

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF GENDERED, POWER RELATIONS, AND MEDIA REPRESENTATION IN DAILY TRUST NEWSPAPER

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Abstract

This research paper employs a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of media representation to analyse how gendered Power relations are linguistically constructed in Nigerian newspapers, with specific reference to the Daily Trust newspaper. Ten articles from the Daily Trust newspaper were used to investigate how sociopolitical and geographical factors influence gender narratives. The paper investigates how language, ideology and Power intersect in media texts. Nigeria is facing a major gender equality crisis, marked by political exclusion, economic marginalisation and an upsurge in gender-based violence. Media discourse frequently perpetuates patriarchal norms by obscuring male culpability with passive constructs. Women are still disproportionately underrepresented in government and their empowerment is sometimes promoted as an economic need rather than a fundamental right. The paper also identifies that systemic injustices persist due to enforcement gaps and extremely low conviction rates. It also demonstrates how context-specific state-level innovations and data-driven lobbying are impacting gender-related rhetoric. Crucially, the media serve two functions: they perpetuate gender stereotypes while simultaneously presenting counter-narratives that highlight women's autonomy and political potentiality. The paper further contributes to international debates about media representation, gender justice and inclusive democratic growth in technologically developing nations by uncovering the ideological work embedded in newspaper language.

Keywords: Power, Media, Discourse, Gender, Inequality.

Introduction

When it comes to portraying gender, an axis of identity that is inextricably tied to Power, culture and ideology, the media acts as both a reflection and a producer of social reality. Newspapers, such as Daily Trust, play an important role in shaping public perceptions of gender roles, abilities and legitimacy in Nigeria where patriarchal standards are deeply embedded in both institutional and daily practices. This paper employs Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to investigate how language structures, narrative techniques and editorial choices in Daily Trust encode, reproduce, or occasionally challenge gendered Power relations. The CDA enables a nuanced examination of how men and women afforded varied levels of agency, voice and visibility in news coverage.

The paper demonstrates how objective reporting can subtly reinforce stereotypes that portray men as logical leaders and women as passive subjects, emotional actors, or peripheral figures by carefully scrutinising lexical choices, syntactic constructions, source attribution, visual framing and thematic emphasis, particularly in fields such as politics, security, economics and national development. The paper contextualises Daily Trust within Nigeria's dynamic media landscape and larger struggles for gender equity by focusing on articles published between January 2020 and December 2025, a period marked by major sociopolitical upheavals such as the EndSARS protests, debates over the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill, and increased female visibility in crisis leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Daily Trust which is widely circulated and influential newspaper, participates in the discursive construction of what is considered normal, remarkable, or credible regarding gender. This paper examines how cultural ideology and journalistic standards combine to either reinforce hegemonic masculinities or create space for counter-hegemonic narratives. Similarly, the paper contributes to decolonial and intersectional understandings of media representation, drawing on African feminist theory and

responding to calls for context-sensitive media critique. Finally, the paper contends that transforming gendered discourse in the media is not only an issue of representation, but also a crucial step towards actual social justice in Nigeria. By conducting a thorough linguistic analysis of the Daily Trust newspaper reportage between 2021 and 2025, this paper explores the linguistic tools employed to portray gender inequality.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a theoretical and methodological framework that examines how language, Power and ideology interact to demonstrate how social inequalities are perpetuated and combated in conversation. Its ultimate purpose is to promote democratic and equitable social change. CDA, created by Fairclough and co, sees language as a critical location of social control and resistance rather than a neutral medium. Discourse actively changes social reality rather than merely reflecting it, and thus serves as an important site for ideas to be enacted, reinforced, and challenged (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1993). Fairclough's (2015) three-dimensional model, which is central to this paper, provides a methodical approach to analysing discourse at three interconnected levels: textual analysis (which focusses on linguistic elements such as grammar, vocabulary and coherence), discursive practice (which examines how texts are created, disseminated and consumed, particularly through media institutions), and social practice (which places discourse within larger sociocultural and political structures). This approach allows for a thorough analysis of how gendered representations are created in Nigerian media through specific linguistic and editorial decisions, and of how these textual patterns connect to the nation's underlying sociopolitical backdrop.

Literature Review

Van Dijk's (2008) socio-cognitive framework, which complements Fairclough's (CDA) structural approach, focuses on how prevalent societal ideas, cultural stereotypes, and mental models influence journalistic production. The approach maintains that news discourse does not exist in a vacuum, but rather reflects and reinforces dominant attitudes through the cognitive filters of journalists, editors and institutional censors, particularly when covering underrepresented groups such as women. Oyěwùmí (1997) challenged Eurocentric views about patriarchy by suggesting that precolonial Yoruba communities arranged social roles based on seniority rather than biological sex.

