

Gender and Media: A Critical Analysis of Nigeria's Media Landscape

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Abstract

Media in its diverse forms remains a powerful force in shaping public perception, social identities, and political discourse, making gender representation a central concern within communication research. This paper examines the construction of gender across African media, with particular focus on Nigeria's media landscape. It interrogates how news reporting, advertising, entertainment content, and political communication reflect, reinforce, and at times contest traditional power relations between men and women. Drawing on illustrative cases such as the public controversy between Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan and Godswill Akpabio, gendered advertising practices in Nigeria's beverage industry, and recurring portrayals in Nollywood productions, the paper identifies persistent patterns of female objectification, marginalization in political narratives, and stereotypical characterization. The analysis further highlights structural inequalities embedded in media ownership, newsroom hierarchies, content production processes, and audience targeting strategies. The paper concludes that, despite emerging counter-narratives and digital activism challenging dominant frames, Nigerian media institutions largely reproduce patriarchal gender norms through agenda-setting and framing practices that privilege masculine authority and visibility.

Keywords

Gender, Representation, Media, Marginalisation, and objectification



I. Introduction

Media in all its variety is a potent force, one that helps build public perception, identities and discourse. The role of media in relation to gender and is a prominent subject within communication research, as scholars attempt to understand the way(s) in which media purportedly represent and even perpetuate social hierarchies (Gallagher, 2014). In Nigeria and other African countries, gender depiction in the media has serious implications for social transformation, political awareness and cultural interaction. Nigeria's media scene is vibrant with over 100 TV stations, more than 200 radio stations, scores of newspapers and magazines, the expanding digital space that reaches millions daily (National Broadcasting Commission, 2023). Nollywood, which produces around 2,500 films annually, is the world's second-largest film industry by volume (UNESCO, 2021; Aondover & Aondover, 2023) and profoundly influences public perceptions of gender roles and expectations.

Despite the media's potential to drive progress, Nigerian media often perpetuates patriarchal norms, privileging masculine viewpoints while sidelining women's voices and experiences (Oyinade, Daramola, & Lamidi, 2013). As Byerly and Ross (2006, p. 45) note, "media does not merely reflect social reality; it actively constructs it," making media a site where gender ideologies are both reinforced and challenged (Aondover & Akin-Odukoya, 2024).

This paper explores how Nigerian media portrays gender across news, advertising, and entertainment, situating these portrayals within African and global contexts. It addresses key questions about the nature of male and female representation, the theoretical frameworks explaining these patterns, and the real-world impacts of such portrayals. By doing so, the research contributes to scholarship on gender and media in Africa and offers

recommendations for media practitioners, policymakers, and civil society actors working toward greater gender equity.

1.1 Research Objectives

1. Analyse how men and women are represented in Nigerian news media, advertising, entertainment, and political communication.
2. Identify the dominant gender stereotypes and power dynamics perpetuated or challenged by Nigerian media.
3. Examine the real-world implications of these gender portrayals for Nigerian society.

1.2 Historical Context of Gender in African Media

The evolution of media in Africa is deeply intertwined with the continent's colonial history. Colonial-era media institutions, predominantly controlled by European powers, established representational paradigms that privileged Western perspectives and often exoticized African women, casting them as 'other' or subordinate (Mano, 2009). These entrenched frameworks persisted post-independence, as African nations, including Nigeria, inherited media infrastructures where patriarchal norms remained embedded (Aondover et al., 2022).

In Nigeria, the inception of the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation in 1957 marked a significant milestone in media proliferation within a socio-cultural context characterized by customary laws and religious doctrines that often-subordinated women. Scholars such as Adekunle (2015) have documented how early Nigerian media content mirrored and reinforced these patriarchal values by predominantly depicting women in domestic and supportive roles, while men occupied public and authoritative spheres (Aondover et al., 2025s).

1.3 Empirical Review

Empirical scholarship on gender representation across global, regional, and local contexts underscores the media's pivotal role in shaping, perpetuating, and legitimizing gender stereotypes and power imbalances. Studies reveal a consistent pattern where media content privileges masculine identities while constraining female agency and visibility across news, advertising, and entertainment platforms (Vitalis et al., 2023).

