Gender, Marriage and Patriarchal Ideologies in Nigerian Digital Discourse: A Critical Discourse Analysis

Juliet Odinaka Akpa

Department of English Language and Literature
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
julietakpa5851@gmail.com

Abstract

This study critically examines gender, marriage and patriarchal ideologies in Nigerian digital discourse. The research is anchored on Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory which provides a framework for analyzing how people see gender, marriage and patriarchy in today's world.

The study adopted a case study design and employed purposive sampling to select relevant data. Data were sourced through primary means by transcribing some video content on social media. Findings reveal that patriarchal ideologies continue to shape public perceptions of marriage in Nigeria by constructing men as natural leaders, providers, and decision-makers, while positioning women as submissive, dependent, and primarily responsible for domestic and reproductive roles. The study concludes that while patriarchal ideologies remain deeply entrenched in Nigerian digital discourse on marriage, they are no longer uncontested. The emergence of counter-discourses advocating equity, reciprocity, and women's agency suggests an ongoing ideological shift in public conversations about gender and marriage.

Keywords: Gender, Marriage, Patriarchy, Digital Discourse

Introduction

Like most societies of the world, the Nigerian society today is strongly structured along gender lines. From the family, to the church, to social organizations, society organizes people through their sex first of all and then their gender. Sex is the biological make up of a person while gender is the role society shapes and expects people to take because of their sex. For instance, African societies expect men to be husbands and fathers and females to be wives and mothers.

World Health Organization. (2006) defines sex as the biological characteristics that define humans as female or male. This means that sex is a biological concept based on characteristics such as chromosomes, hormones, and reproductive organs. Oakley, A. (1972) defines sex as the biological division between male and female, distinguished from gender which refers to social and cultural roles. Oakley differentiates between biological identity (sex) and socially learned behaviours and expectations (gender).

A child carries their sex to the world but gender is learnt after birth. Social roles and expectations inform how parents and societies raise and socialize their children. Nigeria is a deeply patriarchal society, probably one of the most patriarchal societies in the world and this has serious implications for both the girl child and the boy child but especially the girl child. Patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women. Walby, S. (1990). Walby explains patriarchy as a societal system that gives men greater power and privilege in political, economic, cultural, and family institutions, while women are subordinated. This is true for the Nigerian society. Most institutions are structured to favour men at the expense of women. Marriage is a strong institution in Nigerian and African society at large. It is probably the most important institution in society apart from religion. Davis, K. (1949) defines marriage as a set of socially recognized patterns of behavior that define the rights and obligations of spouses. He sees marriage as a social institution that structures roles between partners rather than just a romantic or biological union.

Murdock, G. P. (1949) defines marriage as a socially approved sexual and economic union between a man and a woman that is regulated by customs. He emphasizes marriage as a universal social institution found across cultures and highlights its functions: sexual regulation, economic cooperation, and the legitimation of children. In Nigeria, marriage is shaped by religion and culture. Most Nigerian religions and cultures are deeply patriarchal. The result is that Nigerian marriages are deeply patriarchal. For generations, women have encountered serious struggles navigating patriarchal marriages in a patriarchal society like Nigeria. Many older women endured serious abuse and trauma in their marriages. They sobbed, wept, cried yet carried their marriage and life in general with quietness and grace. Today, almost at every turn, young women are refusing to endure the level of abuse their mothers endured and carry the heavy burdens their mothers carried in the name of marriage. This is leading to a lot of divorces which society now finds itself scrambling to control. There is a saying that there is high rate of divorce in society today because men are insisting on living like their fathers while women are refusing to suffer like their mothers.

There is a growing body of researches on gender, marriage and patriarchal discourses: Asiyanbola (2005), Godiya (2013), Jaiyeola and Aladegbola (2020), Olusegun and Ayodeji (2025). These researches were carried out mainly on Patriarchy and gender inequality in Nigeria. However, little or nothing has been done on examining gender, marriage and patriarchal ideologies in Nigerian digital discourse. This gap underscores the need for the present study which investigates how gender shapes roles in marriages in a deeply patriarchal society like Nigeria and how these ideologies and practices are presented and debated on the Nigerian social media.

Conceptual Framework

The concept of Gender

Sex is the biological make up of an individual. Gender is the role and socialization an individual gets as a result of their sex.

Gender is "a matter of culture"; it refers to the social classification of men and women, whereas sex refers to biological differences. Ann Oakley (1972)

Oakley distinguishes biological characteristics (sex) from socially learned roles, expectations, and behaviors (gender). She argues that society teaches individuals what it means to be masculine or feminine as these things are hardly inherent.

Joan W. Scot (1986) defines gender as a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes and a primary way of signifying relationships of power. Scott views gender not merely as a personal identity but as a social system that structures power relations and social interactions. Gender shapes social relationships and social power structures. Power is highly concentrated on men. Men take lead roles in family and society like leadership, politics, business, etc. Men lead in and outside the home while women become their subordinates and take roles like home making, gardening, teaching, etc.

Judith Butler (1990). Gender is performative; it is constituted through repeated acts rather than being an innate quality. Butler argues that gender identities are produced and maintained through repeated social practices and performances. It is this repetition that makes gender roles feel biological. The roles have been repeated so much that they become a part of the individuals' sense of order and identity. They have been repeating these roles for as long as they have been alive, have seen their family and friends repeat their own roles so they believe that is the right thing and continue to behave as they have been socially programmed to.

West and Zimmerman (1987). Gender is not something one is, but something one does through social interaction. They opine that individuals continually perform gender through everyday actions, speech, and behaviour. While sex is a permanent make up of a person, for example, it is either you have xx chromosomes or you have xy chromosomes. Gender on the other hand is what society makes you do as a result of your sex. It is the socialization that society gives you and roles it assigns you based on your sex. For example, as a man, you'll become a provider for yourself and your dependents, a son, a brother and a father. You are likely to be sent to go fight wars if the need arises. So, society trains you to align with these roles. As a woman, you will be a daughter, a sister, an aunt, a mother, a nurturer among other things. You are likely to carry pregnancy and give birth. Based on these expected roles, society trains you to perform certain duties so often you become used to them and they become part of your identity. Being a father is about your duties of fatherhood to your child among other things, so is being a mother or anything else.

Aina, O. I. (1998). Gender refers to the socially and culturally determined roles, responsibilities, and expectations assigned to men and women. Aina's definition highlights how African societies shape gender identities through cultural norms and social practices.

African societies not only socialize and group people according to their gender, they go as far as commanding gender obedience through cultural norms and social practices. While Western societies thrive on individuality and the idea that the most authoritative people in a child's life are the parents, the African society thrives on the idea that a child belongs to the community and not the parents alone. This ideology is enshrined in some Igbo adages: nwa bu nwa ora (a child belongs to the community) ofu onye ada amu nwa (one person does not birth a child). This underscores how much of personal wills and choices are sacrificed for societal wills and choices in African society. African societies also enforce gender roles through culture and religion. For example, there are behaviours that are labelled cultural taboos. Example of such behaviours include but are not limited to stealing, fornication, adultery, incest, pedophilia, etc. Because most of these rules are generally formulated by men, some of them are misogynistic in nature. For example, if a married man sexually engages with a single woman, he did not commit any adultery but if a married woman sexually engages with a single man, she has committed an adultery and must be sent back to her father's house as that is a serious ground for divorce and even social ostracism. Certain rituals are performed to cleanse the abomination and restore the marriage in some cases and the family perpetually live with the shame of what their daughter has done. No daughter, no matter how emotionally unattended and sexually starved, wants to bring this shame to her family. Hence, they conform.

Oyewumi (1997). Gender is a social construct whose meaning and significance differ across societies and cultures. Oyěwùmí argues that Western notions of gender should not automatically be applied to African societies because social organization may be based on different principles. This is another vital contribution to the gender discourse. Societies are different and this difference come from the beliefs, principles, experiences and even challenges that shape them. An Igbo man is different from an Hausa man and much more different from a White man. The idea of what it means to be a man in Igbo land is different from what it means to be a man in America, Canada or Britain. In precolonial Igbo society for example, an Igbo man is deemed wealthy by the number of wives and children he has. This demonstrates the number of mouths he can feed, a reflection of whether or not he is strong armed. A titled man is highly respected and the more the titles the higher the respect. This is because it takes a lot of wealth and social responsibilities to take these titles. A man with one wife or without a title is seen to be very low in the pyramid, next to women. This is almost opposite of western socialization where monogamy is the order of the day and men pride themselves in how sexually responsible and disciplined they are. So, while having five wives and thirty children may count as wealth and place a man on the positive side of society in precolonial African society, the same fate may make a western man appear crude and sexually irresponsible and place him on the negative side of his society. So, when we talk about gender, we must be aware that gender expectations vary according to society and culture.