Empirical research on Nigerian media supports the continuation of gender-based portrayal biases. In a CDA of major dailies, including Daily Trust, Aremu (2019) revealed that women are frequently depicted as emotional dependents, passive victims, or unusual freaks. This emphasises their exclusion from conventional concepts of leadership and Power. Similarly, Ojebuyi and Salawu (2020) showed that media narratives disproportionately emphasise women's appearance, marital status, or presumed emotional instability attributes, which are rarely mentioned in articles about male leaders, even when they hold positions of authority. This imbalance adds to what Wodak (2001) refers to as discursive marginalisation, the linguistic minimisation or invisibility of women's agency. Adegoke (2021) found a tendency to individualise systemic issues in Daily Trust's reporting on gender-based violence, attributing incidents to personal moral failings or familial dysfunction rather than challenging institutional complicity or patriarchal legal frameworks. These discursive techniques shift attention from structural transformation and depoliticise violence against women.

However, during times of high civic mobilisation, such as the 2020 EndSARS rallies against police brutality, Daily Trust carried opinion articles and editorials that emphasised women's leadership while criticising gendered state repression (Bello, 2023).

These counter-hegemonic articles used inclusive language, centred on female narratives, and openly linked gender justice to larger democratic movements, demonstrating the media's potential as a place of resistance. The articles also emphasise the critical requirement for discourse-sensitive, contextually grounded research that looks beyond descriptive content analysis to investigate the ideological mechanics of representation. Building on previous research, this study expands our understanding of how One of Nigeria's most important newspapers distributes gendered Power during a period of shifting societal consciousness. This duality supports Fairclough's (1995) thesis that communication is inherently dialogic: even when dominant ideas retain Power, there are still opportunities for contestation, especially in editorials where critical voices can gain traction. When taken together, these studies reveal that Nigerian print media, particularly Daily Trust, is a contested environment in which hegemonic gender standards are both maintained and occasionally challenged.

In a similar vein, Mama (2004) decries the imposition of global feminist paradigms that neglect how colonialism, militarism and religious conservatism influenced modern African gender dynamics. These interventions underscore the importance of grounding media research in African feminist theory, which recognises how gender intersects with ethnicity, religion, class and regional identity (Tamale, 2020). Nigerian newspapers, such as Daily Trust, must be viewed within this intellectual tradition as ideological actors embedded in a complex sociopolitical landscape characterised by Islamic traditions, Hausa-Fulani cultural norms and national debates about gender equity.

The above reviews frequently employed a broad, comparative CDA, examining numerous Nigerian newspapers through descriptive or thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns of gender discrimination. They typically focus on surface linguistic features and frequently use brief textual excerpts. This paper, takes a targeted, comprehensive methodological approach, focusing solely on Daily Trust through methodical and purposeful article selection. It employs Fairclough's three-dimensional model in an organised manner to explain not only representation patterns but also the

institutional, ideological and cognitive processes that influence gendered Power relations.

Methodology

This paper used a qualitative research design through the lanes of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how gendered Power relations are generated, maintained, or contested in the Daily Trust newspaper. Bowen (29); Guest et al. (65), suggested that, “a minimum of ten to twenty articles (10 – 20) per newspaper is to be selected to allow for sufficient thematic variation and analytical depth”. Therefore, the paper selected a corpus of ten (10) articles written between 2021 and 2025 and focuses primarily on the Daily Trust newspaper, which is well-known for its coverage of Nigerian politics, security and sociocultural issues. The selected articles reflect power dynamics within important institutions such as government, law enforcement and civil society, and they specifically address gender-related issues, including women's political representation, gender-based violence, workplace inequality, and culturally ingrained gender roles.

The selection adheres to qualitative discourse research methodology, which states that a sample of 10-20 texts per case is sufficient to achieve subject saturation and analytical depth (Bowen, 2008; Guest et al., 2017). Given Daily Trust's unique editorial positioning, which is defined by its Northern Nigerian cultural orientation, bilingual reach (including a prominent Hausa-language edition), and role as a key voice in national policy debates, the ten-article dataset allows for a focused but rich investigation into the linguistic and discursive strategies through which gender and Power are mediated.

