everybody learn to love each other/Instead of fussing and fighting/Cheating, backbiting/Scandalizing and hating/Baby we could have a/Wonderful world, beautiful people/You and your girl, things could be pretty/But underneath this there is a secret/That nobody can reveal/Man and woman, girl and boy/Let us try to give a helping hand/This I know and I’m sure/That with love we all could understand/This is our world, can’t you see?/Everybody wants to live and be free/Instead of fussing and fighting/Cheating, backbiting/Scandalizing and hating/Wecould have a/Wonderful world, beautiful people/You and your girl, things could be pretty/But underneath this there is a secret/That nobody can reveal/Talking about the/Wonderful world, beautiful people/You and your girl, talking about you/Things could be pretty, talking about me/Wonderful world, talking about Nixon/Beautiful people, Harold Wilson/Wonderful world, power too/Beautiful people, and the Seagate
In “Wonderful world; beautiful people,” Jimmy cliff sensitizes the listeners on the subject of love. He decries the state of the world and lists a whole lot of ills bedeviling the world – fighting; cheating; backbiting; scandalizing and hating, and offers a solution – love – which he wants his listeners to imbibe and practice, in order to make the world a better place.

So far so good we still living today/But we don’t know what tomorrow brings/In this crazy world/People dying like flies every day/You read about it in the news/But you don’t believe it/You’ll only know about it/When the man in the long black coat/Knocks on your door/Cause you’re his next victim/As you are living in this/ Chorus:Living in, living in this crazy world (x4)/Leaders starting wars every time they want/ Some for their rights/Some for fun and their own glory letting people die for the wrong that they do/Oh it’s painful come on now little boy/Say your prayers before you sleep/Little boy went down on his knees/And he said:“Oh Lord Now I lay me down to sleep/I pray the Lord my soul to keep/And if I die before I wake/I pray the Lord my soul to take/’Cause he’s living in this crazy world/Oh Lord

“Crazy world” is the soul cry of despondent humanity trying to make sense of the senseless ups and downs in the world where people take matters into their hands and are governed by their whims and caprices. Dube, here, advocates maintaining sanity by letting in a little of some spirituality into our crazy world. This song, combined with Dube’s philosophical rythmn, has the potential to agitate the mind.

When we consider the feelings and moods of the average individual, especially those who experienced, firsthand, the world of the ‘60s, ‘70s and ‘80s, we would appreciate that the reggae message, as we have reviewed, struck the right chord. The question we ask now is: does the reggae message still have a place in the world of the 2000s? Or, are we just left with the vestiges of the vintage?

RATIONALE OF STUDY

Lucky Dube in one of his title tracks says “Nobody can stop reggae.” His rendition goes thus:

Reggae in the bathroom/Reggae in the bedroom/Reggae everywhere/Reggae in jail, reggae in church/Everybody likes it/They tried to kill it/Many years ago/Killing the prophets of reggae/Destroying the prophets of reggae/But somebody said/To all the bald heads/Respect the rastaman/Cause he’s the only one/Only one left in jah creation/Chorus: Nobody can stop reggae (x3)/Cause reggaes strong/You can change the style/Of playing reggae/You can change the/Rhythm of playing reggae/But never ever/Change the message/Every time I play it a Babylon/A wish me fe dead (x2)/They tried to destroy it/Many years ago/Killing the prophets of reggae/Killing the prophets of reggae/But somebody said to all/The bald heads/Nobody can stop reggae (x3)/Cause reggaes strong.

In the spirit of this song, we thought it would be worthwhile to empirically establish how prevalent the influence of reggae is on the contemporary music audience’s perception of social reality. This might, perhaps, help us to uphold or upend Lucky Dube’s belief that “Nobody can stop reggae.”

The recording industry is part of mass communication. Portable media players are popular consumer electronics among the youth in this era of digitization. Reggae is a great appeal to youth consciousness of social realities. There seems to be the need for empirical studies on the influence that exposure to reggae music, through portable media players, has on youth’s perception of social reality. This study is therefore considered as one empirical study that contributes to the body of knowledge on the influence of reggae on young minds.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of our study was to determine how exposed the Nigerian youth music audience is to reggae music through portable media players and what influence the reggae message exerts on how they perceive social reality. In line with this, our study was driven by the following objectives:

1. To ascertain who among the Nigerian youth music audience audience owns/have access to portable media players
2. To measure their level of exposure to reggae music
3. To determine their level of interest in reggae music.
4. To establish if they understand the reggae message.
5. To ascertain if their perception of social reality is influenced in any way by the reggae message they are exposed to.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The expectations of our study were couched within the framework of the Social judgment theory. This is a persuasive theory proposed by Sherif and Hovland. The theory posits that people compare the position advocated in a message with their attitude, assimilating similar viewpoints, contrasting divergent positions, and responding in particularly strong ways when they are ego-involved in the issue [14]. We predicted within this framework that our respondents who would view society through the lens of reggae might end up judging social realities based on the advocation of the reggae message.
METHOD

Our study was designed as a survey. A 46-item questionnaire was used to collect data. Survey questions were in regard to ownership/access to portable media players, exposure to reggae music through portable media players, understanding of the reggae message as communicated by prominent reggae musicians and the influence of the reggae message on perception of social reality, were addressed to a sample of 399 randomly selected Nigerian university students (referred to in this study as youth music audience) drawn from a population of 116,000 students spread across three universities randomly selected from three regions in Nigeria: North (Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria [ABU]); West (University of Lagos [UNILAG]); and, East (University of Nigeria Nsukka [UNN]).

There are many reggae artists whose songs could be assessed. For our study, we purposively chose, based on popularity and demand, the songs of Bob Marley, Lucky Dube, Peter Tosh, Jimmy Cliff and Majek Fashek.

RESULTS

The gender distribution in our sample was 53 percent male and 47 percent female. A greater percentage (92%) of the students interviewed were undergraduates while 8 percent were postgraduate students. The predominant age bracket was 22-26 (68%). Further, 65 percent of the students claimed that their heads of household were civil servants, while 21 percent indicated self-employed/Artisan.

In terms of educational background, one third of the students indicated that their heads of household had a first degree and higher; and about 42 percent had secondary education or less. The majority (70%) of the students claimed parental income bracket of 37,000 and above, while less than seven percent indicated 18,000 or less.

Overall, we can say that our respondents were youths from relatively educated middle class families.

Portable Media Player Ownership/Accessibility

The data collected as shown in Table 1 indicates that 83 percent (N= 261) of the respondents owned smartphones while 17 percent (N= 53) did not own the device. Also, 75 per cent (N=292) of the respondents own Mp3s while about 25 percent (N=98) do not own the player. The data in Table 1 also shows that 46 percent (N=178) of the respondents own DVD players while 54 percent (N=209) do not own the device. Again, 24 percent (N=88) of the respondents own Walkman while 76 percent (N=277) of them do not own the device; about 72 percent (N= 249) of the respondents own Mp4s while 28 percent (N=97) do not. And, 46 percent (N=159) of the respondents own Tablets while 54 percent (N= 187) do not own the device. There is an indication from analyzed data that ownership of smartphones and Mp3s was higher among the respondents than any other device. This might not be unconnected with availability affordability and usability.

Table 1: Portable Media Player Ownership/Accessibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Own Smartphone (N=314) (%)</th>
<th>Own Mp3 (N=390) (%)</th>
<th>Own Tablet (N=387) (%)</th>
<th>Own Walkman (N=365) (%)</th>
<th>Own Mp4 (N=346) (%)</th>
<th>Own DVD player (N=346) (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Exposure to Reggae Music on Portable Media Players

We made an attempt to establish whether our respondents listened to reggae on portable media players. Two question items in our questionnaire sought to elicit data on who listens to reggae and the frequency of listening. We have the trends in the following pie charts.

**Figure 1**: Portable Media Player Use

**Figure 2**: Frequency of Portable Media Player Use

The inference from figure 1 is that 80 percent (N= 319) of the respondents listen to reggae through the portable media player, while 20 percent (N=80) of them did not. The data in figure 2 shows that 19 percent (N=75) regularly listen to reggae through portable media players; 50 percent (N=198) occasionally listen to reggae through the same media while 31 percent (N=123) were not affirmative.

Who Understands the Reggae Message expressed by Popular Reggae Musicians?

