

IDEOLOGY AND GENDERED DOUBLE STANDARDS IN BABY MAMA DISCOURSE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract

This study examines the construction of misogyny and gendered double standards in Nigerian digital discourse surrounding the “baby mama” identity. The study was necessitated by the relative paucity of existing studies linguistically examining this phenomenon within the Nigerian context. Situated within the context of celebrity culture and social media commentary, the research investigates how language is used to regulate women’s sexuality, motherhood, and respectability. Drawing on Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), the study analyzes six purposively selected posts from publicly accessible Nigerian entertainment blogs and associated commentaries on X (formerly Twitter). A critical discourse analytical approach is employed in the study. The findings reveal that the term “baby mama” functions as a stigmatizing master label that reduces women’s identities to their reproductive status while simultaneously normalizing male sexual autonomy. The analysis further demonstrates how moral, religious and relational discursive strategies are deployed to discipline women symbolically and reinforce patriarchal norms. Through repetitive labeling, evaluative language and asymmetrical identity construction, digital platforms reproduce gendered hierarchies under the guise of entertainment reporting. The study concludes that baby mama discourse is not merely descriptive but ideological, serving as a mechanism for sustaining symbolic inequality in contemporary Nigerian digital culture. It therefore calls for critical engagement with everyday digital language practices that normalize gendered moral regulation.

Keywords: baby mama discourse, gendered double standards, patriarchal ideology, social media, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

Introduction

Language plays a central role in the construction, circulation, and legitimization of social meanings, particularly in relation to gender, sexuality and morality in digital public spheres. Social media platforms have become powerful sites for the negotiation of gendered identities and social norms. Among the recurring and highly contested discourses in these spaces are discourses surrounding women labeled as “baby mamas”, a term commonly used to describe women who have children outside marriage. While often framed as neutral or descriptive, the term has acquired strong negative connotations in online discourse, functioning as a linguistic tool for stigma, moral judgment and misogynistic regulation of women’s bodies and reproductive choices (Oriakpono, 2024).

Globally and within patriarchal societies such as Nigeria, motherhood outside marriage is frequently subjected to intense moral scrutiny. Social media discourse reflects and amplifies this scrutiny. In many social media interactions, women who become mothers outside marriage are subjected to intense verbal scrutiny, ridicule and blame. They are seen as sole bearers of moral accountability. On the other hand, men in similar reproductive contexts are rarely subjected to equivalent condemnation, instead, they are discursively erased, excused or linguistically represented as unfortunate or even celebrated. This asymmetry points to deeper ideological structures that privilege masculinity while policing femininity. This reflects what feminist scholars refer to as a gendered double standard, where identical behaviours are evaluated differently based on gender (Lazar, 2005).

The rise of participatory digital culture has intensified the visibility and circulation of such narratives. Unlike traditional media, social media allows users to actively produce, reinforce and disseminate discourse, thereby reinforcing dominant ideologies or, in some cases, contesting them. Misogynistic narratives about “baby mamas” are frequently normalized through humour, sarcasm, moralizing advice, and religious or cultural justifications. These linguistic strategies are often employed as discursive strategies to legitimize gendered shaming while masking violence and discrimination by framing gendered shaming as common sense or moral correction (Jane, 2017). Notably, women themselves sometimes participate in reproducing these discourses, reflecting the internalization of patriarchal norms and respectability politics. Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis interprets this phenomenon as the internalization of patriarchal ideology rather than genuine gender neutrality (Lazar, 2007).

This study is therefore situated within the intersection of language, gender and digital media, seeking to critically examine how misogyny and gendered double standards are linguistically constructed, circulated and legitimized in baby mama narratives on social media. By employing critical and feminist critical frameworks, the study aims to uncover the ideological underpinnings of these discourses and contribute to broader conversations on gender justice, representation and ethical communication in digital public spheres. Also, it aims to contribute to feminist linguistic scholarship by demonstrating how digital discourse functions as a contemporary site for the reproduction of patriarchal power.

Statement of the Problem

Social media platforms have become influential sites for the production and circulation of public discourse, shaping perceptions of gender, morality and sexuality. Scholarship on gendered discourse has established that women are disproportionately targeted for moral policing and verbal aggression on social media (Gupta and Gogoi, 2025; Stevens et al, 2024; Jane, 2017). Within these digital spaces, narratives surrounding women labeled as baby mamas have gained prominence, often characterized by moral judgment and overt or covert misogyny. Although these narratives appear as everyday commentary, they reflect deeper patriarchal ideologies that regulate women's sexuality and reproductive choices while affording men discursive immunity. The persistence of such gendered double standards raises significant concerns about how language functions to sustain inequality in contemporary digital societies.