The Concept of Marriage

Marriage is the union between a man and a woman that has aims and objectives and has both social and legal approval.
Edvard Westermarck (1922) defines marriage as a more or less durable connection between male and female lasting beyond the mere act of propagation till after the birth of the offspring. Westermarck views marriage as a socially recognized enduring relationship that lasts beyond sexual intercourse. He emphasizes permanence, childbearing, and parental responsibility as central features of marriage. Kingsley Davis (1949) defines marriage as a socially approved relationship which legitimizes sexual relations and provides the basis for family life. Davis stresses the legitimizing function of marriage. Society recognizes marriage as the acceptable framework for sexual relationships, protection, and the establishment of families. Children born in marriages have legitimacy unlike children born out of wedlock who are sometimes seen as socially inferior.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines marriage as a legally and socially sanctioned union, usually between two people, that is regulated by laws, customs, beliefs, and attitudes prescribing the rights and duties of the partners. This definition presents marriage from both legal and sociological perspectives. It recognizes that marriage is governed by formal laws as well as cultural and religious norms, making it one of the most comprehensive modern definitions of marriage.

The United Nations regards marriage as a legally recognized union entered into with the free and full consent of the intending spouses. The UN emphasizes human rights rather than merely the social functions of marriage. The definition underscores consent, equality, and the legal recognition of marital unions. This is particularly relevant as Nigeria sees a lot of child marriages due to poverty, illiteracy and religion (especially Islam). It is important too that the two people intending to marry are adults. Teenage marriages are easy to see in Nigeria especially among the Igbo where some men are looking for young women who are still naïve, gullible and obedient. They prefer these women because they believe that university graduates are too wise to be obedient (exploited, actually).

A. Babs Fafunwa (1974). Marriage is a socially approved institution through which families establish legitimate unions that ensure continuity of lineage, cultural values, and communal responsibilities. Fafunwa views marriage as extending beyond the couple to include the extended family and community. This is very African as African marriages usually form a strong tie between the two families, creating an unbreakable bond. In African marriages, there is emphasis on communism. The nuclear families are independent but the extended families have a lot of influence on them. For example, when a child is born, it is the duty of the paternal grandfather to name it and the duty of the maternal grandmother to come and nurse and assists its mother during the postnatal period. Marriage preserves lineage, transmits cultural values, and strengthens kinship ties.

Onigu Otite (1991). Marriage is a culturally sanctioned union between a man and a woman that creates enduring relationships between families and establishes socially recognized rights and obligations. Otite emphasizes the communal nature of Nigerian marriage. Unlike many Western perspectives, marriage in Nigeria often links two families rather than merely two individuals.

Victor C. Uchendu (1965) argues that marriage organizes family authority, inheritance, gender roles, and economic cooperation.

Christians have their own concept of marriage which may or may not agree with legal and sociocultural definitions. The Christian concept of marriage is rooted in the belief that marriage is a divine institution established by God for companionship, mutual support, procreation, and the manifestation of God's covenantal love. Unlike purely legal or social understandings of marriage, Christianity views marriage as both a sacred covenant and a spiritual union between a man and a woman. The foundation of Christian marriage is found in the creation narrative.

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24, NKJV). This passage establishes that the couple forms a new primary family unit, forms a permanent commitment and become one. In mathematics, 1+1=2 but in Christian marriage, 1+1= 1. This shows how much unity is emphasized in Christian marriages. Marriage provides a context in which spouses help one another grow spiritually through prayer, worship, forgiveness, and shared faith. Proverbs 27:17

Christianity generally regards marriage as permanent. Matthew (19:6). What God has joined together, let not man put asunder. Jesus reaffirmed this teaching in Matthew 19:4-6, emphasizing that marriage is God's work and should not be separated by human beings.

Characteristics of Marriage

1. Social recognition: Marriage is recognized by society through religion, customs, traditions or legal systems. It gives legitimacy to the relationship, the spouses and the off-springs.
2. Legal recognition: Most societies establish legal rights and responsibilities regarding inheritance, property ownership, child custody, and financial obligations through the institution of marriage.
3. Permanence: Marriage is generally intended to be long-term, although divorce and separation may dissolve it.
4. Companionship: The first motivation for marriage is companionship. Marriage provides love, support, friendship, and intimacy thereby emotionally nourishing the spouses and their children.
5. Sexual Regulation: Marriage traditionally regulates socially acceptable sexual relationships. A parent may not support her daughter's boyfriend having sex with her but will encourage her daughter to give her husband sex. Marriage provides a legal framework for individuals to fulfil their sexual desires in a way that is legal, morally upright and socially acceptable. You can have sex all you want and still make heaven. This is very important for the religious.
6. Family Formation: Marriage often provides the institutional basis for establishing families and raising children. Once a marriage is established understood that a new family is established and that this new family has a right if not a duty to

welcome children will enjoy legitimacy.

Types of Marriage

Marriage has different types some of which are:

Monogamy: This involves only two people: a husband and a wife.

Polygamy: This involves more than two people usually one man with two or more wives.

Polyandry: This involves more than two people usually one woman with two or more husbands.

Functions of Marriage

Marriage has the following functions:

1. Reproduction: Marriage provides a socially approved framework for bearing and raising children.

2. Socialization: Parents transmit language, culture, values, beliefs, and social norms to children.

3. Emotional Support: Marriage offers companionship, intimacy, affection, and psychological security.

4. Economic Cooperation: Couples often combine resources, divide labour, and support one another financially.

5. Social Stability: Marriage contributes to social order by organizing kinship, inheritance, and family responsibilities.

6. Cultural Continuity: Marriage helps preserve traditions, religious beliefs, family values, and cultural identity across generations.

The concept of Patriarchy

Patriarchy is a social system that is centered around men and their needs at the expense of women and their needs. It is a system of society that robs women to pay men. It refers to a social system in which men hold primary power and dominate political leadership, economic resources, religious authority, family decision-making, and social institutions. Within patriarchal societies, gender roles often privilege men while limiting women's access to opportunities, autonomy, and power. Patriarchy is not simply about individual men dominating individual women; rather, it is a complex system of beliefs, values, institutions, and practices that perpetuate male dominance across generations.

Sylvia Walby (1990) defines patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. According to Walby, patriarchy exists in several interconnected areas such as the household, paid employment, the state, violence, sexuality, and culture. Walby's definition is particularly influential because while it recognizes individual men's behaviours, it also shines light on institutional structures of patriarchy.

Kate Millet (1970) opines that patriarchy is a social system whereby males hold power over females. Millett argues that patriarchy is fundamentally political because it organizes power relationships between men and women. She believes that male dominance is maintained through socialization, education, religion, and literature rather than biological superiority.

Gerda Lerner (1986) defines patriarchy as the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. Lerner emphasizes that patriarchy is historically constructed rather than naturally occurring. She argues that it developed gradually and became embedded in social institutions over thousands of years. Bell hooks (2004) opines that patriarchy affects both women and men by promoting rigid gender expectations. Men are pressured to display dominance while women are expected to remain submissive.

Kamla Bhasin (2006) defines patriarchy as a system of male authority which oppresses women through its social, political and economic institutions. Bhasin opines that patriarchy shapes everyday life by assigning unequal rights and responsibilities to men and women. Friedrich Engels (1884). Argues that men's control over property and inheritance strengthened male authority within the family, making patriarchy an economic as well as a social institution. Oyeronke Oyewumi (1997) argues that patriarchy should not be assumed to exist in the same form across all societies. Drawing on the Yoruba context, she contends that many Western feminist theories universalize gender relations without adequately considering African social systems and histories. Her work encourages scholars to examine patriarchy within specific cultural contexts rather than treating it as a uniform global phenomenon.

Amina Mama (1997) views patriarchy as a system of institutionalized male power that intersects with colonialism, class, and culture in African societies. She argues that African women's experiences of patriarchy are shaped by multiple systems of domination, making it important to analyze gender inequality within broader political and historical contexts.

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo (2012)

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo (2012) describes patriarchy as a cultural system that institutionalizes male authority and legitimizes women's subordination in both the family and the wider society.In her discussions of gender in African literature and society, Adimora-Ezeigbo explains that patriarchal ideology is transmitted through customs, traditions, religion, language, and literary representations. These institutions define men as leaders and decision-makers while assigning women subordinate domestic roles. She advocates gender equity through what she terms Snail-Sense Feminism, emphasizing dialogue, negotiation, resilience, and gradual social transformation rather than confrontation.

