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Audience Dynamics in Novel-to-Film Adaption: The Case of *Half of a Yellow Sun*

By

Awat Malone Embuta*[1], Adamu Pangmeshi & Mbuh Tennu Mbuh

Department of English

The University of Bamenda

Abstract

This paper sets out to evaluate reader-audience attitudes to adaptation. It underscores the point that intertextuality and technological evolution have had a great influence in audience preferences for a film over its novel counterpart in the study of novel-to-film adaptation. Inspired by such transformation, this analysis posits that in the contemporary world, especially in the African/Cameroon postcolony, more people prefer watching/viewing than reading. To sustain this premise, the paper examines intertextuality and audience reaction dynamics. Stated differently, the paper seeks to reveal that there exists an ideological contestation between the novelists and artistic directors which has a causal effect on the audience in terms of audience perception and preference. This is because there exists a controversial question of "which is better: the book or the film?" The response to such a question will always be linked to both the literary artist and the artistic director. The challenge is for the audience to deduce relative meaning from the film based on the artistic director's vision in the adaptation, which in most cases is different from the ideological frame of the source text, thereby making it difficult to ascertain faithfulness. This gives way to the discourse of infidelity in cinema, with the audience caught between the biases of the source author and film director. Applying intertextuality as a theoretical frame, the paper employs the mixed research method wherein selected texts are exploited and data is collected with the help of observation, textual analysis, field survey, the use of interviews, focus group discussion, administration of questionnaires and pilot reconnaissance survey. The results reveal that indeed in today's society, a vast majority of people prefer viewing to reading.

Keywords: adaptation, intertextuality, audience, preference, novel and film.

Introduction

Whenever the discourse of adaptation between media is brought up in cinema, the coupling of a novel and film comes to mind as the relationship between novel and film involves an issue of adaptation. Adaptation is something that we

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*Corresponding Author: **embutaawat@gmail.com**

encounter often and whether consciously or not, we all have our opinion on the subject. The process of adaptation is inevitable for it is not genre or medium restricted. It can be found everywhere traversing virtually across all forms of media and arts for instance, novels, poems, paintings, sculpture, plastic arts, films, television programs and plays. What makes an adaptation such a multifaceted concept is its ability to incorporate numerous mediums. Just like any literary text can generate multiple interpretations, a novel or any genre of literature can generate multiple adaptations as in the case of Daniel Defoe's novel, *Robinson Crusoe* and its various filmic adaptations of the same name.

There exists a common perception that the goal of an adaptation is to produce a copy of its source (fidelity). Bluestone (1957) argues that film adaptations should strive for fidelity to the original (p.33). Murich (1967) believes that fidelity is essential for a successful adaptation (p.7). This, however, is not often the case as the purpose of an adaptation determines the final product in favour of the worldview which the filmmaker wants to portray. Literature to film adaptation may be faithful or unfaithful, and the question of fidelity or infidelity depends on the type of adaptation the filmmaker chooses. This is in line with some scholars such as Sinyard (1986), who view adaptation essentially as an act of literary criticism (p.117). He argues that, "filmmakers use the camera to interpret, not simply illustrate the original text" (p.117). Therefore, an adaptation is the final result of what elements (materials) of the source text the artistic director decides to focus on in the adapted version. It is important to note that ideological contestation which is the case in most adaptations including *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Adichie and Bandele determines the perception of the audience as far as literature to film adaptation is concerned. Therefore, the vision and/or cause of adapting by the artistic director is what will be deduced by the audience. This means that the whole concept of audience preference lies in the vision of the creator. This is because more often than not, audiences always turn to appreciate an adaptation based on the final product and pay little or no attention to the source text. They do so for diverse reasons, which in some cases is different from

the reality. The medium of the adaptation (literary sources, historical sources and other media), determines the limitation of the final product, as the different mediums provide different opportunities for expression. Despite the different mediums through which adaptation can be found, discourses surrounding this field are often dominated by the relationship between film and literature.

The dynamics of audience in novel-to-film adaptations involve complex interactions between novel readers, film viewers, shared audience and audience reception. The outcome of these interactions is determined by certain factors influencing audience dynamics. It should be noted that understanding readers' and viewers' perspectives, helps filmmakers navigate adaptation challenges and meet audience expectations.

Adaptation studies occupy a transitional space within the academic world concerning the relationship between literature and film. Cartmell (2012) posits that "the field is too literary for film studies and too film-based for literary studies" (1). When discussing literary adaptations be it film or television, the analysis remains rooted in fidelity and as such, mutation is always brought into the scope. Mutation refers to the addition/excision of narrative units in the film adaptation. The term excision is used by George Allen (2000) in describing some of the changes that may take place between a text (the hypertext) and a previous one (the hypo text) This explains why conversations regarding what scenes were cut, what was taken too far, what was underplayed, or the poor casting choices elicit the statement, "the book was better than the movie", always comes up when discussing opinions about adaptations between literature and film. This discourse of fidelity should be challenged by the consideration of the director's vision/ideology, the cultural and historical context of the source text and the adaptation as well as the medium through which the story is told.