Despite growing scholarship on gendered identities, gender-based violence and feminist digital discourse, there remains a relative scarcity of linguistically grounded studies that focus specifically on baby mama narratives on social media as a site of ideological struggle. Existing studies often focus on hate speech (Bugajska and Dziedzic, 2023), sexism (Rodriguez-Sanchez et al, 2024), cyberbullying (Anyanwu and Udoh, 2021), sexual double standards among university students (Briceno-Olivera, Galvano-Cabello, Terucan and Rodriguez, 2026), gender inequalities in academia (Araya and Guizardi, 2025); leaving a gap in the detailed analysis of how language choices sustain gendered double standards in reproductive narratives. Moreover, in African, especially Nigerian contexts, where cultural expectations of marriage, motherhood and female respectability are deeply entrenched, such discourses carry significant social consequences which include stigma, exclusion, victim-blaming, and psychological harm.

This gap is problematic because it obscures the ways in which power and ideology are embedded in everyday language practices and normalized through repeated online interactions. Social media functions as an extension of offline patriarchal norms, amplifying them through virality and participatory engagement. Without systematic linguistic analysis, misogynistic narratives are easily dismissed as harmless opinions or cultural expressions rather than recognized as discursive practices that reproduce gendered power relations. Furthermore, the absence of focused analysis limits the ability to challenge the ideological assumptions that underpin such discourse. This research therefore intends to fill this gap.

Research Questions

1. How are women labeled as baby mamas discursively constructed in social media discourse?
2. What discursive strategies are used to express misogyny and moral judgment in baby mama narratives on social media?
3. How do social media users reproduce or challenge gendered double standards through language in baby mama-related discourse?
4. What patriarchal ideologies and gendered power relations are embedded in baby mama discourse on social media?

Conceptual Review

Social Media and Ideology

Zajda (2014) defines ideology as a system of dominant ideas and beliefs affecting every sphere of human social interaction and organization. Buchanan and Levinson (2024) note that the concept of ideology was first introduced by Comte Destutt de Tracy as the science of ideas that aimed to determine the material conditions that give rise to ideas. The concept has however undergone significant development since its introduction. Buchanan and Levinson (2024) distinguish two uses of the term: a descriptive-explanatory use and an evaluative use. The descriptive-explanatory use is concerned with how the existence of ideologies helps explain certain social phenomenon. Those who employ the term in an evaluative sense on the other hand believe that ideologies support unjust social orders and should be done away with. According to Buchanan and Levinson (2024):

Ideologies do not work merely through the dissemination of false consciousness. They also constrain and direct the actions of individuals by including norms that require or prohibit certain behaviours and by defining reasonable expectations for members of various groups. In these ways, ideologies distort the exercise of practical reason.

Gender ideology is “the set of beliefs that govern people’s participation in the gender order, and by which they explain and justify that participation” (Eckert and McConell-Ginet, 2013).

Thompson (1990) points out that the first and defensive function of ideology is as the process of legitimization, and ‘meaning in the service of power’, and ‘ways in which meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination’. An ideology can be imposed through force (as in the case of the Taliban in Afghanistan which imposes a strict interpretation of Islamic law, banning education for girls, restricting women from public life and using violent punishments to enforce their ideology) but is mostly achieved through unconscious imposition – convincing people that it is natural. This process is called naturalization because it needs not be explained to people (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2013). Sexist ideologies apply stricter moral judgment to women than men. When women make choices that deviate from prescribed gender norms, they are branded as immoral, reckless or irrational. This is evident in discourses around baby mamas where women’s decisions are scrutinized while men’s roles are minimized or excused.