Characteristics of Patriarchy

The characteristics of patriarchy are many but for want of time, we will mention just a few. The following are the characteristics of patriarchy:

1. Male authority: Men occupy most leadership positions in families, politics, religion, and organizations.
2. Gender inequality: Men enjoy greater access to economic resources, education, and opportunities.
3. Traditional gender roles: Women are expected to focus on caregiving and domestic responsibilities, while men are viewed as providers and decision-makers.
4. Inheritance through the male line: Property and family names often pass through male descendants.
5. Control over women's sexuality and reproduction: Social and cultural norms regulate women's bodies and reproductive choices more strictly than men's.
6. Normalization of male dominance: Cultural practices, language, religion, media, and education often reinforce male authority as natural or desirable.

Patriarchy in Nigerian Society

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic, multicultural, multi-religious and multi lingual society. With over 250 ethnic groups, over five hundred languages and three main religions, Nigeria is a pot of diversity. With all the differences, are few things cut across all the ethnicities of Nigeria: Religion and Patriarchy.

Nigeria is a deeply patriarchal society. It is also deeply religious. Patriarchy is seen in the home where the man is the head of the family and male children are preferred to female ones, and property (especially ancestral property) is strictly passed to the men. If as a married woman you have five daughters, your co wife who has only one child who happens to be a son is deemed to be more rooted in the family than you. This is because your daughters firstly are seen as another man's home since they will marry and secondly cannot inherit ancestral property even if they don't marry. And, if for any reason they are given ancestral property, they will depend on the kindness and generosity of the men in the family to receive such and it is usually for a limited period of time: they can live in this house, cultivate this land, etc. until they die. It seizes to be theirs once they die and they cannot pass it to their children. Nigeria as a society is highly cultural and the cultures are highly patriarchal. There are patriarchal norms too. Even in the cultural diversity, there is patriarchal unity.

Religion is one of the strongest pillars of Nigerian society. An average Nigerian is religious. This gives religion a strong power to shape society. Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion are the three dominant religions in Nigeria. These religions are patriarchal which further reinforces patriarchy in Nigerian society. Christians dominate the Southern part of Nigeria while Muslims dominate the Northern part. Christian preachers teach that men are the head of the family, wives should obey their husbands and submit to them, and that a woman is created for the man. There is a rise in Pentecostal Christianity in Nigeria. This has resulted in Christianity being less regulated. Many established churches like Catholic and Anglican churches makes sure their priests

are educated being assuming the full duty of priesthood which involves shaping the lives of their members through sermons. Pentecostal denomination are not strict with this kind of standard. This mean that many pastors are illiterate and this influences their teachings on the altar. This makes the religious community vulnerable to misogynistic teachings of some pastors especially the illiterate ones. Having the platform to shape the minds of millions of Nigerians is such a huge responsibility and when the religious teachers are held with little to no accountability, it leaves the lay people even more vulnerable. It is important too to note that more than ninety percent of religious leaders-priests, pastors, bishops, etc. are men. These are the people who run the church, who decide which issue or complaint gets attention and which doesn't, the position of the church on certain matters, who most importantly through their teachings, mold the current and next generation of husbands, wives and leaders. There is an Igbo saying that ugwu nwanyi bu di-a woman's dignity is husband. Many Christians teach that a woman's life purpose is to attend to her husband.

Tied with cultures that already emphasize male authority and undermine female autonomy, especially body autonomy, these teachings produce men that feel entitled to women's body (high level of sexual abuses, rape and pedophilia) and women that are prepped to cater to be vulnerable to these exploitations and to value marriage and being attached to a man as the el dorado of a woman's life.

In the northern part of Nigeria where Muslim is the main religion, pedophilia and child marriages are rife. Parents marry off their children and these girls start experiencing sexual exploitation in the hands of their "husbands" who are often older men with grand children around the age of their new wife. This results in these girls having children before their bodies are ripe for that and that often leads that to having serious health challenges some of which kills them early.

In the home, families are diligent in raising their daughters to be morally upright, obedient, unassuming, cater to men's ego and to stay within the lane of social norms. The men on the other hand, are raised with more open hand. This means that in most families, sons can stay out late but the daughters can't, sons can be goofy, mischievous, etc. and the daughter can't. Teenage pregnancy is seen as the end of the girl as she is now treated as spoilt goods while in most cases, the married man or teenage boy who impregnated her has his life intact.

Patriarchy impacts both men and women in marriages. It pressures men and women to behave in a certain way and to be a certain thing. While patriarchy affects husbands, for example it is the duty of men to provide for their family, and men who fail at this are expected to be ashamed; it is the women who bear the main brunt of it. For example, some women die giving birth to their seventh child because they are looking for a son.

Some patriarchal norms in Nigerian are: preference for male children, male inheritance of family property in certain customary systems, expectations that men should be household heads, unequal distribution of domestic labour, and underrepresentation of women in political leadership.

Nigerian women are also highly underrepresented in the political sphere. Beyond Nigerian politics being ridden with violence and corruption, there is also social

stigma that is attached to women in politics. The image of politics is filthy. “Politics is a dirty game” is a common saying in Nigeria. On the other hand, there is this ideology that women should be soft, holy, virtuous, innocent and peaceful. So, women who go into politics are seen as being strong, lacking in moral depth and carrying the dirt of politics. This is unlike their male counterparts most of whose filthy acts are anticipated and forgiven beforehand because, ‘politics is a dirty game.’

Now, women of this generation are more empowered: education, career, economy, etc. This means that they, unlike their mothers, have a choice. They can afford to say no, separate or even divorce their husbands. The men of this generation are insisting on enjoying all the privileges their fathers enjoyed and the women of this generation are refusing to endure what their mothers endured in marriage. This is causing crisis and divorce in modern marriages.

The concept of digital discourse

Digital discourse in Nigeria refers to the communication practices, interactions, and meaning making processes that occur through digital technologies such as social media, blogs, online newspapers, messaging applications, discussion forums, podcasts, and video-sharing platforms. It is a concept studied across disciplines and it is powerful for its ability to reveal how language, culture, identity, ideology, and power are negotiated in online spaces.

Digital discourse encompasses all forms of language use mediated by digital technologies. Unlike traditional face-to-face communication, digital discourse is characterized by instant interaction, multimodality (combining text, images, videos, emojis, GIFs, and audio), interactivity, and the participation of diverse audiences across geographical boundaries.

In Nigeria, digital discourse reflects the country's rich linguistic and cultural diversity. Nigerians communicate online using English, Nigerian Pidgin, indigenous languages such as Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa as well as mixtures of these languages through code-switching and code-mixing. These linguistic practices shape discussions about politics, religion, gender, marriage, business, entertainment, and social issues.

Digital discourse is not merely communication through digital media; it is the social construction of reality through language in online environments. It reflects how individuals negotiate identities, express ideologies, construct social relationships, and challenge or reinforce cultural norms.

Crispin Thurlow and Kristine Mroczek (2011) define digital discourse as the language and communication practices that emerge through digital media.

Rodney H. Jones, Alice Chik, and Christoph A. Hafner (2015) describe digital discourse as language in digitally mediated contexts where meaning is created through interactions involving multiple modes such as text, images, videos, hyperlinks, and emojis.

Susan C. Herring (2004) views digital discourse as computer-mediated

communication that includes linguistic interaction through internet-based technologies. She emphasizes that online communication possesses distinctive linguistic and structural features that differentiate it from face-to-face communication.

Michele Zappavigna (2012) argues that digital discourse consists of social media interactions through which people build communities, negotiate identities, and construct social relationships.

Digital discourse involves the production, circulation, and interpretation of meaning through digitally mediated communication.

Characteristics of Digital Discourse in Nigeria

Digital discourse in Nigeria exhibits several distinctive features some of which are:

Multilingualism: Users frequently alternate between English, Nigerian Pidgin, and indigenous languages.

Code-switching and code-mixing: Multiple languages may appear within a single sentence or conversation.

Multimodality: Communication integrates text, images, emojis, stickers, memes, GIFs, voice notes, and videos.

Interactivity: Users can immediately comment, reply, repost, and engage with others.

Identity construction: Online language choices help users express ethnic, religious, gender, regional, and professional identities.