Methodology
This paper integrates the mixed research design (quantitative and qualitative methods) for its data collection. Underlying the qualitative method, techniques such as observation, in-depth analysis, interview and focus group discussions

were employed. The population of the study area encompasses the population of Bambui which formed the constituent population used throughout the study. The population of the study area constituted those living in the aforementioned areas. The target population is a subset of the population of the study area and constituted the portion of the population that participated in the reading and viewing of the texts under study. Therefore, their perception was considered and analysed with respect to the objective of the study. The targeted population is therefore the student population, teachers, farmers, business persons, transporters, and households. For this study purposive sample was done wherein we divided the population into strata, examining four quarters of which 1.2% of their population was used to constitute the sample population with a sample size of 83 which was recommended based on a recommendation from Taro Yamane sample size procedure on stratified sample.

For this study, the sampling techniques adopted are the stratified propulsive sampling techniques. The main reason that led to this choice of technique was that the population of the study was too large, and it was equally important to ensure a fair representation of the target population. Stratified sampling was equally used to ensure fairness, validity and reliability. As a stratum, being used as a subset of the entire study area gives reliable information. In this method, the study area was carved out into zones dividing the population into strata to ease the comparison between each stratum of the population since the study has to avoid both conscious and unconscious bias. Data for this study will be collected from two sources that is; through field work and textual analysis (primary data) and the review of documents (secondary data). These sources are all important as they are complementary. The sources shall both be used to attain the formulated objectives through the intertextuality approach.

Intertextuality: The Dynamics between Novels and Films

Intertextuality is an approach that has been utilized in a wide variety of theoretical systems. It is an approach that has informed and has been informed by many areas of the study of language and art. This has allowed it to develop

so many branches. Intertextuality was propounded by Julia Kristeva in 1966 and it is a literary approach that creates an interrelationship between texts or media and generates related understanding in the separate works. In this paper, intertextuality is used in the context of different media, which are between literature and film. That is, it investigates the barriers between text or media allowing the invasion of a multitude of works in any discussion. The texts used for analysis in this paper are *Half of a Yellow Sun* novel and its counterpart by Adichie and Bandele respectively.

1. Novel Readers

Novel readers play a significant role in novel-to-film adaptations, bringing unique perspectives and expectations. These novel readers have certain characteristics they possess which include

- Pre-existing knowledge which resonates around familiarity with characters, plot and themes
- Imagined visuals, which have to do with the setting and characters
- Interpretative ownership: personal understanding of the story.

Apart from the above characteristics, novel readers read adaptations with some expectations they hope to meet at the end such as fidelity, character consistency, theme preservation and similar emotional resonance. These expectations bring about heightened anticipation, comparisons and criticism. Depending on the outcome of events, the reader might choose to defend the changes in the novel or criticize them which is therefore evident their perception and preference is greatly influenced by the vision of the adapter.

2. Viewers

Film viewers bring a unique set of expectations and experience to novel-to-film adaptations which stem from certain characteristics which include

- Visual orientation influenced by cinematic storytelling
- Immediate gratification from an expectation of a self-contained narrative

- Different emotional connections distinct from readers' emotional investment
- No preconceptions due to unfamiliarity with details of the novels

Unlike readers, viewer's expectations have a direct relationship with its characteristics. These expectations resonate around engaging storytelling, spectacle such as cinematic quality, special effects and cinematography alongside entertainment.

3. Audience Reception

Audience reception is a summative evaluation/analysis of readers and viewers concerning their various reactions to adaptations. Audience reception as a process includes the following aspects

- Decoding: interpreting visual narrative cues
- Encoding: bringing in personal experience and biases to interpretation
- Negotiating: Balancing individual and cultural influences
- Resistance: Challenging or rejecting the adaptation

At this juncture, it can be fair to say that the process of audience reception, determines if an adaptation can said to be successful or not. Therefore, after decoding and encoding *half of a Yellow Sun,* by the audience, they still need to start negotiation and resistance before determining the outcome of the adaptation. These objectives can be realized by using theories explaining audience reception such as reception theory, reader-response, uses and gratification theory and social identity theory.