Social media is the set of interactive internet applications that facilitate (collaborative or individual) creation, curation, and sharing of user-generated content (Davis, 2016). It refers to online platforms where people can share information and connect with virtual communities through text, photos, videos, etc. Social media has consequences for the concept of ideology. It is not just a neutral platform for expression but an ideological space where power relations are enacted and contested through discourse. Social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, constitute a digital ideological instrument that enables users to create, share, and amplify meanings about gender, sexuality and morality. Social media users recirculate content that aligns with their pre-existing ideological views. The visibility of likes, shares and comments creates a perception of majority support for certain views, leading users to conform to popular opinions leading to a bandwagon effect. The affordances of social media such as anonymity, virality, interactivity and algorithmic visibility, shape the production and circulation of discourse. Algorithms prioritize content designed to trigger strong emotions like fear, anger, or outrage, spreads faster which often drives users toward more extreme, polarized or radical views. This algorithmic polarization helps facilitate the rapid spread of ideological loaded narratives, including those that stigmatize women labeled as baby mamas while normalizing male sexual freedom and reproductive irresponsibility. Social media users “engage videos, status updates, photos in a way that promotes ideologies they align with and those with which they disagree” (Pihlaja and Musolff, 2017:384). These ideologies are deeply embedded in cultural, religious and social norms and are reproduced on social media through everyday language use.

At the ideological level, patriarchal belief systems inform how motherhood, marriage and female sexuality are evaluated in online discourse. Patriarchal ideology influences the linguistic choices and discursive strategies employed in baby mama discourses by controlling how women are named, evaluated, blamed and morally positioned through language. The term “baby mama” is not neutral but is embedded in power relations that privilege male perspectives while disciplining women who fall outside patriarchally approved roles of wifehood and “respectable” motherhood. Through these strategies, women are constructed as morally deviant while men are represented as passive or morally neutral.

Moral Policing

Ojo (2025:7) defines moral policing as “the informal or formal regulation of behaviour based on perceived moral standards”. Moral policing monitors and controls behaviour perceived as violating cultural, religious or social norms and is often enforced through censure, shaming, surveillance, exclusion and sometimes law enforcement overreach. Vajiram and Ravi (2025) identify features of moral policing as: vigilante enforcement, gendered targeting, cultural justification, public shaming, mob mobilization, legal ambiguity, selective morality, political patronage, fear enforcement and rights erosion.

Ojo (2025) distinguishes two axis in which moral policing operates: vertical and horizontal axis. The vertical axis refers to moral regulation imposed by institutions or state actors on individuals or groups. Examples of moral policing operating in the vertical axis in Nigeria are: The Hisbah Corps (Sharia Police) which is an official state-sanctioned religious police force established to enforce Sharia law and strict moral codes in northern states, the gender-discriminatory regulation in section 127 of the Police Act that police morality and personal life of female

officers in the Nigerian Police Force which dictates that an unmarried woman police officer who becomes pregnant shall be discharged from the force, Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, strict dress codes in higher institutions which prohibits students from wearing certain clothes, etc. Horizontal axis refers to moral regulation that occurs among individuals, community members or peer groups through social pressure, peer surveillance, informal sanctions such as shaming, gossip, exclusion, and social media call-outs. It operates through social norms and collective pressure, not formal authority. Examples include: online shaming of baby mamas, community members gossiping about someone's marriage choices, criticizing perceived indecent dressing, etc. In digital spaces, horizontal moral policing is amplified by platforms like Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) where users collectively shame or discipline others.

In their study, Morgenroth and Faber (2025) found that moralization of women's bodies may help justify policies and norms that limit women's autonomy. This is because when people approach issues from a moral perspective, they frame behaviours as issues of right and wrong rather than personal choices which makes it easy to justify policies and laws regulating it because it feels reasonable to impose restrictions on immoral conduct. Ojo (2025:7) argues that the goal of moral policing is "typically framed as the protection of societal values, yet its effect is frequently the repression of individual expression, especially when such expression deviates from dominant cultural or religious norms". The stigma against baby mamas in Nigeria "is not rooted in concern of the parent or child but in the enforcement of marital conformity and sexual regulation" (Ojo, 2025:18). Moral policing is therefore an instrument of surveillance and exclusion especially against the female gender.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA). FCDA provides an analytical lens for interrogating how language functions as a site of power, ideology and gendered social control. Unlike general discourse analysis, FCDA foregrounds gender as a central axis of inequality and examines how discourse sustains patriarchal structures (Lazar, 2005). It is therefore particularly relevant for analyzing how women's sexuality, reproduction and respectability are regulated through digital media narratives. FCDA developed from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). However, feminist scholars argued that early CDA insufficiently addressed gender as a structural category of analysis. In response, Michelle Lazar (2005) formally articulated FCDA as an approach that integrates feminist theory with critical discourse analysis, examines how discourse sustains gendered power relations and seeks not only to analyze but to challenge patriarchal ideology. The core assumptions of FCDA include:

- Discourse as Social Practice: Language does not merely reflect reality; it constructs social identities, relationships and systems of knowledge.
- Gender as Ideological Structure: FCDA assumes that gender is deeply embedded in discourse (Lazar, 2007). Patriarchal ideology becomes naturalized through everyday language practices, making unequal norms appear normal or common sense.
- Power and Hegemony: Drawing from Gramsci's concept of hegemony, FCDA argues that dominant ideologies are reproduced through consent rather than coercion (Lazar, 2005).
- Interdiscursivity and Context: FCDA recognizes that discourse draws on multiple social domains – religion, culture, media, law and morality (Wodak and Meyer, 2016). This interdiscursivity intensifies moral regulation of women's identities.

FCDA foregrounds gendered power relations embedded in discourse.

FCDA allows the study to demonstrate that the label "baby mama" is not merely descriptive but ideological, gendered double standards are maintained through differential labeling and that social media functions as a powerful site for the production and contestation of gendered meanings.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research design, specifically a critical discourse analytical approach. A qualitative design is appropriate because the study seeks to interpret meanings, ideological patterns, and power relations embedded in language rather than to measure variables quantitatively.

The data for this study were drawn from publicly accessible posts on Nigerian blog pages on X (formerly Twitter) from 2024 to 2026. This platform was selected because it frequently reports on celebrity relationships and reproduction, generate high engagement and commentary and shape and circulate dominant narratives within Nigerian digital culture. The data consists of six selected posts discussing women labeled as baby mamas or publicly evaluated for non-marital motherhood. X was chosen for data collection because it is the most commonly used source for online misogyny research due to its historically liberal provision of Application Programming Interface (API) access (Fontanella et al, 2024).

The study used purposive sampling. Posts were selected based on the following criteria:

- The post explicitly used the term baby mama or implied non-marital motherhood.
- The post generated significant engagement (like, reposts, comments).
- The post involved gendered evaluation or identity labeling.
- The post contained moral, relational or religious framing.

A total of six posts were selected for the study. The aim was not statistical generalization but in-depth critical interpretation.

The data were analyzed using Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis through the following steps:

- **Textual Analysis:** This involves close examination of lexical choices, pronoun use and possessiveness, metaphors, transitivity, modality and evaluation. These features reveal embedded gender assumptions.
- **Discursive Practice Analysis:** This level examines headline framing, repetition of identity labels, audience engagement patterns and circulation and amplification on social media.
- **Social Practice Analysis:** This involves situating discourse within broader Nigerian socio-cultural contexts. Thus, discourse is analyzed not in isolation but within systems of power.

To ensure credibility, data were drawn from verifiable public sources, analytical categories were consistently applied across all cases and interpretation was grounded in FCDA.

Ethical considerations: The study relied exclusively on publicly available online content. No private data were accessed. Usernames and posts referenced are already in the public domain.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to selected posts from specific entertainment blogs and the Nigerian digital celebrity discourse. As a qualitative study, findings are interpretative and therefore not statistically generalizable. However, they provide deep insights into ideological patterns within the selected context.

Analysis

Excerpt 1



The term “home wrecker” in the headline is a morally loaded label. From a FCDA perspective, it performs several ideological functions:

- It assigns blame for relational instability to women.
- It constructs her as sexually and morally deviant.
- It erases male accountability in the relational conflict.

Even though the man publicly threatens to impregnate her friends, the primary moral marker in the headline is directed at the woman. This reflects a patriarchal pattern: women are framed as disruptors of homes while men’s infidelity is normalized or trivialized.

Sexual Threat as Masculine Power Performance: The statement, “I will soon impregnate your close friends”, is a discursive weapon. From an FCDA lens, it functions as:

- A performance of hypermasculinity
- A public humiliation tactics
- A reproductive threat used to assert dominance.

Impregnation here becomes symbolic power. This is a performance of hegemonic masculinity where sexual conquest equals power, emotional aggression equals strength and public shaming reinforces status. It suggests control over the women’s bodies, sexual conquest as revenge and public shaming as punishment.