Ideological contestation: Digital platforms serve as spaces where competing beliefs about politics, religion, marriage, gender, culture, and governance are debated.

Virality: Messages, hashtags, memes, and narratives can spread rapidly to millions of users.

Digital discourse has transformed communication in Nigeria through platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube.

These platforms are used for:

- Political participation and election campaigns.
- Social activism (for example, discussions surrounding the #EndSARS protests).
- Public debates on gender, marriage, and patriarchy.
- Religious evangelism and theological discussions.
- Business promotion and digital marketing.
- Educational content and academic discussions.
- Entertainment and celebrity culture.

Nigerian digital discourse provides a rich site for examining how social meanings and ideologies are created, challenged, and reproduced. Online platforms allow individuals to reinforce, contest, or transform patriarchal beliefs through comments, posts, hashtags, memes, and multimedia interactions. A discourse-analytic approach can therefore reveal how linguistic choices construct gender roles, marital expectations, and power relations in contemporary Nigerian society.

Empirical Studies

Several studies have investigated gender, marriage and patriarchal ideologies though few have focused on how these ideologies are produced, reproduced and negotiated in Nigerian digital discourse. Asiyanbola (2005), empirically analyzed and discussed the nature of male dominance in Nigerian family using data obtained through a cross-sectional survey of 233 households in Ibadan, Nigeria between November 1999 and April 2000. The work is focused on Ibadan does not pay attention to underlying ideologies that shape the reality of married couples. It also does not capture well digital discourse.

Godiya (2013) evaluated the conceptual and material bases of patriarchy and gender inequality in Nigeria, identified dimensions of gender inequality and discrimination, and discussed socio-cultural and political factors leading to discrimination.

Jaiyeola and Aladegbola (2020) traced the history of gender inequality in Nigeria and analyzed how colonizers aggravated patriarchy and women's suffering by introducing new systems that stripped women of community leadership, prominent political positions and financial autonomy among other things. They argued that the British colonists introduced the practice of isolating women from socio-economic and political activities. Patriarchy was stronger in the west as evidenced by the Women's protest in the west for suffrage and the waves of feminism in the United States of America. The precolonial Nigerian woman had almost equal rights with men as positions were given mostly based on age and not gender. It was in this era that Nigeria witnessed the rise and reign of many female kings who built empires, and female warriors famous for their military heroism. Examples of such women are: BakwaTuruku and her daughter Queen Amina who later founded the present city of Zaria in the Kaduna state; EfunsetanAniwura, princess Dauranna of Bayayida, princess Inkpi of Igala, queen Kambasen of Ijaw, and queen Quari of Ilesha (Adu 2013). Quoted in Jaiyeola and Aladegbola (2020).

While this work touches on gender and patriarchy, it does not touch on marriage nor is it written from the discourse analysis perspective. Hence, the need for this work.

Olusegun and Ayodeji (2025). Examined the relationship between patriarchy and marital issues among public servants in Southwest Nigeria but their study centered on

government employed civil servants rather than digital discourse.

While previous research addresses gender, marriage and patriarchy in Nigeria, none has brought these three important topics together and explored them from a discourse analyses perspective. There is also limited scholarship on how digital discourse, a prominent medium of communication in Nigeria functions as a vehicle of influence and as a sight where ideologies are produced, reproduced, negotiated and distributed. This study fills that gap by conducting a critical discourse analysis of gender, marriage and patriarchal ideologies in Nigeria's digital discourse.

There is a growing body of researches on gender, marriage and patriarchal discourses: Asiyanbola (2005), Godiya (2013), Jaiyeola and Aladegbola (2020), Olusegun and Ayodeji (2025). These researches were carried out mainly on Patriarchy and gender inequality in Nigeria. However, little or nothing has been done on examining gender, marriage and patriarchal ideologies in Nigerian digital discourse. This gap underscores the need for the present study which investigates how gender shapes roles in marriages in a deeply patriarchal society like Nigeria and how these ideologies and practices are presented and debated on the Nigerian social media.

Methodology

This study employs qualitative research design to investigate how gender, marriage and patriarchal ideologies are produced, negotiated and distributed on Nigerian digital discourse. The research focuses on discovering how receptive the social communities are of patriarchy, their ideologies of gender, marriage and patriarchy and how these ideologies are produced, negotiated and distributed on the social media.

The primary method of data collection will be employed in collecting data. Research data was collected by screenshotting people's posts on Nigerian social media platforms like Facebook, X, Tik Tok and Youtube and the reactions of Nigerians to such posts.

For data analysis, the study adopted Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This approach facilitated the examination of how gender, marriage and patriarchal ideologies are

produced, negotiated and distributed in

Nigerian digital discourse.

Ukonu to Odogwukiwi on Tiktok:

Extract 1:

A woman is not meant to be treated well. A woman is meant to be given direction and taken good care of. So, if you're trying to be always treating somebody well especially a woman, my brother, you're a goner. To me, I don't believe the ideology of treating a woman well. I have a good definition of a woman. A woman is a man with a womb who thinks she knows what she wants, after she has gotten what she wanted, she then realized that is not what she wanted and she dare blame you as a man for not knowing what she wanted even when she don't know what she wanted

.

Critical Discourse Analysis:

Textual Analysis:

The speaker deliberately selects words that construct women as dependent, irrational, and subordinate: eg. "not meant to be treated well" "given direction"

"taken good care of" "my brother" "you're a goner" "a man with a womb"

The expression "given direction" presupposes that women require male leadership and are incapable of directing their own lives. This lexical choice positions men as natural authority figures while women are represented as followers.

Defining a woman as "a man with a womb" removes women's independent identity by defining them only in relation to men. Rather than acknowledging women as autonomous individuals, the speaker linguistically constructs them as incomplete versions of men whose primary distinction is biological reproduction.

The phrase "you're a goner" functions as a warning to men that kindness towards women leads to personal loss or exploitation.

Women are represented primarily as receivers rather than actors.

Examples include: "be treated well" "be given direction" "be taken good care of"

These passive constructions erase women's agency while assigning men the active roles of directing, caring for, and controlling women.

Conversely, women become active only when engaging in negative behaviour:

"she thinks" "she realized" "she blame you"

Agency is selectively assigned. Men are portrayed as responsible leaders, whereas women are depicted as irrational decision makers who unfairly blame men.

The speaker uses pronouns “you” ‘she” to establish ideological boundaries and “my brother” “a man” to create solidarity among male listeners, constructing an in-group based on shared masculine experience. Women are consistently referred to as "she," positioning them as the out-group whose behaviour is evaluated and criticised.

Discursive Practice:

Discursive practice examines how the discourse is produced, circulated, and interpreted.

The extract reflects a style common in contemporary Nigerian digital discourse, particularly in podcasts, motivational talks, and social media discussions centred on gender relations. The conversational tone ("my brother") suggests that the message is directed primarily at male audiences, encouraging identification with the speaker's perspective.

The speaker draws on familiar cultural narratives about male leadership and female dependence. These narratives are framed as practical wisdom rather than personal opinion, increasing their persuasive force. The repeated use of confident assertions and generalized claims invites audiences to interpret the discourse as common sense rather than ideology.

The discourse also relies on stereotypes of women as indecisive and emotionally inconsistent. By presenting these stereotypes as universal characteristics, the speaker simplifies complex human behaviour into gender-based assumptions. This encourages listeners to interpret interpersonal conflicts through a patriarchal lens in which men are positioned as rational leaders and women as inherently unreliable.

Social Practice:

The extract reproduces patriarchal ideology by constructing masculinity as naturally authoritative and femininity as dependent and

irrational. Men are represented as decision-makers responsible for directing women, while women are denied full autonomy and are evaluated according to their conformity with male expectations. The discourse also normalizes unequal power relations by suggesting that treating women with equality or excessive kindness is harmful to men. Such framing legitimizes hierarchical gender relations and reinforces traditional gender norms that privilege male authority.

Furthermore, the statement that women should be "given direction" reflects broader cultural beliefs that associate leadership, rationality, and decision-making with men. These assumptions contribute to the maintenance of gender inequality by portraying male dominance as both natural and desirable. The essentialist characterization of women as confused and incapable of knowing what they want reinforces sexist stereotypes that can influence attitudes toward women's participation in leadership, education, employment, and family decision-making. By attributing irrationality to women as a group, the discourse undermines women's credibility and autonomy.

The extract promotes patriarchy, male authority, gender essentialism, sexism and hegemonic masculinity.