Factors Influencing Audience Perception and Preference in Novel to Film Adaptations
Time
Concerning the time factor, there is a general perception that it takes more time to read books than to watch films. This is because books can take weeks and even months to read but when adapted, it will take a few hours or days to watch. This was the case with the text under study as over 80% of the sampled population attested to the fact that they took less time in watching the adapted scripts than the book. Figure 1 throws more light on this.
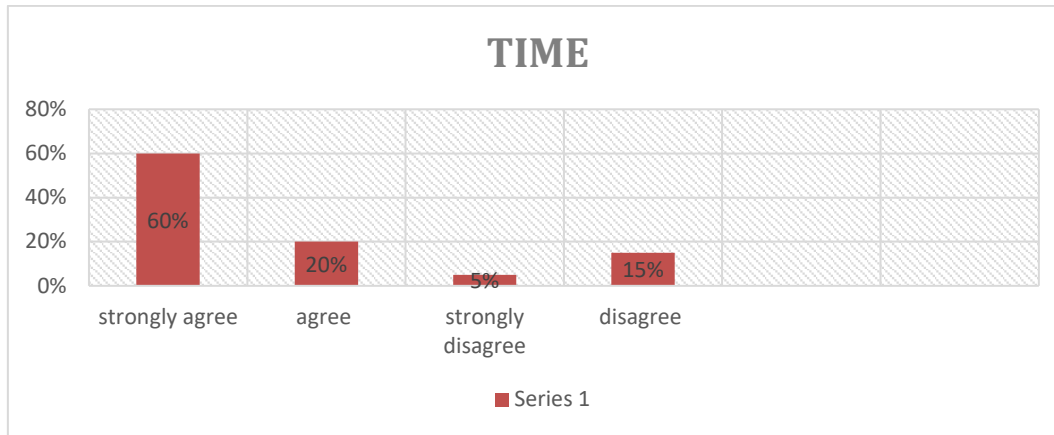
Figure 1: Time

(Source: Awat Malone, Field Work 2023/2024)

Figure 1 depicts the perspective of the population on the notion of time in asserting that literary professionals/students prefer viewing film adaptations to reading the texts. 60% of the population strongly agrees while 20% agree giving a cumulative percentage of 80% of the population that affirms and adhere to this notion. Nevertheless, 5% strongly disagree while 15% disagree pointing to the fact that in reading, they concentrated and dedicated all their attention to it thereby using less time unlike watching a movie wherein they can easily lose focus as a result of many distractions and this would warrant that they watch the movie again thus consuming more time

Affordability

Affordability is a major determining factor when it comes to literary professionals'/students' preferences in viewing film adaptations rather than reading the texts. This is because of the disparity in prices. Films are considered more affordable than books. The respondents indicated that the price of a film that has been adapted is 1/10 of the book cost and driven by the zeal to minimize cost they prefer the film to the book the response of the sample population is best depicted in Figure 2.
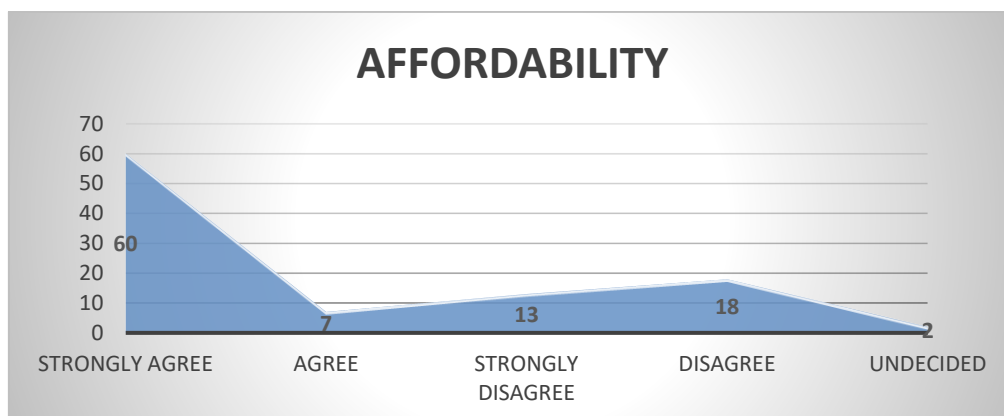
Figure 2: affordability

(Source: Awat Malone, Fieldwork 2023/2024)

Findings from the field reveal that 60% of the population strongly agree with the notion that Affordability is a major determining factor when it comes to literary professionals'/students' preferences in viewing film adaptations rather than reading the texts. This assertion is supported by 7% of the population thereby cumulating to 67% of the population that adheres to and affirms this assertion while 13% strongly disagree and 18% disagree and as such 31% of the population do not attribute their preferences to affordability. They hold durability as a more determining factor stating that even though books are relatively expensive than film, books are nevertheless more durable and can be easily preserved and read later while they are intact compared to films which may easily get damaged. This, to them, accounts for their preference for the book because they indicate it is a worthy asset to possess.