We sought to determine whether our respondents understood the reggae message. Four popular songs from the selected reggae artistes were presented to the respondents to which they were expected to say if they understood their messages as well as enjoyed their rhythm or did not understand but enjoyed the songs. Data generated were presented in Tables 2-6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>“No Woman No Cry” (N=396) (%)</th>
<th>“One Love” (N=396) (%)</th>
<th>“ Redemption Song” (N=361) (%)</th>
<th>“Buffalo Soldier” (N=373) (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understand and enjoy the song</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t understand but enjoy the song</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
In Table 2 data show that 83 percent (N=261) of the respondents understood and enjoyed Bob Marley’s ‘No Woman, No Cry’, while 17 percent (N=67) of them did not understand even though the enjoyed the song. Also, 85 percent (N=337) of the sample size understood and enjoyed Bob Marley’s ‘One Love’, while 15 percent (N=59) relished but did not understand it. Again, data in Table 2 show that 70 percent (N=253) of the respondents understood and enjoyed Bob Marley’s ‘Redemption Song’ while 30 percent (N=108) of them did not understand but enjoyed the song; and 65 percent (N=242) affirmed that they understood and enjoyed Bob Marley’s ‘Buffalo Soldier’ while 35 percent (N=131) were not affirmative.

Table 3: Appreciation of Lucky Dube’s Songs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>“Crazy World” (N=397) (%)</th>
<th>“Different Colours” (N=306) (%)</th>
<th>“House of Exile” (N=351) (%)</th>
<th>“Affirmative Action” (N=370) (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understand and enjoy the songblick</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t understand but enjoy the song</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
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</table>

Out of the 397 respondents surveyed, close to 298 (75%) indicated that they understood and enjoyed Lucky Dube’s ‘Crazy World’, as against 25 percent (N=99) who did not understand but enjoyed the song (Table 3). Our findings also show that 78 percent (N=239) of the respondents studied understood and enjoyed Lucky Dude’s ‘Different Colours’, while 22 percent (N=67) of them did not. Furthermore, data in Table 3 show that a greater percentage of the respondents, 72 percent (N=253) understood and enjoyed Lucky Dube’s ‘House of Exile’, whereas 28 % (N=55) of them did not understand the music. And for ‘Affirmative Action,’ data in Table 3 show that 52 percent (N=192) of the respondents understood and enjoyed Lucky Dude’s ‘Affirmative Action’ while 48 percent (N=178) of the respondents did not understand but enjoyed it.

Table 4: Appreciation of Peter Tosh’s Songs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>“Equal Rights” (N=396) (%)</th>
<th>“Living in Glass House” (N=356) (%)</th>
<th>“Mama Africa” (N=361) (%)</th>
<th>“Reggae Mylitis” (N=320) (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understand and enjoy the songblick</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t understand but enjoy the song</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
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</table>

Table 4 shows that 58 percent (N=230) of our respondents understood and enjoyed Peter Tosh’s ‘Equal Rights’ while 42 percent (N=166) of them enjoyed but did not understand the song. Also, we can infer from Table 4 that ‘Living in Glass House’ was understood and enjoyed by only 29 percent (N=103) of the respondents while 71 percent (N=253), enjoyed but did not understand the song. For ‘Mama Africa’, 52 percent (N=188) of the respondents understood and enjoyed the song, while 48 percent (N=173) of them, enjoyed but did not understand the song. Thirty-one percent of the respondents (N=99), understood and enjoyed Peter Tosh’s ‘Reggae Mylitis’, while the greater percentage, 69 percent (N=221), of the study sample, enjoyed but did not understand the song.
Table 5: Appreciation of Majek Fasek’s Songs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>“Rain maker” (N=398) (%)</th>
<th>“Prisoner of Conscience” (N=363) (%)</th>
<th>“Spirit of Love” (N=378) (%)</th>
<th>“Little Patience” (N=372) (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understand and enjoy the song</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t understand but enjoy the song</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>30’</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
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</table>

Data in Table 5 shows that 86 percent (N=342) of the respondents understood and enjoyed Majek Fashek’s ‘Rain Maker’, while 14 percent (N=56) of them did not understand yet they enjoyed the song. Table 5 also indicates that only 26 percent (N=94) of the sample understood and enjoyed Majek Fashek’s ‘Prisoner of Conscience’, while the greater percentage among them 74% (N= 269), though they enjoyed the song they did not understand the gist. Furthermore, our data show that only 30 percent (N=113) of the respondents understood and enjoyed Majek Fashek’s ‘Spirit of Love’ while 70 percent (N=265) did not understand but they still enjoyed the song (Table 5). Also, we can infer from our data, as reflected in Table 5, that 26 percent (N=97) of our respondents enjoyed and understood the message communicated through Majek Fashek’s ‘Little Patience’, while 74 percent (N=275) of them did not understand the message even though the enjoyed the song.