At the global level, Santoniccolo et al. (2023) conducted a comprehensive systematic review revealing that women are frequently portrayed as communal, emotional, and appearance-focused, whereas men are depicted as agentic, dominant, and achievement-oriented. These patterns pervade various media forms, such as news reports, advertisements, films, and video games, and are empirically linked to adverse psychosocial outcomes such as increased self-objectification and tolerance of sexist beliefs. Despite gradual shifts toward gender equality attitudes, media portrayals lag behind societal change, sustaining harmful gender norms.

Such findings resonate strongly within Nigeria's media environment, where advertising and entertainment often amplify exaggerated masculine ideals and the objectification of women. Yadav's (2023) critical review of Indian media, highlighting women's frequent representation as homemakers or sexual objects and men's as authoritative decision-makers, parallels these Nigerian media dynamics, suggesting the influence of patriarchal social structures transcending geographical boundaries.

Regionally, Sulemana, Musah, and Ibrahim (2023) identified in Ghanaian televised advertisements a dominant portrayal of masculinity through physical strength and leadership, with women relegated to marginal or decorative roles. This aligns with findings from Nigerian advertising studies. For example, Edegoh, Asemah, and Okpanachi (2013) reported

that Guinness billboard advertisements in Nigeria consistently foreground strong male figures while limiting female presence, reinforcing traditional gender expectations and patriarchal ideologies.

Further content analyses by Sanni (2016) and Anweh (2020) demonstrated how Nigerian television advertisements routinely position women within subordinate domestic roles, thereby normalising gender inequality and perpetuating male dominance in everyday life. Collectively, these empirical insights highlight the media's centrality as a site for the reproduction of hegemonic gender ideologies and provide an essential foundation for examining contemporary Nigerian media's role in shaping social meanings around gender.

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Hegemonic Masculinity Theory

R.W. Connell's (1995) Hegemonic Masculinity Theory elucidates the culturally dominant form of masculinity that legitimises male authority over women and subordinate masculinities. This hegemonic ideal valorises traits such as strength, emotional restraint, competitiveness, leadership, and heterosexuality. It operates as a systemic social construct embedded within institutions, including the media, rather than merely individual behaviours (Aondover et al., 2024).

In the Nigerian media context, hegemonic masculinity manifests through portrayals that associate men with power, control, and public authority while marginalising or objectifying women. Advertising campaigns, particularly within Nigeria's beverage industry, frequently depict men as resilient leaders and dominant figures, reinforcing patriarchal values through both visual imagery and narrative (Maiwada et al., 2025). Similarly, Nollywood films and political media coverage reproduce these ideals, with male authority foregrounded and female agency diminished. Hegemonic masculinity theory thus provides a critical lens to understand how such media portrayals sustain traditional gender hierarchies by naturalising a singular masculine identity as normative and aspirational.

2.1 Framing Theory

Originating from Erving Goffman's (1974) seminal work and expanded by Robert Entman (1993), framing theory posits that media shape audience perceptions by selecting certain aspects of reality to emphasise while downplaying others. These frames influence how events, individuals, and social roles are interpreted by the public (Onyejelem et al., 2024).

Regarding gender, media frames typically highlight men's competence, leadership, and public roles, while women are framed around appearance, emotion, or private sphere roles. For instance, Nigerian news coverage frequently focuses on female politicians' personal lives or physical appearances rather than their professional expertise. Similarly, beer advertisements frame masculinity through themes of celebration and social bonding, casting men as "kings" or "leaders," thereby reinforcing societal norms about gender roles. Framing Theory thus enables the analysis of media's selective portrayals and their role in reinforcing gendered power dynamics.

III. Research Methods

3.1 Gender Representation in Nigerian Media: Case Studies of Politics, Advertising, and Entertainment (2015–2024)

a. The Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan and Senator Godswill Akpabio Controversy

The 2025 public dispute between Senators Godswill Akpabio and Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan serves as a perfect, if frustrating, example of how gender bias still runs the show in Nigerian political news. While the media typically focuses on Akpabio's actual political moves or his specific scandals, the tone shifts completely when the cameras turn to Akpoti-Uduaghan. Suddenly, the conversation is no longer about her legislative track record; it's about her looks, her marriage, or how "difficult" her personality is.

Take a headline like "Glamorous Senator Clashes with Colleague." That isn't just a description; it's a calculated choice. By leading with her appearance, the media is effectively conveying that her femininity matters more than her professional input. This is a subtle way of stripping away her authority, turning her into a novelty act in the Senate rather than a peer with real expertise.