Accessibility

Accessible in the context of how easily available something can be obtained is pivotal when it comes to literary professionals/students, preferences in viewing film adaptations rather than reading the texts. Books and films have different levels of availability in different areas. In the Tubah subdivision, findings from the field best elucidate the perception of the focal population in Figure 3
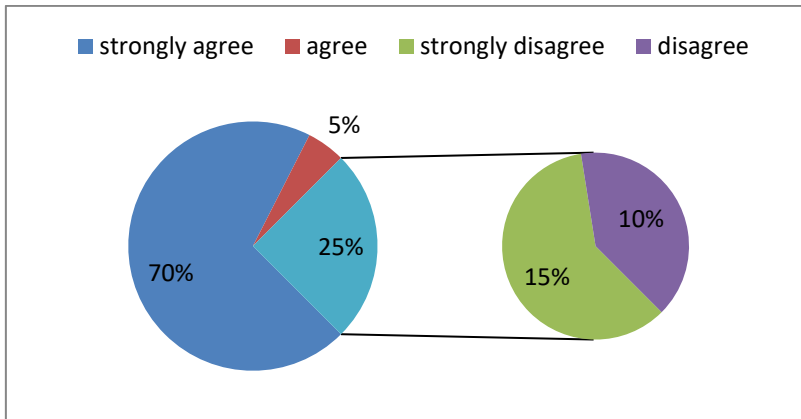
Figure 3: Accessibility

(Source: Awat Malone, Fieldwork 2023/2024)

In as much as both books and films are accessible, the opinion of the targeted population is divided on the extent to which they can be accessible. Statistics from the field point to greater accessibility to films than books. This is the reason why 70% of the population strongly agrees this assertion is equally supported by 5% of the population that agree while 15% strongly disagree and 10% disagree stating that the level of accessibility is a function of information and interest as books are even found in electronic formats thereby making them accessible online.

Entertaining

There are many purposes for which people watch films and read books. Prominent amongst these reasons, is that of entertainment. Many people find books and films to be entertaining so much that they even have favourite films and books which they can read and watch several times with much gratification. The views of the population are best represented in Figure 4.
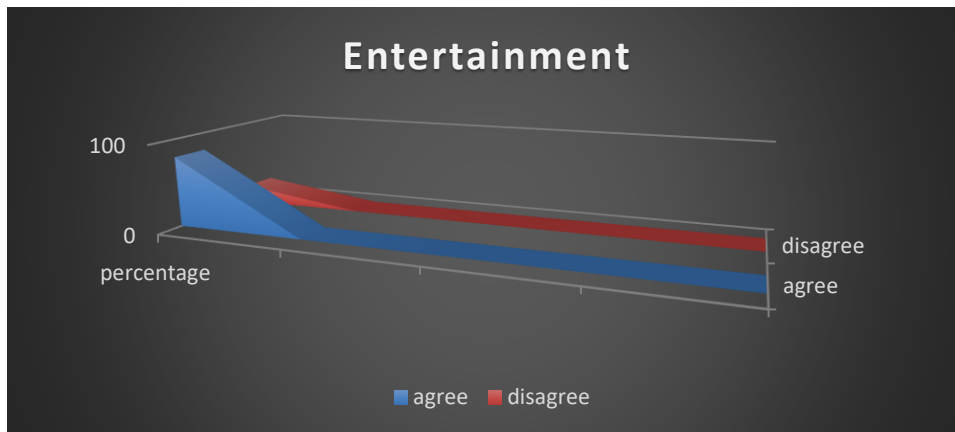
Figure 4: Entertainment

(Source: Awat Malone, Fieldwork 2023/2024)

From the preceding chart, it is seen clearly that 80% of the respondents adhere to or strongly agree that films are more entertaining than books. This is many on the premise that films can have special effects in terms of sounds and green screens which the viewers say are more entertaining, unlike a book which can only describe the sound. This therefore justifies their preference for films over books. Nevertheless, 20% of the respondents do not agree with this because they say it all depends on the author's ingenuity. They argue that some writers are better than some film directors, and as such, they can meticulously depict events in such a manner that you relate with more than what you can see in some films.

Identification

Being able to identify with something is a fundamental determinant in people's preferences as some people relate to certain things more than others. This is the same when it comes to asserting that literary professionals/students prefer viewing film adaptations than reading the texts. Some people stick to this notion while others reject it with justifiable reasons. The perspectives of both sides are presented in Figure 5.
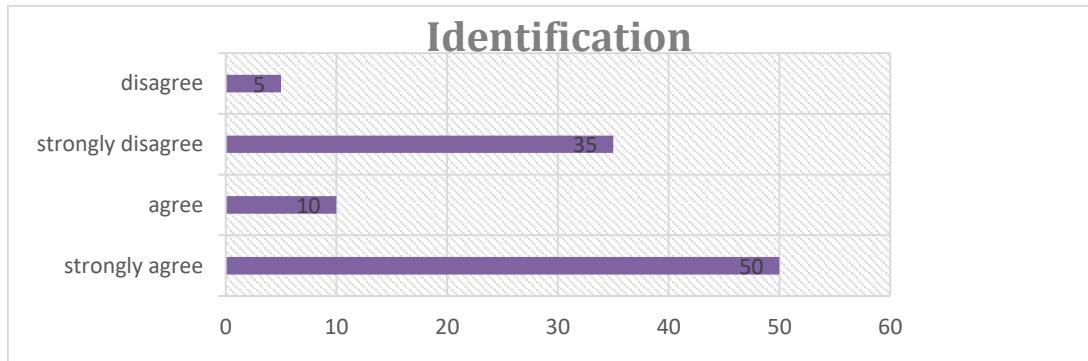
Figure 5: Relatable

(Source: Awat Malone, Fieldwork 2023/2024)

The perception of the target population on asserting that literary professionals/students prefer viewing film adaptations than reading the texts is somehow almost evenly divided. This is mainly because most people state that what makes something relatable/appealing to them is mainly the storyline which is central in determining their preferences. They posit that if a storyline is interesting to them whether books or adaptations, they nevertheless will still happily watch and read starting other factors like time. While 40% disagree that film adaptations are more relatable than books. 50% strongly agree likewise 10% agree giving a cumulative sum of 60% that subscribes to the opinion that literary professionals/students prefer viewing film adaptations than reading the texts.