To identify the ideological foundations of representation, this paper examines textual elements (such as lexical choices, syntactic agency, and nominalisation), discursive practices (such as sourcing, framing, and intertextuality), and sociocultural contexts (such as patriarchal norms, regional identity, and national gender discourse). Every story was

obtained from Daily Trust's publicly available digital archive, which ensures reproducibility and openness. By focus on One specific, controllable corpus, the study provides a comprehensive case study that contributes to broader questions about media, ideology and gender justice in Nigeria. It also takes a detailed look at how One of Nigeria's most well-known newspapers contribute to the discursive Creation of gendered hierarchies.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The data were presented and qualitatively appraised through the lenses of the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework. Every excerpt from the selected articles of Daily Trust was analysed in respect to the linguistic devices used. The analysis focuses on how language choices reflect gender disparities and shape meaning.

Datum 1: Daily Trust (Tue, 31 Dec 2024)

“Women remain underrepresented in political and other decision-making positions in Nigeria, with only 4.69 per cent of executive and legislative positions held by women.”

Drawing on Fairclough and van Dijk, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) sees the fact that women hold only 4.69% of executive and legislative positions in Nigeria as a socially created discourse that reflects and reinforces deeply rooted patriarchal Power systems. Lexical choices such as ‘under-represented’ and ‘remain’ have ideological weight: the former euphemistically softens the reality of near-total exclusion, whereas the latter implies stasis, framing gender disparity as an unchangeable condition rather than the result of institutional barriers, cultural norms, and systemic discrimination. The tone is depersonalised and passive, concealing agency and shielding male-dominated political

leaders from accountability. like figures commonly appear in Nigerian media around symbolic events like elections or International Women's Day, but they are rarely accompanied by a sustained analysis of underlying mechanisms, such as voter bias or party gatekeeping. This selective, decontextualised reporting exemplifies what Fairclough calls discursive mystification, in which the outward appearance of transparency masks underlying Power dynamics. In the end, this confines feminist criticism to ideologically safe boundaries while perpetuating the very inequalities it seeks to highlight.

Datum 2: Daily Trust (Tue, 31 Dec 2024)

"Nigeria ranked 125th out of 146 countries on the [Global Gender Gap] index..."

Through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Nigeria's ranking of 125th out of 146 on the Global Gender Gap Index functions not as a neutral fact but as an ideologically charged discursive artefact that intertwines national identity, global accountability and gendered Power hierarchies in Nigerian newspaper reportage. While the quantified ranking appears objective, it depoliticises gender inequity by reducing it to a technical deficit rather than exposing the like figures commonly appear in Nigerian media around symbolic events like elections or International Women's Day, but they are rarely accompanied by a sustained analysis of underlying mechanisms, such as voter bias or party gatekeeping. This selective, decontextualised reporting exemplifies what Fairclough calls discursive mystification, in which the outward appearance of transparency masks underlying Power dynamics. In the end, this confines feminist criticism to ideologically safe boundaries while perpetuating the very inequalities it seeks to highlight.

Datum 3: Daily Trust (8th Mar, 2025)

"The numbers tell a concerning story. In the last Assembly, there were nine female senators out of 109; in the 10th Assembly, that number has dropped to just four."

The above excerpt is a rhetorical technique that exposes and conceals gendered Power dynamics in Nigerian politics. Even though it claims to be objective reporting, the language employs ideological framing: personifying data (the numbers tell) obscures the journalist's interpretive role, and emotive language like "just four" expresses moral concern without challenging structural obstacles such as party gatekeeping, electoral violence, financial constraints, or patriarchal voter bias, all of which actively exclude women.

The contrast between assemblies demonstrates a reduction rather than the continued near-complete exclusion of women. Importantly, power structures are insulated from scrutiny by their passive construction and the absence of identifiable individuals, political parties, electoral processes, or male elites. Such material, which is typically released around International Women's Day, restricts feminist critique to symbolic activities that ultimately promote the patriarchal status quo by presenting gender inequality as a seasonal or statistical issue rather than a democratic disaster.

Datum 4: Daily Trust (8th Mar, 2025)

"Female representation has consistently been low... just 3.8 per cent after post-election litigation in 2023."

The aforementioned remark establishes a discursive space in which gendered exclusion is simultaneously neutralised and acknowledged. It shows male supremacy as a result of deliberate political and institutional measures. The adverb consistently portrays women's marginalisation as a historical fact. The precise percentage of "3.8%, derived from post-

election litigation, creates the impression of technical neutrality while hiding the extremely political and frequently patriarchal mechanisms that influence election results. The statement highlights how this type of quantification depoliticises inequality by reducing systematic injustice to a depersonalised statistic while concealing the involvement of courts, political parties, and election authorities in perpetuating gendered gatekeeping. The inclusion of post-election litigation serves as a discursive ellipsis, noting a crucial process without delving into its gendered implications, such as whether female candidates were disproportionately challenged or rejected.