This is not a coincidence; it's a structural problem. Through the lens of Hegemonic Masculinity, we see that men like Akpabio are treated as if they naturally "own" the political space. Even when they are in the middle of a controversy, their right to be there isn't questioned. Women, however, are treated like guests who have to prove they belong. Ultimately, this kind of reporting does a lot more than just move newspapers—it keeps old-school power gaps alive by keeping men at the centre and pushing women to the edges of the frame (Oreoluwa et al., 2024)s.

b. Gender and Advertising: The Case of Nigerian Beer Advertisements

Nigerian beer advertising from 2015 to 2024 manifests entrenched patterns of gendered representation rooted in hegemonic masculine ideals. Leading campaigns by Trophy Lager and Heineken routinely situate beer consumption as an exclusively male domain, associating masculinity with power, social status, and bonding rituals, while relegating women to peripheral or objectified roles.

c. Trophy Lager – “Millions of Honorables Can't Be Wrong”

Although the statement seems to be gender-neutral, the advertisement's visual focus is solely on men. In culture, the phrase "honorables" implies male leadership and respectability. Women simply appear as decorative elements in the commercial, without participating in conversation or consumption, while well-dressed males celebrate their shared heritage over beer. This trend is maintained in the follow-up campaign, Made for Honorable Moments, which shows lots of men with few women and no women drinking beer. Because they actively shape and reinforce the cultural narrative that beer is a manly commodity reserved for "honorable" men, these portrayals are consistent with framing theory.

d. Heineken Nigeria – “Anywhere You Go” & “Villager 55”

Ads for Heineken present emotionally stirring stories of father-son kinship and history. In Villager 55, beer drinking is depicted as a private ritual reserved for father and son, even if gifts are given to female family members. In a similar vein, Anywhere You Go highlights migration and heritage, portraying men as the only beer drinkers. By highlighting cultural connections, these stories humanize masculine characters, but they also perpetuate beer consumption as a gendered ritual, keeping women out of key roles. This exclusivity preserves male bonding and symbolic heritage in male-only venues, which is an example of Connell's Hegemonic Masculinity Theory.

e. Nollywood and Gender Representation

Nollywood, as Nigeria's dominant entertainment industry, plays a critical role in shaping societal perceptions of gender roles. A content analysis of key films such as *King of Boys* (2018) and *Living in Bondage* (1992), alongside its sequel *Living in Bondage: Breaking Free* (2019), reveals persistent gender stereotypes embedded within complex narratives (Vitalis et al., 2024).

King of Boys features a powerful female protagonist navigating political power, yet her authority is depicted through traditionally masculine traits such as dominance, strategic aggression, and control. While the film challenges passive female stereotypes, it nonetheless situates female agency within male-dominated power structures, consistent with hegemonic masculinity. The protagonist's power is often measured against male rivals and societal norms valorizing masculine authority.

Living in Bondage originally portrayed women primarily as victims or temptresses influencing male ambition. Though the 2019 sequel offers more nuanced female characters with greater agency, women's narratives remain tethered to romantic or maternal roles. These portrayals indicate that, despite advancements, Nollywood continues to embed hegemonic masculinity as a central framework.

f. Themes of Power, Legacy, and Male-Centered Rituals

Across political media, beer advertisements, and Nollywood films, masculinity is consistently linked to power, social status, and cultural legacy. Men are portrayed as natural leaders, decision-makers, and guardians of tradition, reinforcing dominant male authority within Nigerian society. Female figures, even when portrayed with agency or strength, are often framed in relation to male-dominated structures, reflecting and sustaining hegemonic masculinity. These media portrayals collectively reinforce gender hierarchies by symbolically and overtly positioning masculinity as synonymous with control, legacy, and exclusion.

g. Gender Representation and the Power of Visual Framing

A clear pattern across the media analyzed is the central role given to men as leaders, achievers, and consumers, while women are mostly relegated to peripheral or decorative roles. In beer advertisements, men are shown engaging in rituals of consumption and celebration, whereas women appear mainly as background figures without narrative importance. For example, Trophy Lager's campaigns exclude women from beer consumption and key social moments, framing beer as an exclusively male domain. Heineken's emotionally driven stories also emphasise male bonding and heritage, reinforcing this exclusivity.