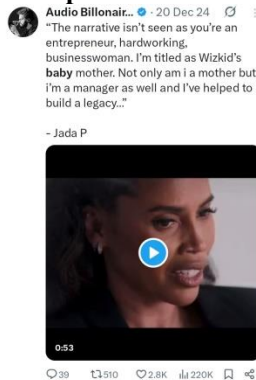
Gendered Double Standards

The woman is reduced to baby mama, home wrecker and someone seeking attention. Even though the man speaks aggressively and threatens further pregnancies, his sexual conduct is not morally labeled. His reproductive irresponsibility is also normalized. This is a clear gendered double standard: male promiscuity = masculine power. Female relational conflict = moral deviance.

Public Shaming and Digital Patriarchy

Social media amplifies this through screenshots, viral reposting and commentary framing. The phrase “continues to drag his baby mama” constructs a public stage for humiliation and disciplining women. FCDA views digital platforms as spaces where patriarchal ideology is reproduced and intensified through virality and repetition.

Excerpt 2



Discursive Construction of Identity: Here, the phrase “I’m titled as” foregrounds external labeling rather than self-identification. The passive construction erases the agent (who is doing the titling?), implying that society/media impose the label. The discourse constructs two competing identities: Professional identity (entrepreneur, hardworking and businesswoman) and relational identity (Wizkid’s baby mama). The woman’s (Jada Pollock) professional identity is backgrounded while her relational identity carries more media visibility. Her identity is reduced to relational motherhood, specifically in relation to a celebrity. The male figure (Wizkid) functions as the primary identity anchor; her public recognition is mediated through him even though she is a renowned international talent manager and entrepreneur. This reflects a patriarchal discursive pattern where women are defined in relation to men rather than as autonomous subjects. This demonstrates a gendered double standard where male celebrities are framed as artists while women connected to them are framed through motherhood or romantic ties.

Ideology and Power: The term “baby mother” operates ideologically. It often carries moral undertones in popular discourse. It implies non-marital reproduction, which is socially policed more harshly for women and subtly questions respectability. FCDA reveals how such labels reinforce patriarchal norms about “proper” motherhood, discipline women who fall outside marriage-centered family structures and sustain symbolic power by controlling how women are publicly recognized. Thus, discourse functions as a site of gendered power struggle.

Resistance and Counter-Discourse: The speaker resists: “Not only am I a mother but I’m a manager as well and I’ve helped to build a legacy”. This is a reclaiming move. She re-centers agency and also expands identity beyond the imposed label. From a FCDA lens, this is a counter-hegemonic act, attempting to destabilize the dominant narrative that reduces her to “baby mother”.

Excerpt 3



This text examines how women's sexuality and reproductive choices are discursively policed. The original motivational statement - "Life is too short. Do stuff. Regret later" - promotes spontaneity and risk-taking. However, the immediate response - "don't be a baby mama thou" - introduces a gendered restriction. The warning targets women suggesting that while life may be short, reproductive consequences for women are socially unforgivable. This reflects patriarchal control over women's bodies. Notably absent is any equivalent warning directed at men. The discourse erases male accountability in reproduction. FCDA identifies this as discursive asymmetry: women = moral risk, shame, long-term regret, while men = invisible or exempt. This unequal framing sustains gendered double standards embedded in patriarchal ideology. The Nigerian Pidgin commentary - "They no dey tell person... Your eyes go soon peel" - frames the warning as common sense or experiential wisdom. This normalizes the stigma, presenting it as practical advice rather than gendered judgment. FCDA calls this ideological naturalization, where oppressive meanings are disguised as neutral or protective counsel.

Excerpt 4



The speaker equates impregnating multiple women with divine blessing- "As God blessed Wizkid with music talent, God blessed me with nuclear weapon". Here, reproduction is metaphorically constructed as "nuclear weapon". From an FCDA perspective, this metaphor performs several ideological functions:

1. It frames male fertility as power.
2. It normalizes multiple pregnancies as achievement.
3. It transforms reproductive irresponsibility into masculine pride.

The metaphor suggests force, dominance, destruction and strategic power. Thus, male sexuality is constructed as weaponized strength.

Also, in the structure "I got three girls pregnant", the women are grammatically positioned as objects of male action. There are no names, no subjectivity and no agency. The clause structure centers male agency: "I got...", "I gave birth..." The second statement "I gave birth to three children" is significant. Although biologically inaccurate, it is discursively powerful. It symbolically appropriates childbirth, a traditionally female experience, and reframes it as male accomplishment. FCDA interprets this as discursive appropriation of reproductive labour, erasure of women's bodily experience and re-centering male identity in childbirth narratives.