Extract 2:

I would not marry somebody who is in the same class with me. I have a HND, I will not marry somebody who has a HND or PHD. It's a no to me. You can call it inferiority complex, that is your own cup of tea. The fact is that, I am a predator, I select my prey. I can't go and compete with somebody who has the same experience with me. I selectively select my own prey. That is why if you go to animal kingdom, he goes for the weaker ones.

The W in a woman means withdrawal. A woman cannot add. If a woman does not withdraw from you, you're a goner. She's a consumer. You're a producer. I am a producer, a woman is a consumer. Any day you make a woman a producer, she hates you.

Textual Analysis:

The speaker employs highly evaluative and metaphorical language to construct women as inferior, dependent, and exploitative. Expressions such as "predator," "prey," "weaker ones," "consumer," and "withdrawal" depict relationships as arenas of dominance rather than mutual partnership. The statement "A woman cannot add" denies women's capacity to contribute positively, while repeatedly describing women as "consumers" constructs them as economic burdens whose role is to benefit from men's resources.

The extract assigns active agency to men and passive or exploitative roles to women. The speaker positions himself as the actor in statements such as "I select my prey" and "I am a producer," emphasizing male control and decision-making. Women, however, are represented primarily through actions associated with dependency and

consumption, such as "withdraw" and "consume." This unequal distribution of agency reinforces male dominance and female dependence. The repeated use of categorical expressions such as "I will not," "The fact is," and "A woman cannot add" conveys absolute certainty. These assertions present subjective beliefs as objective facts, leaving little room for alternative perspectives or individual differences among women.

The discourse creates a sharp opposition between "I," "you," and "a woman." While the speaker aligns himself and male listeners through references to "I" and "you," women are constructed as a separate group defined by negative attributes. This linguistic division reinforces an ideological distinction between men and women. The extract presupposes that relationships are competitive, that women naturally exploit men, and that women contribute little beyond consuming male resources. It also assumes that educational equality between spouses creates unhealthy competition. These assumptions are presented as self-evident truths rather than opinions, encouraging audiences to accept patriarchal beliefs without questioning them.

Animal imagery dominates the discourse. By describing himself as a "predator" who selects "prey," the speaker frames intimate relationships as acts of domination in which women are deliberately chosen because they are weaker. Similarly, the metaphor "The W in a woman means withdrawal" symbolically associates womanhood with financial loss and dependence. These metaphors dehumanize women and legitimize unequal gender relations.

Discursive Practice:

The discourse reflects a common narrative in contemporary Nigerian digital spaces where discussions on relationships frequently promote traditional masculine authority and female dependence. Through confident assertions and vivid metaphors, the speaker presents patriarchal beliefs as practical wisdom rather than personal opinion. The use of economic and animal imagery makes the message memorable and persuasive, encouraging audiences to interpret relationships through the lens of dominance, competition, and male superiority.

Social Practice:

At the broader social level, the extract reproduces patriarchal ideology by legitimizing unequal power relations between men and women. Men are portrayed as producers, providers, and decision-makers, while women are represented as consumers whose primary role is to benefit from men's labour and resources. The comparison of women to prey further normalizes male dominance and female subordination by suggesting that unequal relationships are both natural and desirable. Consequently, the discourse reinforces gender stereotypes that undermine women's autonomy, competence, and equal participation in education, employment, and family decision-making.

Extract 3:

A woman doesn’t have a right to choose. A woman has a right to accept or decline. A woman needs to fear me. How do I do that? I carefully select my prey. I can’t select a woman who will be bigger than you. You know why? I am the one that’s going to pay your bride price. I married you into my home. The ability of a woman to make you the original father of your children, that is the only gift a woman can give to you, every other thing a woman brings to the table is adjective.
You have to know that in a home, my decision comes first. A woman’s opinion can be considered, it is not paramount. What I decide about how our home should work, that’s how it’s going to be. My own decision supersedes your own decision. If you tell me madam, your friend Charity invited you to an occasion and I say to you, my queen, you go nowhere. You go nowhere. But if I should say right now Odogwu invited me in his live and my woman says Ukonu you go nowhere, she dare not say that.

Textual Analysis:

The speaker employs authoritative and possessive lexical choices to construct men as dominant figures and women as subordinate partners. Expressions such as "doesn't have a right to choose," "needs to fear me," "my decision comes first," and "she dare not say that" portray male authority as absolute. Similarly, phrases like "I carefully select my prey" and "I married you into my home" objectify women and frame marriage as an institution in which men possess ownership and control. The statement that a woman's "only gift" is bearing children diminishes women's contributions to reproduction alone while dismissing their social, intellectual, and economic value. The discourse consistently assigns men active roles while limiting women's agency. The speaker positions himself as the actor who "selects," "pays," "decides," and "controls," whereas women are primarily represented as those who "accept," "decline," "fear," and "obey." This unequal distribution of agency reinforces the ideology that men exercise power while women submit to male authority.

The extract is characterised by strong deontic modality through expressions such as "needs to," "have to," "that's how it's going to be," and "she dare not." These categorical statements communicate obligation and certainty, presenting the speaker's personal beliefs about gender relations as unquestionable norms rather than subjective opinions.

The extract presupposes that paying a bride price grants men authority over women, that women should fear their husbands, and that men alone possess the right to make final family decisions. It also assumes that a woman's primary value lies in childbearing. These assumptions are presented as natural truths, thereby legitimising patriarchal norms without offering justification. The metaphor "I carefully select my prey" likens marital

choice to predation, portraying women as vulnerable objects to be captured and controlled. Likewise, describing every contribution a woman makes apart from childbearing as "adjective" metaphorically trivialises women's roles, suggesting that their achievements are merely secondary additions rather than essential contributions.

Social Practice:

The extract reflects patriarchal discourses that frequently circulate within Nigerian digital media and relationship discussions, where male leadership is presented as the foundation of a successful marriage. Through confident assertions, personal anecdotes, and culturally familiar references such as bride price, the speaker frames unequal gender relations as common sense. The discourse encourages audiences, particularly men, to view authority and female submission as desirable marital ideals.

Social Practice:

At the broader social level, the discourse reproduces patriarchal ideology by legitimising male authority and female subordination within marriage. Women are represented as individuals whose autonomy is limited to accepting or rejecting male decisions, while men are portrayed as providers, leaders, and final decision-makers. The invocation of bride price as justification for authority reflects cultural beliefs that may reinforce unequal gender relations. Consequently, the discourse sustains social structures that privilege male power, restrict women's autonomy, and normalise gender inequality within the family and society.

Extract 4

Ukonu to Odiuko:

Yes, he has right to beat her depending on what she did. There are four things that if my wife does, my brother will be right to beat her: If my brother catches my wife with sleeping with another man, if he beats her then she pitied her because if I were the one it would be worse. If my brother catches my wife beating my aged parents, if my brother beats her, he is hundred percent right. If my brother catches my wife sending the money I sent her to another man, if he beats her, it is very right. This concept that no matter what any woman does, don't beat her, is very wrong. I beat a woman. If you marry my sister, if she does something that warrants beating, beat her. If I can beat my five year old child, then, an old woman that is thirty years is the one you said I should not beat. Let's stop deceiving ourselves. If a woman does something that warrants beating, beat her. Odiuko if my wife does something that warrants beating, I will beat the hell out of her. If you marry my sister and she does something that warrants beating, beat the hell out of her. Odiuko, let us be honest with the truth here. I am a proudly woman beater if she does something that warrants beating. My brother that beat my wife did not disrespect me because if I catch my wife sleeping with

another man, I will kill her and she will die. I will kill you and you will die. If you don't want to marry me, kindly leave the marriage. Odiuko if my wife is sleeping with another man and I find out, Odiuko, she is not leaving with her life.

Textual Analysis:

The extract repeatedly employs lexical items associated with violence, authority, punishment, and domination. We see words such as: "beat her" "beat the hell out of her" "kill her" "she will die" "woman beater" "hundred percent right" "warrants beating"

The repetition of the verb "beat" normalizes physical violence as a legitimate response to perceived female misconduct. Rather than presenting violence as exceptional or criminal, it is framed as a reasonable disciplinary measure. The phrase "warrants beating" is particularly ideological. The verb *warrants* presupposes that violence can be deserved, thereby shifting responsibility from the perpetrator to the victim. Violence is represented not as abuse but as justified punishment. Similarly, expressions such as "beat the hell out of her" and "kill her and she will die" intensify the discourse from corporal punishment to lethal violence. Hyperbolic language amplifies masculine authority while simultaneously trivializing femicide. The absence of modal verbs such as *may*, *might*, or *perhaps* demonstrates absolute certainty, which strengthens ideological persuasion. Women are linguistically positioned as objects of male authority rather than autonomous individuals. The comparison: "If I can beat my five year old child..." equates wives with children. This metaphor infantilizes women, portraying wives as dependents requiring correction and discipline rather than equal marital partners.