Datum 5: Daily Trust (8th Mar, 2025)

“Fifteen out of the 36 Nigerian states have no female representation in their state Houses of Assembly”.

Rather than objective reporting, the aforementioned assertion is a discursive instrument that reveals and reinforces gendered power disparities. Despite its impartiality, the numerical frame (fifteen out of thirty-six) quantifies absence without requiring accountability, rendering women's exclusion statistically visible but politically ineffective. The passive construction (lack of female representation), a feature of what van Dijk refers to as ideological reproduction, erases agency by excluding political parties, electoral institutions, and patriarchal norms that are actively accountable for its erasure. This defends dominant structures from critique. The timing of the publication on International Women's Day (March 8, 2025) exemplifies Fairclough's concept of discursive commodification, in which feminist concerns are packaged as symbolic content rather than urgent democratic failures. This embeds the statistic within a ritualised media practice that episodically acknowledges gender inequality while avoiding sustained structural analysis.

Datum 6: Daily Trust (29th Mar, 2022)

“Women account for most of your country's unemployment and underrepresentation on account of either your political exclusion or male dominance...”

The preceding line assigns structural guilt and implicates the reader in the second person "your," which is a notable departure from the depersonalised, statistic-driven traditions of Nigerian newspaper reporting. This rhetorical device subverts journalistic impartiality by presenting the text as an interventionist critique that specifically identifies male dominance and political exclusion as the primary drivers of gender inequality.

Furthermore, despite the unambiguous identification of "male dominance," accountability is undermined by the absence of specific institutional actors, such as political parties, traditional authorities, or corporate elites, which obscure systemic powerholders. The statement, published outside of the ceremonial framework of International Women's Day in March 2022, calls for a longer-term commitment to gender justice; however, its binary logic narrows the scope of emancipatory discourse by framing women primarily as victims rather than agents of political change. Thus, CDA demonstrates how even counter-hegemonic language can mistakenly replicate limiting narratives that constrain revolutionary political imagination, even when the sentence reflects a discursive shift towards explicit critique.

Datum 7: (29th Mar., 2022)

“Despite you constituting virtually 50 per cent of your country's population, most of you are lagging far behind and suffocated by... gender disparity, economic inequality, political exclusion...”

The above statement both contradicts and reproduces dominant discursive norms in Daily Trust newspaper reporting, employing an emotive, accusatory register. The direct

approach in the second person "you" questions mainstream journalism's detached impartiality and demands moral accountability by involving the reader and, as a result, national institutions in the perpetuation of systematic injustices.

The remark calls into question the concept that numerical parity implies substantive Power by highlighting a stark mismatch that functions as an ideological intervention, contrasting women's virtually equal demographic presence with their significant structural marginalisation. The statement, issued on March 29, 2022, outside of symbolic gender observances, indicates a shift towards continuous participation; however, its impact is limited to moral mourning rather than revolutionary discourse due to the lack of named players, specific examples, or policy approaches. It so depicts the dilemma between speaking truth to Power and perpetuating the discursive limitations that keep it in place, albeit representing a linguistic movement towards outspoken critique of patriarchy and national complicity. However, it remains constrained by hegemonic journalistic tendencies that prioritise emotive generalisation over structural accountability.

Datum 8: (30th May, 2025)

"Only seven women, just over 15 per cent, in President Tinubu's 48-member cabinet, falling far short of the 35 per cent affirmative action target."

The preceding remark acts as a discursive intervention that both contains and criticises gender inequality in Nigerian political leadership. The evaluative lexicon (only, just over, falling far short) expresses moral condemnation and frames the cabinet composition as a failure to uphold Nigeria's National Gender Policy rather than a neutral fact, owing to Fairclough's deliberate use of intertextuality. This criticism is, however, limited because it does not examine the institutional players, patriarchal networks, or party mechanisms that intentionally hinder women's inclusion, despite the fact that utilising the 35%

affirmative action criterion confers normative influence. The phrase "just over 15 per cent" encourages what van Dijk calls semantic manipulation by indirectly applauding minimum representation: using progressive jargon, such as "affirmative action," to portray inclusivity without really transferring Power.

The study therefore demonstrates how the media can assume symbolic responsibility in the absence of structural interrogation. As a result, even supposedly critical journalism runs the risk of serving as a hegemonic safety valve, integrating female demands into ritualised deficit comparisons while preserving the male-dominated executive branch.