Comprehension

This refers to the ease with which the selected population understands a text or a movie. This is mainly because there is a disparity when it comes to understanding different concepts and phenomena in life. The essence of every author creating content is firstly to communicate with an audience to which they wish to address, thereby emphasizing the importance of the need to be understood. The uniqueness of books and films gives them different levels of comprehension as shown by evidence from the field. The notion that literary professionals/students prefer viewing film adaptations to reading the texts as shown in Figure 6.
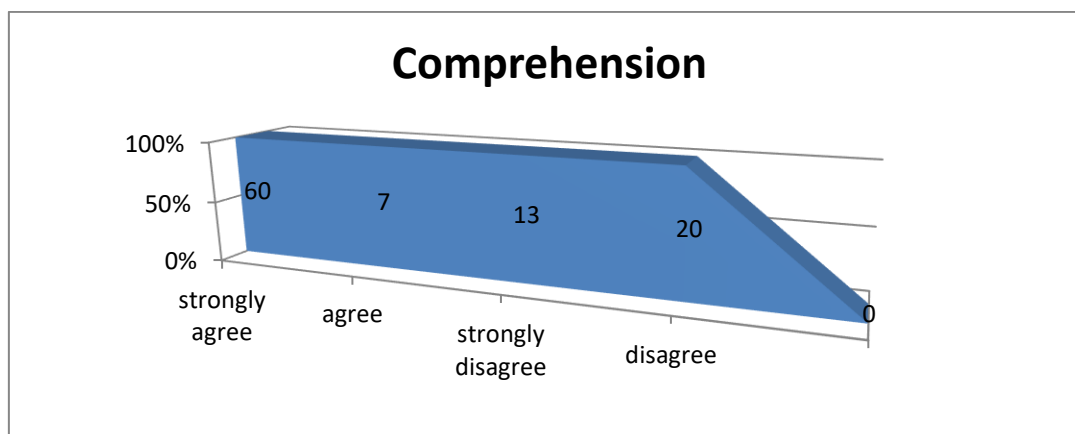
Figure 6: comprehension

(Source: Awat Malone, Fieldwork 2023/2024)

It can be seen that comprehension is one main determinant in preferences especially in the context of literary professionals/students' preferences in viewing film adaptations rather than reading the texts. Many respondents pointed to the fact that the visuals and actions in films are self-explanatory. This is why a person can watch a film in a foreign language and still understand the central message and other important elements in the film. This cannot be the case with reading books, as very few people will be interested in even opening a book that is written in another language. This highlights the advantage of watching a film to reading a book as indicated by the respondents.

Special Effects

Special effect refers to and constitutes all action, depiction, and enhancement that are intended to bring in feeling, sound or notion, that everything being equal, will not have been there. The purpose of special effects is mainly to portray vivid descriptions and enhance the details. It is worth noting that both films and books have different levels of special effects. In terms of books special effects are mostly portrayed in graphics or pictures while in films they extend to sounds and can be more detailed due to the correlation of visuals and audio, and the ability to curate alternative realities that can only be described in books. This, therefore,

explains why some literary professionals/students prefer viewing film adaptations to reading the texts Figure 7

Figure 7: Special Effects

(Source: Awat Malone, Fieldwork 2023/2024)