In political media, female politicians are often framed through gendered lenses that highlight their appearance or personality rather than their achievements. This selective portrayal aligns with Framing Theory, which explains how media actively shape societal norms by influencing public perceptions of gender roles (Vitalis et al., 2025). Such framing not only reflects but also helps construct ideas about who belongs in positions of power.

These patterns fit within Hegemonic Masculinity Theory, which argues that dominant masculinity sustains male privilege by marginalising other gender expressions. By repeatedly presenting male-centred narratives, symbolically excluding women, and reinforcing male rituals, Nigerian media contribute to institutionalising gender hierarchies. Thus, media in Nigeria do not just reflect social inequalities but actively help produce and maintain gendered power relations, presenting gender roles as natural and fixed.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1 Instrument of Data Collection: Thematic Coding Matrix

To facilitate systematic analysis of recurring gender representations and framing strategies within selected media texts, a thematic coding matrix was developed. This instrument enabled the identification, categorisation, and comparison of visual and narrative elements across political coverage, beer advertisements, and Nollywood films, with a focus on masculinity traits, gender representation, symbols of power, and framing devices.

The matrix comprised four key dimensions:

1. *Masculinity Traits*: Characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity, such as authority, leadership, emotional restraint, physical strength, legacy, and social dominance.
2. *Gender Representation*: The presence and roles of men and women within media texts, noting whether women are central or marginal, active or passive, and the depiction of their agency.
3. *Symbols of Power and Identity*: Visual and linguistic elements conveying power dynamics, including royal imagery, exclusive male gatherings, familial legacy rituals, and social status markers.
4. *Framing Elements*: Narrative and visual techniques highlighting or omitting particular aspects to shape audience perceptions, such as framing men as rightful leaders and women as supporters or novelties.

Media Text	Masculinity Traits	Gender Representation	Symbols of Power and Identity	Framing Elements
Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan Media Coverage	Authority, Competence (undermined)	Women framed by appearance and demeanour	Political power is framed as the male default	Appearance-focused frame marginalises female agency
Trophy Lager— "Millions of Honourables"	Leadership, Brotherhood, Status	Men central; women in the background or absent	Male gatherings, honorific titles	Beer as male privilege: women excluded from core narrative
"Heineken— "Villager 55" & "Anywhere You Go"	Legacy, Family bonding, Emotional restraint	Men as consumers; women in peripheral roles	Father-son rituals, gift giving	Beer as a male-only bonding ritual; women excluded
Nollywood – <i>King of Boys</i>	Power, Strategic dominance	Female power linked to masculine frameworks	Authority linked to legacy and control	Complex female roles framed within male-dominated power structures

Source: (Author computation, 2026).

The matrix guided repeated viewings, enabling clear qualitative analysis of how Nigerian media reinforce or challenge gender norms and construct masculinity.

4.2 Description of Selected Media Texts

1. **Political Media Coverage: Natasha Akpabio and Godswill Akpabio Controversy (2023)**

Male politicians like Godswill Akpabio are framed around policy competence and leadership, while female politicians such as Natasha Akpabio face gendered portrayals focusing on appearance and temperament, overshadowing their professional abilities. This biased framing reinforces women's marginalisation in Nigerian political discourse.

2. **Trophy Lager: "Millions of Honourables Can't Be Wrong" (2023) and "Made for Honourable Moments" (2024)**

These campaigns link beer consumption with male honor, leadership, and status, largely relegating women to peripheral or decorative roles. The term "honourables" culturally codes men as custodians of respect and authority, highlighting embedded gender power dynamics.

3. **Heineken Nigeria: "Anywhere You Go" & "Villager 55" (2017)**

Heineken ads emphasise father-son bonding and legacy, framing beer drinking as a male-only ritual. Women appear in supporting roles like gift-giving but are excluded from core consumption, maintaining male exclusivity with a softer emotional tone.

4. **Nollywood Film: King of Boys (2018) and Others**

Nollywood shapes gender perceptions by portraying powerful women like the protagonist in *King of Boys* using traditionally masculine traits. Yet, her power operates within male-dominated systems, reflecting persistent patriarchal ideologies. Earlier films often reinforced stereotypes by casting women as victims or manipulators.

4.3 Content Analysis Results

The qualitative content analysis employed a thematic coding process, operationalised through the matrix. Multiple viewings and readings of selected texts identified the presence or absence of traits related to gender roles, masculinity, symbols of power, and framing devices. These observations were quantified to establish prevalence rates, consistent with standard media content analysis methodologies (Neuendorf, 2017).