2. Discursive Practice:

Discursive practice explores how the discourse is produced, circulated, and interpreted. The extract reflects a form of digital patriarchal discourse, where traditional beliefs about gender are reproduced through online platforms and public commentary. The speaker draws upon familiar cultural narratives concerning male authority, female obedience, family honour and marital ownership. These narratives are presented as common knowledge rather than personal opinion. The discourse constructs an inter-textual relationship with longstanding patriarchal ideologies that define husbands as disciplinarians responsible for correcting deviant wives. The repeated references to: adultery, respect for parents, financial loyalty; invoke culturally recognized expectations of wives. By framing violence as the consequence of violating these expectations, the discourse legitimizes abuse as moral correction rather than criminal behaviour.

Using "My brother" repeatedly is an interactional strategy that creates solidarity among male audiences, encouraging collective acceptance of patriarchal norms. The phrase: "Let us be honest" positions opposing perspectives especially legal and human rights discourses condemning domestic violence as dishonest or unrealistic.

Thus, alternative viewpoints are delegitimized before they can be considered.

Social Practice

The extract constructs marriage as a hierarchical institution where men possess authority to punish women. Masculinity is associated with authority, discipline, violence and control while femininity is associated with obedience, submission, and accountability to male authority. Violence becomes a mechanism through which patriarchal power is maintained. The discourse explicitly legitimizes domestic violence. Rather than portraying abuse as illegal or immoral, it is reconstructed as discipline, justice, and deserved punishment.

Extract 5: (From Facebook. This is a sermon by Pastor Sarah Omakwu, the senior pastor of family worship center, Abuja, and the president of Family Ministries International)

A lot of feminists will hate me for saying this, don't marry. But, If you are marry, you are for the man. The woman was created by God for the man. As, like a whole me, you mean that God just created me for a man, no, I also have my purpose. Abeg o, me I'm not for anybody. Me too I have my own rights and privileges. You're on your own. You have left God behind. You are working by yourself now. Because if you are married, you are for the man. And the man was not created for you. I'm speaking bible. See, I have always said when I preach these series eh, that let us manage this bible we have now until we go to heaven and they give us another one. Like they do in the military, you say obey first before you complain. When you go you can complain after you have obeyed. Let us follow this bible. This is the only bible we have. We can't change it. And if it says made for the man, then it was made for the man.

The repeated expression "warrants beating" creates moral justification for abuse while obscuring the perpetrator's responsibility. The declaration: "I am a proudly woman beater," constructs violence as a positive masculine identity. Instead of expressing shame, the speaker transforms abusive behaviour into a source of pride, thereby reinforcing hegemonic masculinity. The most extreme ideological position appears in: "If I catch my wife sleeping with another man... I will kill her." This constructs murder as an acceptable defence of masculine honour. The discourse reflects honour-based patriarchal beliefs in which female sexuality becomes the property of men, and perceived sexual transgressions justify lethal retaliation.

My husband used to say to me, I will do something very nice or something will happen, he will say, " I own you, your money, everything. All of you are mine." And we will laugh. It used to be funny but that's the truth.

Textual Analysis

The speaker constructs marriage as a divinely ordained institution in which women exist primarily for men. The speaker uses expressions like: *"You are for the man." "The woman was created by God for the man." "The man was not created for you." To* construct women as possessions or resources rather than autonomous human beings. The preposition "for" functions ideologically by defining women according to men's needs and purposes rather than their own identities. Ownership vocabulary appears later: *"I own you, your money, everything. All of you are*

mine." The lexical field of ownership ("own," "mine") transforms marriage into a relationship of possession. The woman is represented as property rather than an equal partner.

The speaker uses high epistemic certainty: *"That's the truth." "We can't change it." "It was made for the man."* These categorical statements leave little room for alternative interpretations. The absence of hedging presents the patriarchal interpretation as absolute truth rather than one possible reading of scripture. The speaker anticipates opposition and therefore uses pronouns to establish opposing ideological camps: *"A lot of feminists will hate me..."* This creates an "us versus them" dichotomy: "We" = Bible believers, "They" = feminists

The opposing female voice is represented as saying: *"I also have my purpose." "I'm not for anybody."* This voice is immediately dismissed: *"You're on your own."* The interaction delegitimizes feminist perspectives while positioning biblical patriarchy as the only legitimate worldview. The discourse repeatedly invokes biblical authority: *"The woman was created by God for the man." "I'm speaking Bible." "This is the only Bible we have." The speaker commands obedience "Obey first before you complain," and* encourages unquestioning submission.

Discursive Practice

The speaker draws upon religious discourse, patriarchal discourse, and anti-feminist discourse to produce and circulate a particular understanding of marriage. The dominant discourse is evangelical Christian teaching. Biblical authority is treated as final and beyond interpretation:

"We can't change it." Religious discourse therefore becomes a legitimizing mechanism through which male dominance is presented as divinely sanctioned rather than socially constructed. Marriage is constructed as a hierarchical institution. The speaker represents women as existing primarily to support men: *"If you are married, you are for the man."* Meanwhile,*"The man was not created for you."* establishes an asymmetrical relationship in which obligations flow only from women toward men. The extract explicitly positions feminism as opposing divine truth.

Beginning with: *"A lot of feminists will hate me..."* the speaker frames feminist disagreement as expected but ultimately invalid. The imagined feminist response: *"I have my own rights and privileges."* is represented only briefly before being rejected. Consequently, feminist discourse is marginalized while patriarchal discourse is privileged. The ownership statement is softened through humour: *"We will laugh."* The speaker immediately follows with: *"But that's the truth."* Humour functions strategically to make a controversial ideological claim appear normal and acceptable. It reduces the perceived seriousness of unequal power relations while simultaneously reinforcing them.

Social Practice

Within the broader sociocultural context, the extract reflects and reproduces patriarchal ideologies embedded in many conservative religious communities. The discourse naturalizes male dominance by attributing it

to divine creation rather than historical or cultural development. Since God's authority is presented as unquestionable, resistance becomes equivalent to resisting God. This makes patriarchal power appear natural, permanent, and morally justified.

She normalizes female submission and encourages them to understand marriage as surrendering personal autonomy. Statements such as: *"You are for the man."* And *"Obey first before you complain."* normalize obedience as an essential characteristic of womanhood. Submission is therefore framed as virtue rather than inequality.

The imagined female response emphasizes individual purpose and rights: *"I also have my purpose." "I'm not for anybody."* Rather than engaging this argument, the speaker dismisses it: *"You have left God behind."* Women's autonomy is therefore represented as rebellion against divine authority. There is also power and ideology. According to Fairclough, ideology operates most effectively when it becomes common sense. The repeated insistence that: *"We can't change it." "That's the truth."* works to close off alternative interpretations and establish patriarchal meanings as common knowledge.

Extract 6

This is about the recent news that is trending in Nigerian social media. Frank Edogho alleged that Chike (famous musician) broke his home by having an affair with his then wife. Even after pleading with him to leave his wife for him so that they could work on their marriage as the lady had three kids for him and this was his second marriage, Chike continued with the relationship which allegedly led to the breakdown of the marriage. Sandra, Frank Edogho's wife, responded that Frank had already killed their marriage by excessively cheating with different kinds of women including prostitutes. She released evidences of her husband sleeping with different women and said she only started a relationship with Chike after the marriage had ended (probably to her).

This divided social media users. Most men supported the man while most women supported the woman. In fact, the woman gained millions of followers immediately the story broke.

The following extract is the opinion of one of her supporters.

Extract:

Yes, we are in support. I am in support of what our brother, Chike, did. This is because women have been crying from time immemorial about how their husbands have been cheating and maltreating them. Most times once you come on social media, you'll see women complaining of how their husbands left them for other women or are maltreating them. No man condemned the action of these men the whole time. No man told that what they were doing was wrong.