Special effect is arguably the most intriguing factor that determines the audience's preferences in reading books or watching films. This is so because the
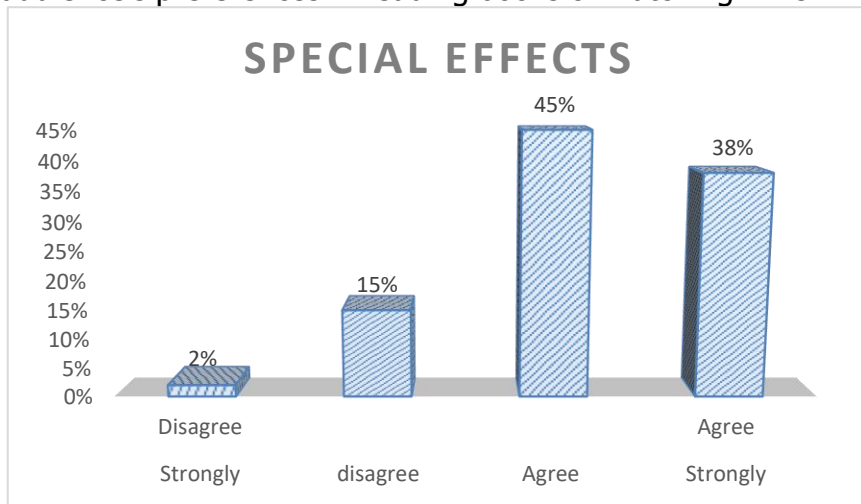
more details that can be captured in a few words or a few moments in a film, the more interesting the film or book is perceived to be. With the use of appropriate contemporary cutting-edge technology film adaptations are said to represent the authors' thoughts more accurately, This explains why findings from the field reveal that 38% of the respondents strongly agree supported by 45% that agree making a total of 83% of the population that adheres and affirms that most literary professionals/students prefer viewing film adaptations than reading the texts. Nevertheless, 2% strongly disagree while 15% equally disagree, stating that special effects in films at times drift away from the original concepts by adding extra stuff that gives a different impression.

Versatility/Multitasking in Watching Films and Doing Others Things

Versatility/ multitasking refers to the ability to do many things at once. It is not easy to be doing other things while reading a book because books demand diligent attention and doing other things that involve the hand will cause inconveniences in flipping through the pages of the book. This is not the case with films as people can be watching films and doing other things such as

"shelling egusi" and sorting vegetables with their hands while watching films as depicted below.

Figure 8: Versatility
(Source: Awat Malone, Fieldwork 2023/2024)

As seen in Figure 8, watching a film while carrying out other activities such as "sorting vegetables" is possible and this is a common practice in our society as most women during their leisure time, especially when they are watching TV love to complement it with benefiting activities that neither distract their attention from the film nor necessitate their complete attention. 95% of the respondents uphold the claim that it is relatively easier and more comfortable watching films and "shelling egusi" than reading a book and doing the same activity. This is because books have many pages, and they have to flip through, unlike a television screen that continuously displays a film, requiring little intervention for continuity as is the case with a book. Making allusions to other activities, the respondent stated that, they can carry out activities like "sorting vegetables", and peeling of items like cocoyam, yams, plantain, potatoes and cassava while watching films, an activity which they cannot do while reading a book due to the maximum attention and concentration reading requires. This explains why

literary professionals/students prefer viewing film adaptations to reading the texts.

Art Forms

Books and films incorporate different art forms. Though they have much in common and even complement each other. In some cases, nevertheless, they constitute separate art forms and as such, account for differences in preferences to various individual and collective groups of people influenced by their job description, age, location, religion and other inclinations that shape people's opinions. These art forms include but are not limited to music, graphite, sports, and sculpture amongst other arts and crafts. Different people relate to these art forms differently depending on the medium of interaction/interface. The aforementioned art forms though having differences in presentation with respect to films and books, nevertheless share the same point of view. However, they both have their diverse preferences as per the audience.

Figure 9: Art Form

(Source: Bandele's "Half of a Yellow Sun")

Concerning Figure 9, it is seen that a dance presented in a book would capture just specific action while that same dance presented in a film would encompass more action as it would be continuously displaying different dance moves/ styles, which if it were to be displayed in a book, would require just too many photos and will still miss out on some parts. This is one of the reasons that explain why

literary professionals/students prefer viewing film adaptations to reading the texts.

It is worth noting that elements such as age, location, and job description are handy factors when it comes to explaining why most literary professionals/students prefer viewing film adaptations to reading the texts. Concerning age, the younger generation is very much inclined to viewing than reading while the older generation is more inclined to reading than viewing. Furthermore, for location, those in urban areas have more interaction with viewing than those in rural areas. More so, in terms of job description people having jobs with less spare time prefer watching films to reading books as they consider watching films as a form of relaxation from their busy schedule. This is why to some of them reading books that have been adapted is seen as a pragmatic and unnecessary stress.

Films are more age-friendly than books as little children who cannot read can watch films and still understand.