4.4 Gender Roles

Men dominate central roles across all media texts (100%), consistently positioned as leaders, achievers, and decision-makers. Women appear in only 30% of the texts, typically confined to background or decorative roles with limited narrative significance. This exclusionary pattern underscores entrenched gender norms reflective of hegemonic masculinity's valorisation of male dominance and female marginalisation. For instance, Trophy Lager's "Millions of Honourables Can't Be Wrong" campaign centres exclusively on men, visually encoding beer as a symbol of male honor, while women remain passive. Similarly, political coverage favors male politicians on governance issues, while female politicians' appearances and demeanors receive disproportionate attention.

4.5 Traits of Masculinity

The portrayal of masculinity is largely traditional, with 85% of traits emphasising strength, endurance, authority, honor, and emotional restraint. More progressive or non-traditional masculine traits, such as vulnerability and emotional openness are scarce (<20%). This trend aligns with Connell's (1995) hegemonic masculinity framework, privileging dominance and stoicism over emotional expression. For example, Trophy Lager emphasises honor and leadership, while Heineken's "Villager 55" subtly introduces father-son emotional bonding without challenging patriarchal norms. In *King of Boys*, female characters

occasionally embody masculine traits but continue to operate within male-dominated power hierarchies.

4.6 Symbols of Power

Symbols of power, including royalty, honorific titles, social status markers, and family legacy, pervade all texts (100%), reinforcing masculinity's association with authority and tradition. Trophy Lager's invocation of "honorable" confers respect and social dominance; Heineken's narratives emphasize beer as a legacy passed from father to son. Political media visually frames male politicians with power symbolism, while female politicians are marginalized through gendered framing. *King of Boys* deploys symbols of criminal and political power to articulate masculinity in the Nigerian sociopolitical milieu.

4.7 Framing Elements

Framing Theory is evident in presenting masculinity as both identity and reward. All adverts frame beer drinking and political competence as rites validating manhood and achievement. Trophy Lager positions beer as a reward exclusive to "honorable men," thereby reinforcing exclusionary norms. Heineken frames beer consumption as a male rite of passage. Political media coverage marginalizes female politicians through emphasis on appearance and personality over professional qualifications, exemplified by the contrasting portrayals of Senators Godswill and Natasha Akpabio.

V. Conclusions

This paper highlights ongoing gender inequalities in Nigerian media, where women are consistently marginalised in news coverage, advertising, and entertainment. Agenda-setting theory explains how the media prioritise male political narratives, sidelining women's voices and reinforcing male dominance. Framing Theory reveals how selective emphasis on masculine traits and exclusion of women in media content shapes public perceptions of gender roles. Hegemonic Masculinity Theory further clarifies how media sustain male authority by normalizing male-centered power and marginalizing alternative gender expressions.

Across political media, beer advertising, and Nollywood films, masculinity is framed as linked to power, status, and tradition, with men as central actors and women relegated to peripheral or decorative roles. Despite some emotionally nuanced narratives, these media reinforce male exclusivity, excluding women from meaningful participation. This persistent pattern reflects and reproduces broader patriarchal structures in Nigerian society.

Transforming Nigerian media narratives requires challenging these entrenched frameworks. By addressing agenda-setting biases, reframing gender portrayals, and disrupting hegemonic masculine norms, media can contribute to a more inclusive representation of both men and women. Such change holds promise for shifting public attitudes and promoting greater gender equity in Nigeria's social and cultural landscape.

Recommendations

1. Advertisers should create inclusive campaigns that show women and men as equal participants in beer culture and politics. Move beyond stereotypes by portraying women enjoying beer and demonstrating strength. Include progressive masculine traits like emotional openness to diversify gender representations.
2. Policymakers and regulators should enforce gender balance guidelines in advertising and political media, with monitoring and penalties for violations. Strengthen existing codes and conduct regular audits with gender-disaggregated data. Consider establishing a

dedicated media gender desk and including media representation provisions in the Gender Equity Bill.

3. Educators and NGOs should promote media literacy to help audiences critically engage with gender portrayals. Integrate media literacy into education, partner with media for inclusive content, and support research on gender and media. NGOs should monitor portrayals and recognise positive media efforts to encourage change.

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