Furthermore, there is the issue of gendered double standards in the discourse. If a woman had stated "I got pregnant for three men", the likely reaction would be moral condemnation, slut-shaming and character attacks. However, multiple children with different women equal virility and power for men. FCDA shows how discourse normalizes male sexuality while disciplining women's sexuality.

Excerpt 5



This post shows both imposed labeling and female resistance within a patriarchal digital environment. Shola Ogudu is introduced as Wizkid's baby mama in the headline. Her identity is framed relationally and maternally rather than individually. From a FCDA perspective, this reflects:

- Relational identity construction – defining a woman primarily through her connection to a male celebrity.
- Possessive structuring (Wizkid's) – linguistically positioning her as socially anchored to him.
- Maternal reduction – privileging reproductive identity over professional or personal identity.

The term "Iyawo Ibrahim" (wife of Ibrahim) implies a legitimate relational status. It attempts to fix her identity in relation to the celebrity. This disregards her autonomy and current relational status. The repeated labeling becomes a discursive attempt to define her publicly. Her response identifies the label as harmful and she directly rejects the imposed identity. FCDA identifies this as counter-hegemonic act. She challenges patriarchal assumptions, reclaims narrative authority and exposes how public discourse can affect women's social positioning. Her concern that such comments are "detrimental" to her being "Iyawo somebody" one day reflects the cultural importance of marriage and the fragility of women's reputational capital. The male celebrity by contrast is not publicly worried about being labeled in ways that damage his marital prospects.

Excerpt 6



This post references a comment made by Solomon Buchi about Toke Makinwa having a child at almost forty without marriage. FCDA points at moral framing through religion in this discourse. The phrase "outside the premise of God's order", invokes religious ideology as a framework for evaluation. From FCDA perspective, religion is used as a legitimizing discourse and motherhood is framed as morally acceptable only within divine order (marriage). The criticism is not about the pregnancy itself, but about "mixing Jesus and God with it". This suggests policing of how women narrate their reproductive experiences and control of not only action but interpretation. The woman's expression of gratitude is framed as inappropriate because it allegedly contradicts "God's order".

Although the statement begins with, "I'm happy for Toke", the conjunction "but" signals ideological correction. The discourse performs benevolent moral policing.

Research Question 1: How are women labeled as baby mamas discursively constructed in social media discourse?

Relational framing is often seen in the data – "his baby mama" (excerpt 1), Wizkid's baby mama (excerpts 2 and 5). This reduces identity to motherhood outside marriage which carries moral implications in many cultural contexts. Also, the accusation "home wrecker" in excerpt 1 constructs the woman as morally deviant while the male partner is exempted from blame. In excerpt 6, Toke Makinwa's pregnancy is framed not as an individual life event but as something evaluated within a moral and social framework. The phrase, "...we got it outside the premise of God's order", implies that childbirth outside marriage violates religious norms. This constructs the woman as morally questionable, deviating from acceptable social order.

Research Question 2: What discursive strategies are used to express misogyny and moral judgment?

Some discursive strategies found in excerpt 1 are:

- Derogatory labeling - "home wrecker" is a stigmatizing label which assigns blame to the woman.
- Sexual threats and humiliation – "I will soon impregnate your close friends" weaponizes male sexuality and publicly humiliates the woman.

- Insult – “werey” (mad person) is used to delegitimize her voice and frame her as irrational or mentally unstable. This is a common misogynistic strategy where women who challenge men are portrayed as irrational or emotionally unstable.

In excerpt 5, presupposition is used as a discursive strategy. The comment “Iyawo Ibrahim” (Ibrahim’s wife) presupposes that she should be the singer’s wife. This reinforces the patriarchal belief that a woman’s ultimate goal is marriage especially to a successful man. The comment “Every day is a holiday” also presupposes that her success or lifestyle is dependent on the successful singer. This trivializes her individuality and autonomy.

In excerpt 6. The following discursive strategies were used –

- Moral Framing: The phrase “outside the premise of God’s order” invokes reproductive choices. It positions the speaker as morally superior and the woman’s action as sinful.
- Disclaimer Strategy: The comment begins with, “I’m happy that Toke is having a child...” This softens criticism and allows moral condemnation while appearing supportive.
- Indirect Shaming: Instead of explicitly insulting the woman, the discourse frames the situation as spiritually inappropriate. This allows the speaker to shame without overt hostility, a subtle form of misogynistic discourse.