The importance of accurately understanding the storyline of a novel or film cannot be overemphasized. This is a result of the fact that films and books have a specific message they are conveying in as much as parallel messages could be communicated as by-products, this notwithstanding, the central theme of the book or film is the main reason why the book was written. Age, Language, level of education, and self-development, significantly influence the level of understanding, thereby shaping preferences as people generally prefer what seems more friendly and understandable to them. Children and old persons who cannot read may more easily relate to what they can see as it fosters their understanding.
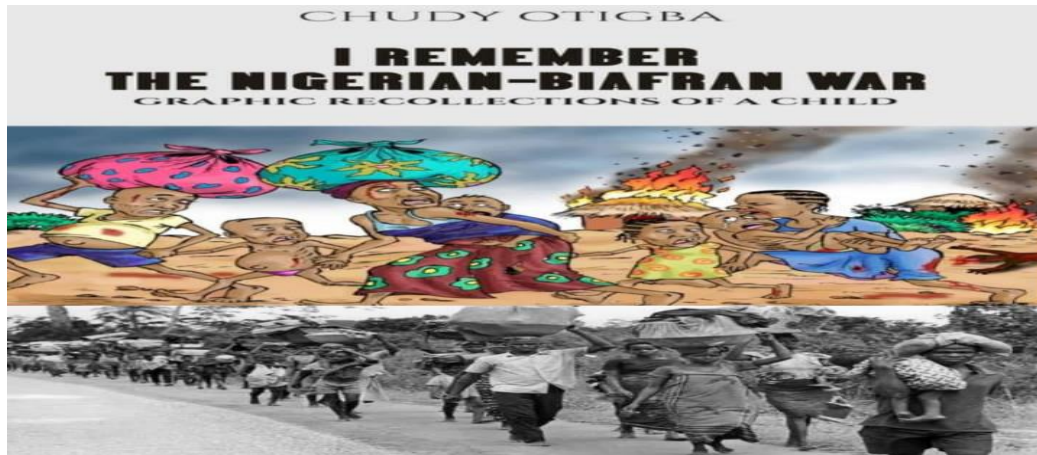
Figure 10: Films are more age-friendly than books for little children

(Source: adapted by the authors from dailytimesng.com and qz.com)

Figure 10 shows the Nigerian-Biafra war in pictures. From the above analysis, it is evident that children will easily relate to the cartoon-like images because they identify with them as opposed to the natural displacement pictures which resonate around adults.

Figure 11: Films are more age-friendly than books for little children

(Source: adapted by authors from slate.com and Pinterest)

Findings from the field reveal that children who cannot read will only be interested in a book if it contains pictures, beautiful colourations, graphics or other specially designed characters that catch the eye. This is so because they otherwise find it difficult to relate to what they can't read and understand. The reverse is true for film adaptations as watching and hearing people speak easily seem more relatable as many people hear and understand words that they cannot spell or

read/recognize in writing due to the intricacies that exist in the language in terms of spelling and pronunciations. this study revealed that 26% of the respondents made references to the fact that they are words which they have found difficult to pronounce and spell. However, when they hear others use those words in speaking, they understand immediately what the message is and thus accounts for why 74% of the target population holds to the notion that films are more age-friendly than books as little children who cannot read can watch films and understand.

Films can be easily stored online, transported, and transferred to other people than books

The advent of technology has brought about countless opportunities which include, but are not limited to the possibility of storing large files in small portable cassettes, discs, hard drives, flash, memory cards and even online wherein an individual does not need to carry any physical gadget. an individual can store and access their files from any part of the world at any time at their convenience thanks to the use of different types of technology. At first, to be able to access a book, there was a need for physical contact and some books are indeed very voluminous making them difficult to carry/transport around conveniently. In as much as books are equally available online in the forms of 'E-Books' that is Electronic Books they are not as widely available as films this is even more so when one considers the fact that there are some books that have been adapted into films which are still, till date, not having electronic versions, thereby attesting to the fact that literary professionals/students prefer viewing film adaptations than reading the texts.

It should be noted that books are adapted and placed online based on demand which is directly linked to the audience preferences. Thus, the fact that many books have been adapted nevertheless they don't have an electronic version is a testament to the fact that literary professionals/students prefer viewing film adaptations to reading the texts this is justified by the simple premise that it is Demand that Drives Supply. This simply reflects the preferences as more people