Table 6: Appreciation of Jimmy Cliff’s Songs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>“Reggae Night” (N=394) (%)</th>
<th>“Wonderful World” (N=391) (%)</th>
<th>“Many Rivers to Cross” (N=388) (%)</th>
<th>“You can get it if you really want” (N=397) (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understand and enjoy the song</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t understand but enjoy the song</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>74’</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The trends in the appreciation of popular songs by Jimmy Cliff are shown in Table 6. Our data here indicate that the percentage of the study population that understood Jimmy Cliff’s ‘Reggae Night’ was 44 percent (N=173), while the percentage of those who did not understand the message borne by the song was 56 percent (N=221). Table 6 also indicates that only 29 percent (N=113) of our respondents understood the message in Jimmy Cliff’s “Wonderful World, Beautiful People” as against 71 percent (N=278) among them who did not understand but still enjoyed the song. “Many Rivers to Cross” was understood and enjoyed by 26 percent (N=101) of our respondents while 74 percent (N=287) of the sample enjoyed but did not understand the message of the song. A lesser percentage of the entire sample, 41 percent (N=163) enjoyed and understood the message communicated in Jimmy Cliff’s ‘You Can Get It If You Really Want’ while a greater percentage, 59 percent (N=234) enjoyed but did not understand the song.
Overall, findings from our study indicate that the most appreciated reggae songs among the respondents were those of Bob Marley and Lucky Dube. This would suggest that the songs of these reggae artistes have the strongest appeal to our respondents.

Reggae Music and Social Perception

Part of our study examined the perceptions of social reality held by our respondents, vis-à-vis exposure to reggae. In line with this, they were asked a series of questions which sought to determine the impressions they got from the messages of reggae. Our findings were captured in Table 7.

Table 7: Influence of the message of Reggae on respondents’ perception of social reality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When I listen to Reggae I’m made to see social problems neglected by the rest of well off humanity</td>
<td>81% 19% (N=396)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get inspired on the need for social change when I listen to reggae</td>
<td>80% 20% (N=397)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I listen to reggae, I’m made to see societal disequilibrium</td>
<td>77% 23% (N=396)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reggae makes me see the evils of racism and discrimination and the need for counter action</td>
<td>66% 34% (N=396)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to Reggae inspires self-confidence and self-belief in me</td>
<td>65% 35% (N=396)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reggae lyrics awakens me spiritually</td>
<td>51% 49% (N=393)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reggae opens my eyes to the hypocrisies and inconsistencies in governance and political leadership</td>
<td>78% 22% (N=397)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our analysis in Table 7 shows how the respondents reckoned the influence of reggae on how they perceived social reality. About 81 percent (N=321) of the respondents think that reggae does a lot of service in highlighting social issues deserving attention, while some of them, 19 percent (N=75), did not think so. Similarly, 80 percent (N=318) of the respondents perceive reggae as inspirational while 20 percent (N=79) perceived otherwise. About 77 percent (N=305) of the study population sense the need to address social, political and economic injustices when they listen to reggae. Only 23 percent (N=91) of them did not sense the same. Out of 396 respondents, 66 percent (N=261) of them were inspired against racism when they listen to reggae, and 34 percent (N=135) were not necessarily inspired against racism when they listen to reggae. Also our data show that 65 percent (N=257) of the respondents think that reggae inspire in them the need for self confidence and self belief while 35 percent (N=139), did not affirm. Our data in Table 7 further reveal that 51 percent (N=200) of the sample size sense the need for spiritual awakening when they listen to reggae, while 49 percent (N=193) among them sense otherwise. The respondents who said the reggae message opened their eyes to the inconsistencies in governance and in political leadership, made up 78 percent (N=310) of the study population as against 22 percent (N=87) of them who did not share this view.

Analysis of Research Objectives

Our first research objective was to determine whether our respondents own or have access to portable media players like smartphone, Mp3, Tablet, Walkman, MP4 and DVD players. The analyses of our findings in Table 1, give an overall picture of the respondents who own or have access to portable media players. There is the indication that a greater number among them own and have access to these devices.

Our second research objective sought to ascertain our respondents’ level of exposure to reggae music through portable media players. The analysis of the respondents’ exposure to the various portable media players shows that most of the respondents are exposed to reggae music through smartphones, Mp3s, Tablets, Walkmans, MP4s and DVD players. Figure 1 shows that 80% percent of the respondents listen to reggae through these channels. These foregoing findings suggest that majority of the study population listen to reggae through portable media players and they are relatively exposed to reggae music. This also suggests further, that the respondents are exposed to reggae music because they own and/or have access to portable media players.