Some women even committed suicide because they caught their husbands with their mistress. All of you were here while these things were happening. You men were so cold as if someone as if someone poured ice block on you. Nobody said set podcast and said how can we men change our orientation. The way we treat our women is not good. If we are practicing African traditional religion, let us inform our women before hand so that women who like polygamous men will come and marry us; because there are women who practice African Traditional Religion too. Nobody told the men, let us turn a new leaf, let us change our orientation because our women are now crying deeply. But none of you did that. So, now that this has happened, women like it. At least I like it let me not speak for other women. Whoever said they don't support it, there is no problem. But if you watch, you'll see that the majority of women are comfortably and solidly behind the lady in question. This is an example, to teach you men a lesson that most of the time, when your wives go out, men admire them and want to be with them, but because these women are so disciplined, they know that there is nothing outside. They just say, hey, I have married o, I am not supposed to listen to this person. She will not give the person audience, instead she will focus on her family. But the man on the other hand will be telling his wife, look at you, after 3, after 4, is there any man that will want you again? You are old, etc. this is an example, to teach men a lesson that people looking for your wives are not average men. That your wife has not left you and moved on with other men is just because her parents trained her well and put in her the fear of God. But you men, you'll carry the one in your waist and be wandering, causing disaster, sometimes rubbing it on the face of your wife. So, the feeling is mutual. You see how disgusted and bitter men are because a woman cheated on her husbands, that's how women have been feeling for many years. But you'll press women on their necks and tell them not to speak and the woman will be enduring. They have been enduring now. So, today is the day of reckoning. When you endure too much, one day you'll say that if you don't fight back, your grandchildren will see this thing that you're seeing. The pain is very deep.

Textual Analysis

The discourse is saturated with emotionally loaded vocabulary that constructs women as victims and men as perpetrators. Examples of such loaded words are: *"cheating" "maltreating" "committed suicide" "crying deeply" "disaster" "disgusted" "bitter" "day*

of reckoning" These lexical items create a semantic field of oppression and emotional suffering. Women are represented as people who have endured prolonged emotional abuse, while men are portrayed as habitual offenders whose actions have gone unchallenged. Similarly, positive lexical items describe women: *"disciplined" "trained her well" "fear of God"* These choices position women as morally upright despite opportunities to be unfaithful.

The repeated use of collective pronouns establishes a clear ideological division. Examples include: *"we are in support" "our brother Chike" "you men" "our women" "all of you"* The pronouns construct two opposing social groups: Women ("we") who are: victims, morally disciplined, emotionally wounded, united. And Men ("you") who are: oppressors, silent accomplices, morally irresponsible, deserving of retaliation. This binary opposition creates an "us versus them" discourse that reinforces gender polarization. The speaker employs several metaphors. Examples are: *"You men were so cold as if someone poured ice block on you."* The metaphor depicts men as emotionally detached and indifferent toward women's suffering. *"Press women on their necks."* This metaphor symbolizes systematic oppression and suppression of women's voices. Similarly, *"Carry the one in your waist and be wandering."* This euphemistic metaphor criticizes male sexual promiscuity while ridiculing masculine entitlement.

"Today is the day of reckoning." frames female infidelity as a form of justice or historical retribution rather than merely an immoral act. The discourse references broader societal experiences rather than isolated incidents. For instance, references like: women complaining on social media, husbands leaving wives, women committing suicide, public discussions about infidelity, etc. situate the argument within ongoing digital conversations about marriage and gender inequality, lending legitimacy to the speaker's claims by invoking shared public narratives.

Discursive Practice

This discourse is produced within Nigerian digital media, where public discussions increasingly challenge patriarchal marriage norms. The speaker responds to criticism surrounding a woman accused of infidelity by reframing her behaviour as a reaction to longstanding male misconduct. The discourse functions as a counter-narrative to dominant patriarchal expectations that condemn female infidelity while normalizing male infidelity.

The speaker uses several discursive strategies, the first of which is reversal strategy. Rather than defending adultery itself, the speaker reverses traditional moral judgment. The argument becomes: Men normalized cheating, therefore, men should experience the same emotional pain. This rhetorical reversal exposes perceived double standards.

The repeated references to: *"from time immemorial" "for many years" "they have been enduring"*

construct women's suffering as continuous and historically embedded.

The present event is therefore interpreted as the culmination of accumulated injustice rather than an isolated moral failure. The speaker legitimizes women's loyalty through appeals to religion and family socialization. Women's faithfulness is attributed to moral upbringing rather than lack of opportunity, thereby challenging patriarchal assumptions that women remain faithful because they lack alternatives.

Social Practice

At the broader social level, the discourse reflects changing gender relations in Nigerian society. The extract challenges a dominant patriarchal ideology that normalizes male infidelity while severely condemning female infidelity. The speaker argues that male cheating is socially tolerated; while female cheating provokes immediate outrage. Thus, the discourse exposes unequal moral expectations within marriage. Rather than accepting traditional gender norms, the speaker frames women's approval of the incident as symbolic resistance. The statement *"Today is the day of reckoning."* represents female resistance against accumulated gender oppression. The discourse therefore challenges patriarchal power structures by portraying women's collective support as a form of social protest. Unlike traditional patriarchal discourse, which portrays women as passive, this speaker constructs women as morally disciplined; emotionally resilient; politically conscious; capable of collective resistance.

Extract 7

This is an interview that a pastor and his wife granted.

Pastor:

My wife fed me and then all of us in the whole family for the first three and a half years of our marriage. She was the one working, she's an event planner. So, all her events businesses that she was doing, she was keeping the money to herself then so when the man came (points to himself), she had to be reporting the money to me. I remember I always made it clear to her, look, if I see you squeeze face because you're giving me money. Gladly I will sit down at home, look that money, how much is it so, you go and work. Whatever you need I will assist but that money, we are deciding it from my desk. So, we use the money cook food I chop well well. And, sometimes she wanna do, look, you better don't squeeze face. If I see your face squeeze there.

Textual Analysis

The speaker repeatedly employs lexical items that emphasize authority, hierarchy, and ownership. Examples include: "she had to be reporting the money to me" "we are deciding

it from my desk" "I made it clear to her" "you better don't squeeze face" The modal expression "had to" conveys obligation rather than choice, presenting the wife's financial reporting as mandatory. Similarly, "I made it clear" establishes the speaker as the rule-maker within the relationship. The phrase "from my desk" is particularly significant because it metaphorically associates the husband with an executive or managerial position, constructing him as the legitimate decision-maker even when he is not the economic provider.

The speaker repeatedly uses commands: "Don't squeeze face." "You better don't squeeze face." Imperatives function as linguistic expressions of power. Rather than inviting negotiation, they regulate the wife's emotional expression and behavior.

Discursive Practice

The discourse constructs multiple social identities. The husband is represented not simply as a spouse but as the legitimate governor of family finances. Even when unemployed, his authority remains unquestioned within his narrative. This is achieved through repeated references to supervision: reporting, deciding, making it clear, etc.

Thus, leadership is detached from economic contribution and attached instead to masculine identity.

Although the wife performs productive labor and financially sustains the household, her agency is simultaneously constrained. The discourse gives her economic responsibility but removes financial authority. The repeated warning against "squeezing face" extends beyond financial management. It regulates emotional performance. The wife is expected not only to surrender financial control but also to avoid displaying dissatisfaction while doing so.

Social Practice

The discourse draws upon broader patriarchal ideologies regarding marriage.

It reflects masculinity as authority. The phrase: "when the man came" is particularly revealing.

Rather than saying "when I got married", the speaker says "when the man came" while pointing to himself. This linguistic choice naturalizes masculinity as synonymous with leadership and authority. The discourse reproduces a patriarchal assumption that men lead, women submit; and that financial authority belongs to husbands regardless of economic contribution. The wife's earnings do not alter the hierarchy because authority is presented as inherent in male identity rather than negotiated through contribution or mutual agreement.

Extract 8

This extract is from Chokomilo the UK messenger.

My brother, why is it that you don’t want to notice that table has turned around. You Igbo man, why don’t you want to tell yourself the truth that table has turned around. Our parents’ marriage is better. Have you forgotten that during the time of your father and your mother, women answered oriaku (wealth eater). Women answered her husband's wealth. Women answered the

beauty of wealth. Women answered woman is wealth. But you who want your marriage to be the same with your parents' are now asking a woman what does she have to bring to the table. You are still asking a woman what will she bring to the table. But you want a woman that will bring things to the table to be the same with your parents' marriage. Forgetting that some of your mothers were at home and were not working. They were just having kids. Filled everywhere with kids! Forgetting that during the time of your mother and father, which you claim to want in 2026, that your mother was at home having only kids. It's not like she wants to have all these kids, but it's the situation your father put her in. Then now, you want a woman that has something to bring to the table and you still want to claim the man of the house. When it comes to respect you won't respect that woman that both of you bring the same thing to the table. At the end of the day the same woman will carry pregnancy for nine months, clean your house, do school runs. At the end of the day, that woman will be awake taking care of your children while you're sleeping. And then, when you come to the home, you will be sharing the same bill or most times, some of our sisters pay more bills than you. But instead of you to appreciate her, look after her, encourage her to do more for the family, what does she get in return, it is abuse. The earlier you understand that table has turned around, the better for you.