are subscribing to streaming platforms to watch films than those creating accounts on Electronic books (E-book portals). Results from the field reveal that amongst literary professionals and students aged 40 and below, 62% have active Subscriptions to streaming platforms, while only 45% of this age group have an E-book account. Less than 27% have active accounts which are used regularly on the frequency of twice a month as revealed by those having these accounts and statistics from the use of these accounts show an average of 3 months of inactivity as depicted in Fig. 12.
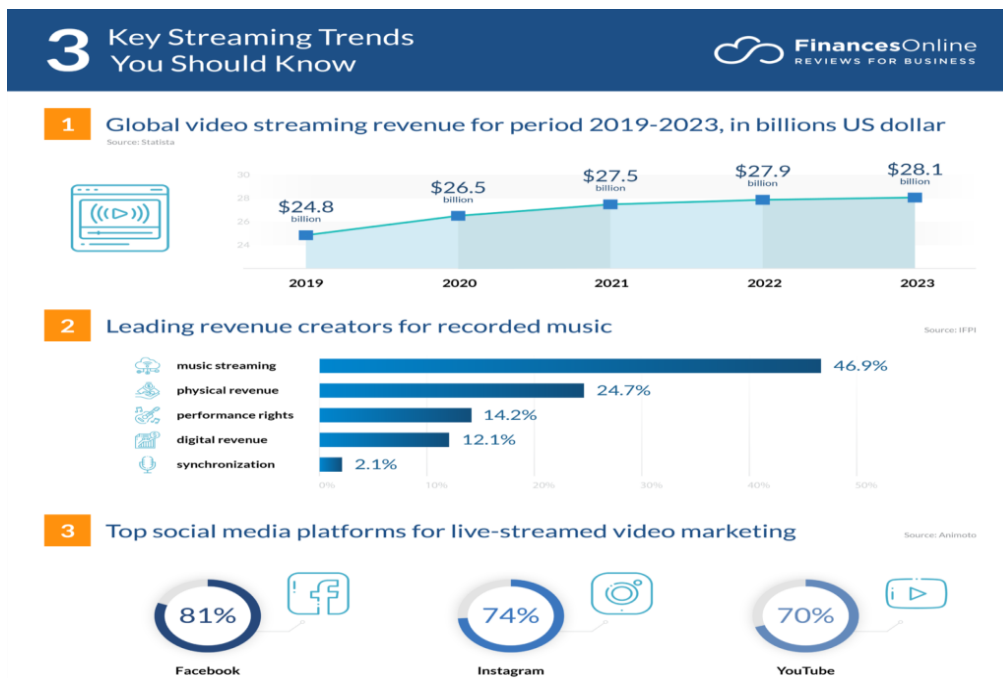
Figure 12: Global Video Streaming Revenues from 2019-2023
(Source: Finance Online 2024)
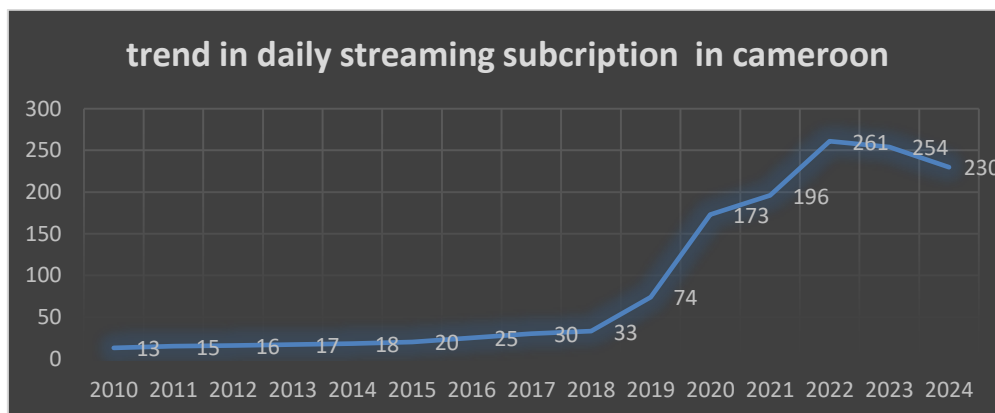
Figure 13: Book sale in 2023
(Source: Awat Malone, Fieldwork 2023/2024)

Figure 13 depicts the trend in daily subscriptions to streaming platforms of newcomers who are subscribing/creating accounts on these platforms. The statistics show that more people are watching films than reading books as some of the films streamed are adaptations. Relevant to note that 60% of our sample population indicated that for books/texts, they were not consistent in reading them all in one sitting but when it came to the adaptations, they watched the films in one sitting. 40% of the 60% indicated that they watched the movies more than once a week, that is, for a second time completely as it was more convenient for them to do so. This is not the case with a book and this is supported by streaming data from various platforms which shows a growing interest in films than written text.

Conclusion

This paper sought (out) to examine intertextuality and the dynamics of audiencehood in literature (novel) to film adaptation. It looked at intertextuality and the role it played in the discourse between media and posits that intersexuality comes into the study as a means to help examine texts or media that are influenced by others, but its main objective is not solely to investigate the new text and its precursor (the first existing text). Therefore, it sets out to investigate the interaction between the first text and the second text. The discourse of intertextuality also maps out the relationship between media and proposes that when discussing adaptation, attention should be directed towards the creative process of art forms rather than the source, that is, the processes used in novel-to-film adaptation.

The evolution of time and technology brought about a high increase in popular culture which greatly affected the field of arts in general and literature and film in particular. This is because a perpetual decrease in the reading culture has been experienced over the past years due to differences in perception and preferences. This is opposed to the significant increase and interest in viewership on the part of the audience. Therefore, it can be recommended that filmmakers and artistic directors should work together at all times to create both versions of their text

as it will go a long way to mitigate the unbalanced representation of choices by the audience and also help to market their works.

The assertion that the audience prefers' viewing film adaptations to reading the texts stemmed from observation, field survey, the use of interviews, focus group discussion, administration of questionnaires, pilot reconnaissance survey and textual analysis of the texts under study. The results revealed that indeed in today's society, a vast majority of people prefer viewing to reading. The paper also looked at the factors influencing choices of the audience which included but were not limited to time, affordability, accessibility, versatility/multitasking and comprehensibility. The research design used for this study was the stratified propulsive sampling techniques alongside an effective use of valid and reliable instruments and data collection procedures. This credited the paper's results with validation and reliability.

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