The third research objective was to ascertain the respondents’ level of interest in reggae music. Data in figure 2 shows that 19 percent of the respondents regularly listen to reggae music, 50 percent occasionally listen to reggae and 31 percent were not affirmative. This shows that the level of interest in reggae music among our respondents was relatively appreciable.
The fourth research objective sought to establish whether our respondents understood the reggae message communicated by prominent reggae musicians. Our findings show that majority of the respondents understood the reggae message communicated by prominent reggae musicians. Our focus was on five prominent reggae musicians: Bob Marley, Lucky Dube, Peter Tosh, Majek Fashek and Jimmy Cliff. Data in Table 2 show that most of the respondents understood the reggae message communicated in Bob Marley’s music. Also data in Table 3 indicate that majority of our respondents understood the reggae message communicated in Lucky Dube’s lyrics. On the contrary data in Tables 4, 5 and 6 indicate that majority of our respondents did not understand the reggae message communicated by Peter Tosh, Majek Fashek and Jimmy Cliff.

The fifth research objective of our study sought to ascertain whether our respondents’ perception of social reality was influenced by the reggae message they were exposed to. Our findings show that the respondents’ perception of social reality was appreciably influenced by the reggae message they were exposed to as can be seen from data in Table 7. Here there is the indication that majority of the respondents’ think the reggae message does a lot of service in making them see social problems neglected by the rest of well off humanity; inspires them on the need for social change; makes them see societal disequilibrium; makes them see the evils of racism and discrimination and the need for counter action; inspires self-confidence and self-belief in them; awakens them spiritually; and opens their eyes to the hypocrisies and inconsistencies in governance and political leadership.

Discussion of findings

Generally, our findings suggest that ownership and access to portable media player, especially smartphones, Mp3s and Mp4s, was high among our youth respondents. This is not surprising. When we consider inclination to using new technologies, youths appear to be more likely to want to be trendy; therefore the likelihood that they would own or have access to new technology devices like portable media players should be expected to be high.

All genre of music could be listened to using portable media players. The finding that these student respondents were relatively exposed to reggae would suggest that reggae is one of the genre of music they listen to through their portable media players. Listening occasionally rather than regularly might mean they likely turn to reggae for variety in their music listening. We could therefore infer, from our findings, that reggae is still counted as one of the music of interest among a youth audience.

There seems to be no logical explanation for the finding that our student respondents understood the lyrics of the reggae songs by Bob Marley and Lucky Dube more than those reggae songs by Peter Tosh, Majek Fashek and Jimmy Cliff. All reggae songs by these artistes are weighty in terms of philosophy and rhythm. Our respondents had no much problem enjoying the songs but understanding the messages were not so easy. Could the explanation for this finding lie in the way the reaggae artistes vocalized their messages? Could it be a problem of semantics? This is the question that future studies should seek to address.

The findings in Table 7 appear to vindicate reggae as music of influence. We can infer from these findings that our respondents seem to see social realities through the eye of the reggae message. It would appear that the truth that many people seem afraid to tell, lest the draw the ire of authorities is boldly proclaimed by the reggae message. This is no surprise since there is this “protest” tag on reggae music anyway. So, the reactions of our respondents seem to suggest: “If you want to hear the other side, turn to reggae.”

Conclusion

This study used selected survey questions to attempt to determine how exposed the Nigerian youth music audience is to reggae music through portable media players and what influence the reggae message exerts on how they perceive social reality.

The major finding of our study suggests that the target audience surveyed understood the message communicated in the reggae songs they were exposed to (i.e. listened to) and this understanding affected their perception of social reality. This leads to the conclusion that, reggae is communicative music; it is not just about the rhythm and beats, but the lyrics that speak.

In general, the paramount significance of our study is found in the fact that it is one attempt to empirically establish that reggae music is a form of communication. Communication is all about encoding a message, sending the message through a channel to the target audience; the audience receives the message, decodes it and then sends their feedback [15]. Reggae Music does just that. The data analyzed in this study lends credence to this.

If reggae is appreciated, as the findings from our study suggest, then we are yet to hear the last of reggae. The inequality in many societies, especially developing societies, still necessitates “protest” music like reggae. If reggae can cause social change, because it is a medium that reveals human needs and the focal agitations that ought to be addressed for sustained cohesion in the society, then this genre of music would still be relevant, as a communicative force, in years to come. Remember Mozart! And, Shakespeare!

References


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