Datum 9: Daily trust (17th Mar., 2022)

"A woman should not be voted into office... simply because she is a woman as if she is a charity case... [but] deliberate efforts should be made to even the platform for them."

The above exemplifies the discursive tension in Nigerian media discourse on gender and Power between apparent liberalism and deeply embedded patriarchal logic. The rhetoric relies on the loaded metaphor of the charity case, portraying gender-conscious support for female candidates as patronising kindness rather than a solution to systemic exclusion, even as it claims to reject tokenism and advocate structural justice. The argument for equity is abstract and non-binding since the passive construction requires active steps to prevent agencies from failing to designate who must act or what concrete activities (e.g., quotas, public funding, legal reforms) are necessary. The remark exemplifies how feminist vocabulary may be adopted by elite discourse within a liberal individualist worldview that sees inequality as a matter of unequal opportunity rather than Power.

Datum 10: Daily Trust (24th April, 2023)

"Power has never been given to women; the freedom to participate... is created. The women of the future must do more for themselves..."

The preceding statement exemplifies a discursive paradox in Nigerian media discourse that both uncovers and reinforces gendered Power hierarchies. The initial statement, which claims that women have historically been denied political Power, undermines the concept of meritocracy and gives a rare, direct admission of structural exclusion. This understanding is consistent with CDA's objective of exposing how dominant groups control institutional access. The notion that "freedom to participate... is created" (despite its grammatical ambiguity) implies that agency is self-generated rather than institutionally guaranteed, and the directive that "women... must do more for themselves" shifts the responsibility of liberation to the marginalised. However, the discussion swiftly shifts towards neoliberal individualism. This rhetorical technique, which blends critical knowledge with ideologies that prioritise individual accountability over structural accountability, demonstrates Fairclough's concept of discursive hybridity.

Research Findings

A critical discourse study of Daily Trust newspaper from 2021 to 2025 found that Nigerian media coverage of gender disparity both exposes and reproduces patriarchal Power systems. Statistics such as the fact that women only hold 4.69% of executive and legislative positions are presented as objective facts, but they ideologically normalise exclusion rather than questioning its structural origins. While passive constructions conceal agency and shield political elites from accountability, linguistic choices such as 'under-represented' or 'only four' indicate emotional concern while depoliticising these procedures. According to Fairclough, discursive mystification creates the appearance of transparency while concealing more intricate Power dynamics. Furthermore, reporting is

usually ritualised and episodic, with peaks around holidays such as International Women's Day. It presents inequality in terms of unmet legislative targets, such as the 35% affirmative action quota, as well as numerical deficits relative to global standards. Such coverage serves as a hegemonic safety valve, absorbing feminist demands into less hazardous language while providing symbolic concern without ongoing structural scrutiny.

Discursive tensions that ultimately reinforce patriarchal standards can be detected in even supposedly progressive statements. Affirmative action is accidentally delegitimised when tokenism is rejected by dismissing women's inclusion as 'charity', while pleas for intentional efforts remain abstract since responsible actors are excluded. The frequent depiction of women as passive victims or individually accountable for their success reinforces neoliberal narratives that link empowerment to individual resilience rather than social mobilisation or institutional reform.

Furthermore, the use of demographic parity or Western-centric measurements (such as 50% of the population) highlights inequalities in technocratic frameworks that marginalise indigenous feminist epistemologies. Finally, CDA demonstrates how Nigerian media discourse domesticates dissent: it acknowledges gender inequality enough to indicate global compliance and modernity, but it consistently avoids questioning the male-dominated structure of political Power, perpetuating the very hierarchies it claims to challenge.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper demonstrated that Nigerian media discourse, functions as an active site of ideological negotiation, exposing and upholding patriarchal Power structures rather than acting as a neutral mirror of gender inequality. Using Fairclough's triadic model of ideological reproduction as a framework, Critical Discourse Analysis shows how statistical reporting, depoliticising lexical choices, passive syntactic constructions that mask institutional agency, and ritualised timing around occasions like International Women's Day, together, they provide a type of managed critique that acknowledges women's political marginalisation sufficiently to show global compliance and progressiveness. Such discourse frames inequality in technocratic or Western-centric metrics that marginalise indigenous feminist epistemologies, assign women personal responsibility for self-liberation, and commodify gender justice as episodic spectacle rather than sparking structural reform.

Finally, unless deliberate discursive shifts are made towards naming Power holders, centring institutional agency, and embedding sustained structural critique beyond commemorative moments, Nigerian media risks perpetuating the very hierarchies it claims to expose, undermining the democratic imperative of inclusive representation.

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