Textual Analysis

The repeated expression "the table has turned around" functions as the central metaphor of the discourse. It symbolizes a transformation in gender relations, emphasizing that contemporary marriage differs significantly from previous generations. The repetition of this phrase reinforces the inevitability of social change and challenges men who continue to uphold outdated patriarchal expectations. The repeated rhetorical question, "What does she have to bring to the table?", is not used to seek information but to criticize men who evaluate women primarily based on their economic contributions while simultaneously expecting traditional domestic roles. Through repetition, the speaker exposes what he presents as the contradiction within contemporary patriarchal thinking.

The speaker frequently employs the second-person pronoun "you", as seen in expressions such as "You Igbo man," "you want a woman," and "you still want to claim the man of the house." This direct mode of address personalizes the criticism and positions the audience, particularly Igbo men, as responsible for sustaining unequal gender relations. It also creates a confrontational tone that seeks to provoke reflection and accountability. Historical comparison is another significant linguistic strategy. The speaker contrasts "our parents' marriage" with present-day marriages using temporal

markers such as "during the time of your father and your mother" and "now." This contrast highlights changing socio-economic realities, particularly women's increased participation in paid employment.

The lexical item "oriaku" (wealth eater) is culturally significant. Traditionally, the term celebrates a wife whose husband is financially capable of providing for her, reflecting the male breadwinner ideology. However, the speaker recontextualizes the term to demonstrate that this traditional identity no longer reflects contemporary realities where many women contribute substantially to household income. The extract also employs listing to foreground women's multiple responsibilities: "carry pregnancy for nine months," "clean your house," "do school runs," "take care of your children," ” pay more bills.”

This accumulation of domestic, reproductive, emotional, and financial labour creates an image of women performing both traditional caregiving and modern economic roles simultaneously. The list serves to emphasize the unequal distribution of labour within the household. The evaluative expression "it is abuse" functions as a moral judgment. Rather than describing unequal treatment as merely unfair, the speaker explicitly labels it as abuse, thereby framing certain patriarchal practices as forms of gender-based violence rather than normal marital behaviour.

Discursive Practice

The discourse draws upon competing gender ideologies that circulate within Nigerian digital spaces. On one hand, it invokes the traditional patriarchal discourse that positions men as providers and women as economically dependent homemakers. This discourse is represented through references to mothers who "were at home and were not working" and whose primary role was childbearing and domestic care. On the other hand, the speaker introduces a counter-discourse reflecting contemporary gender realities. Women are represented as active economic contributors who simultaneously continue to perform unpaid domestic labour. The discourse therefore challenges the persistence of patriarchal privilege despite changes in women's social and economic roles.

Intertextually, the extract engages with ongoing Nigerian online debates surrounding:

> "What do women bring to the table?" gender equality in marriage, financial responsibility between spouses, emotional labour, domestic labour, male headship. Rather than accepting these debates as neutral, the speaker reinterprets them to expose inconsistencies in patriarchal expectations. The discourse also reconstructs masculinity. Traditional masculinity associates authority with economic provision. However, the speaker argues that many contemporary men no longer fulfil this exclusive provider role while continuing to demand unquestioned authority and respect. Consequently, hegemonic masculinity is represented as increasingly difficult to justify

under present socio-economic conditions.

Social Practice

The extract reflects broader transformations occurring within Nigerian society as economic pressures, urbanization, women's education, and increased labour force participation reshape marital relationships. Traditionally, patriarchal marriage was organized around a gendered division of labour in which men provided financially while women performed unpaid domestic work. Male authority was legitimized through economic dependence.

The discourse argues that this social arrangement has changed significantly. Contemporary women increasingly contribute financially to household survival while continuing to shoulder the majority of reproductive and domestic responsibilities. Despite these structural changes, patriarchal expectations regarding male authority and female submission often remain unchanged.

The discourse challenges the normalization of women's unpaid domestic labour by making visible tasks that are often taken for granted, including pregnancy, childcare, school runs, housework, and emotional care. By explicitly naming these forms of labour, the speaker contests their invisibility within patriarchal discourse.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Nigeria's digital discourse on gender and marriage is a significant site for the production, negotiation, and contestation of patriarchal ideologies.

The findings indicate that patriarchal ideologies continue to shape public perceptions of marriage in Nigeria by constructing men as natural leaders, providers, and decision-makers, while positioning women as submissive, dependent, and primarily responsible for domestic and reproductive roles. These ideological constructions are frequently reinforced through appeals to cultural values, religious doctrines, and social expectations that normalize male authority and female subordination. At the same time, the analysis also uncovered competing discourses that resist these dominant narratives by advocating gender equality, mutual respect, shared responsibilities, and women's autonomy within marriage. This coexistence of competing ideological positions reflects the dynamic and contested nature of contemporary Nigerian society, where traditional patriarchal norms increasingly encounter feminist and egalitarian perspectives.

Furthermore, the study illustrates that digital discourse does not merely reflect existing social realities but actively participates in shaping them. Online interactions influence public opinion, reinforce social identities, and contribute to the continuous negotiation of acceptable gender roles within marriage. Consequently, digital platforms have become influential arenas where societal beliefs are constructed, circulated, and contested, making them important spaces for understanding contemporary gender relations.

Theoretically, this study demonstrates the usefulness of Critical Discourse Analysis in exposing the often subtle linguistic mechanisms through which ideology and power are embedded in everyday discourse. By revealing the relationship between

language, power, and social inequality, the study contributes to scholarship on discourse, gender studies, sociolinguistics, and media communication. It also extends existing knowledge on how patriarchal ideologies are reproduced and challenged within the rapidly evolving digital communication landscape in Nigeria.

The study concludes that while patriarchal ideologies remain deeply entrenched in Nigerian digital discourse on marriage, they are no longer uncontested. The emergence of counter-discourses advocating equity, reciprocity, and women's agency suggests an ongoing ideological shift in public conversations about gender and marriage. Sustained public education, inclusive policy initiatives, and critical media literacy are therefore essential for promoting more equitable gender relations and encouraging healthier, more respectful representations of marriage in Nigeria's digital public sphere. Future research may further explore how variables such as age, ethnicity, religion, educational background, and different social media platforms influence the construction and negotiation of gender ideologies in digital discourse.

References

Bhasin, K. (2006). *What is patriarchy?* Women Unlimited.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity.* Routledge.

Oakley, A. (1972). *Sex, gender and society.* Temple Smith.

Otite, O. (1991). *Marriage and family systems in Nigeria.* Malthouse Press.

Davis, K. (1949). *Human society.* Macmillan.

Engels, F. (1972). *The origin of the family, private property and the state.* International Publishers. (Original work published 1884)

Encyclopaedia Britannica. (n.d.). *Marriage.*

Fafunwa, A. B. (1974). *History of education in Nigeria.* George Allen & Unwin.

hooks, b. (2004). *The will to change: Men, masculinity, and love.* Washington Square Press.

Johnson, A. G. (2005). *The gender knot: Unraveling our patriarchal legacy* (3rd ed.). Temple University Press.

Lerner, G. (1986). *The creation of patriarchy.* Oxford University Press.

Lorber, J. (2012). *Gender inequality: Feminist theories and politics* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Mama, A. (1997). *Beyond the masks: Race, gender and subjectivity.* Routledge.

Millett, K. (1970). *Sexual politics.* Doubleday.

Murdock, G. P. (1949). *Social structure.* Macmillan.

Oyěwùmí, O. (1997). *The invention of women: Making an African sense of Western gender discourses.* University of Minnesota Press.

Scott, J. W. (1986). Gender: A useful category of historical analysis. *The American Historical Review, 91*(5), 1053–1075.

Uchendu, V. C. (1965). *The Igbo of southeast Nigeria.* Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

United Nations. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights.*

Walby, S. (1990). *Theorizing patriarchy.* Basil Blackwell.

West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing gender. *Gender & Society, 1*(2), 125–151.

Westermarck, E. (1922). *The history of human marriage* (5th ed.). Macmillan.

World Health Organization. (2006). *Defining sexual health: Report of a technical consultation on sexual health.* World Health Organization.