Research Question 3: How do social media challenge gendered double standards through language?

In excerpt 2, the speaker (Jada P) resists the dominant narrative that reduces her to just a baby mama and reclaims her identity as “an entrepreneur, hardworking, businesswoman.” In excerpt 5, Shola’s response shows resistance to the discourse. She calls the comment delusional and asks that it stops. She reclaims autonomy, resists patriarchal assignment and asserts self-definition rather than male-defined identity.

Research Question 4: What patriarchal ideologies are embedded in baby mama discourse on social media?

- The construction of women’s identity through male figures (Iyawo Ibrahim, Wizkid’s baby mama, Portable’s babymama)
- A woman’s social worth is tied to a man. Being “Iyawo” (wife) is framed as a form of social elevation.
- Marriage as legitimation of motherhood - The reference to God’s order (excerpt 6) implies that motherhood is legitimate only within marriage.
- Women as Moral Symbols – Women are positioned as carriers of moral order in society. Their actions are treated as symbolic of religious adherence, cultural values and societal morality. Men are not placed on the same pedestal.
- Male authority and dominance –The aggressive tone of the statements in excerpt 1 positions the male speaker as dominant and authoritative in the relationship. This reinforces the ideology that men have power over women in public narratives.
- Male fertility as power – The comments “God blessed me with nuclear weapon” (in excerpt 4) and “I will soon impregnate your close friends” (in excerpt 1) demonstrate this ideology.

Discussion of Findings

The findings reveal that baby mama discourse functions as a site of ideological struggle where patriarchal norms are reproduced, contested and negotiated. One of the significant findings is that “baby mama” operates as a master status that overrides women’s professional, personal and social identities. Women connected to male celebrities are repeatedly introduced as “Wizkid’s baby mama”, “Portable’s baby mama”. Even when the woman has an independent identity (entrepreneur, manager, influencer), the relational and maternal label dominates public framing. This demonstrates how repeated public tagging fixes identity categories. In contrast, male counterparts are rarely reduced to baby fathers. Their professional identity remains central. This asymmetry confirms that labeling processes in digital spaces are gendered.

The findings also show that women are frequently positioned as moral deviants. Labels such as “home wreckers” and “baby mama” carry implicit and moral judgment. FCDA reflects how discourse assigns agency and blame asymmetrically. Men are constructed as emotionally vulnerable and women as manipulative or opportunistic. Labeling theory further explains that once categorized as deviant, women’s identities become socially filtered through suspicion.

A particularly important finding is how respectability politics shapes women’s responses. In one case, being repeatedly labeled as a celebrity’s wife was described as detrimental to future marriage prospects. This indicates that women’s reputational capital is fragile and marriageability remains socially significant. Men however do not demonstrate comparable anxiety about reputational harm from similar labeling. This highlights how patriarchal

culture places the burden of moral image management disproportionately on women. It also reflects the patriarchal ideology that a woman's worth is tied to marriage.

While much of the discourse reproduces gendered double standards, the study also identifies moments of resistance. Some women explicitly rejected imposed labels, challenged repeated identity tagging and asserted professional or independent identities. These counter-discursive moves demonstrate that women are not passive recipients of labeling. Instead, they negotiate and contest patriarchal narratives within constrained structures.

Conclusion

This study examines how gendered double standards is constructed, circulated and contested within baby mama discourse on Nigerian social media. Drawing on Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), the research analyzes selected posts from entertainment blogs and celebrity commentary to explore how language functions as a site for ideological reproduction. The study concludes that baby mama discourse is not neutral but deeply ideological and gendered. Through FCDA, the findings reveal how moral and religious language is strategically deployed to discipline women while normalizing male sexual autonomy. FCDA further demonstrates how the term baby mama functions as a stigmatizing label that reduces women's identities to a socially deviant status, reinforcing public scrutiny and symbolic punishment. The analysis shows that such labels are ideological tools that sustain gender inequality in digital spaces. In the Nigerian socio-cultural context, these discursive practices reflect broader tensions between religious and cultural morality, modernity and women's agency. Ultimately, the study affirms that challenging misogynistic language and stigmatizing labels is essential for promoting more equitable and respectful representations of women.

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