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## Analysis of Media Discourse on Baby Mama Syndrome in Nigeria

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### Abstract:

*The research aims to analyse the paradoxical portrayal of the 'Baby Mama Syndrome' in Nigerian media space, contrasting prevalent moral and cultural norms. It seeks to explore how media tolerance contributes to a shifting societal dynamic, potentially influencing young women to perceive Baby mamahood as a normative lifestyle choice. The study fills a significant gap in the existing literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of the 'Baby Mama Syndrome' discourse in Nigerian media and its broader implications for gender relations, family structures, and public debates. Through a qualitative analysis of media representations, scholarly articles, news reports, and opinion pieces, the study uncovers the underlying factors driving this syndrome and its implications for societal attitudes and behaviours. The results show that societal views, cultural changes, and media representations of baby parenting in Nigeria interact in an inconsistent manner. Media narratives have normalised the 'Baby Mama Syndrome,' presenting it as a viable and even glamorous lifestyle choice despite the inherent challenges and societal implications. In light of these findings, recommendations are proposed to counteract the normalisation of the 'Baby Mama Syndrome' in Nigerian media through initiatives aimed at promoting more responsible and balanced media portrayals of 'baby mamahood', highlighting the realities and complexities involved. The study recommends educational programs targeting young women, emphasising the importance of informed decision-making and highlighting alternative paths to fulfilment and success within traditional family structures. This direction aligns with the broader goal of promoting healthy family dynamics and societal values rooted in empathy and responsibility.*

**Keywords:** *Baby Mama Syndrome, media discourse, baby mamahood, societal attitudes, social media representations*

### 1. Introduction

In Nigerian media, the term 'Baby Mama' has become increasingly prevalent, exposing a societal phenomenon that challenges traditional norms and values surrounding family structures and parenthood. The discourse on the 'Baby Mama Syndrome' has emerged as a notable phenomenon within the media spaces, reflecting a complex interaction of societal norms, cultural values, and shifting gender dynamics. 'Baby Mama Syndrome' refers to the increasing prevalence and acceptance of baby mamahood, often characterised by unmarried women bearing children with men who do not assume active parental roles (Ekwueme et al., 2023). Within Nigerian media, this phenomenon has garnered significant attention across various platforms, including television, film, music, and social media. Media representations of the 'Baby Mama Syndrome' present a shaded narrative that intersects with societal norms, cultural values, and shifting gender dynamics.

Whereas this phenomenon is not unique to Nigeria, its portrayal in Nigerian media presents a paradoxical narrative that warrants closer examination. On one hand, Nigeria's cultural fabric traditionally emphasises the sanctity of marriage and the importance of intact family structures (Ekwueme et al., 2023). However, media representations of the 'Baby Mama Syndrome' suggest a growing tolerance and even glamorisation of baby mamahood, challenging established norms and raising questions about its societal implications (Minkov et al., 2012). The fickle nature of media discourse on the 'Baby Mama Syndrome' reflects a tension between traditional values and modern realities in Nigerian society (Bednarek, 2016). While traditional norms dictate that women should aspire for marriage and mamahood within the confines of wedlock, contemporary media narratives often present single mamahood, especially the 'Baby Mamahood' as a viable and even glamorous lifestyle choice, devoid of stigma or societal condemnation (Gerami, 2021). This stark contrast underscores the dynamic nature of societal norms and the influential role of media in shaping public perceptions and behaviors.

This paper aims to fill a significant gap in the existing literature by conducting a comprehensive analysis of the 'Baby Mama Syndrome' discourse in Nigerian media and its broader implications for gender relations, family structures,

and public debates. Through a qualitative examination of media representations, scholarly articles, news reports, and opinion pieces, this study seeks to uncover the underlying factors driving this phenomenon and its impact on societal attitudes and behaviors. This paper seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding contemporary Nigerian society's views on family structures and gender roles, ultimately informing efforts to foster more inclusive and empathetic societal norms and values.

The significance of analysing media representations of the 'Baby Mama Syndrome' extends beyond mere cultural commentary; it speaks to broader issues of gender equality, family dynamics, and social cohesion in Nigerian society. By seemingly normalising baby mamahood and downplaying the role of absentee fathers, media narratives may inadvertently reinforce gender inequalities and perpetuate stereotypes about women's roles and responsibilities within the family unit. Understanding the mechanisms through which media discourse influences societal perceptions is essential for informing policy interventions, public debates, and societal initiatives aimed at promoting more balanced and responsible portrayals of family dynamics and parenthood. Therefore, in contrasting media portrayals with traditional moral and cultural norms, the study seeks to highlight the tensions and contradictions inherent in contemporary Nigerian society's perceptions of family and gender roles.

## 2. Literature Review

The literature reviews three main areas: historical and cultural perspectives on family structures in Nigeria, existing literature on media representations of baby mamahood, and theoretical frameworks for analysing media influence on societal attitudes. By synthesising existing scholarship, this section provides a comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors, scholarly discourse, and theoretical underpinnings relevant to the analysis of media discourse on the 'Baby Mama Syndrome' in Nigeria.

### 2.1. Historical and Cultural Perspectives on Family Structures in Nigeria

Traditional Nigerian society is characterised by deeply ingrained cultural values that emphasise the importance of family, kinship networks, and communal ties (Best, 2014). Historically, family structures in Nigeria have been patriarchal, with extended families playing a central role in social organisation and support systems (Agarwal & Arshad, 2024). Marriage is traditionally viewed as a sacred institution, and societal norms dictate that women should aspire to marital stability and mamahood within the confines of wedlock.

However, Nigeria's socio-cultural landscape has undergone significant transformations in recent decades, fueled by urbanisation, globalisation, and socio-economic changes (Akoh, 2020). These shifts have led to the emergence of diverse family structures and dynamics, challenging traditional norms and values surrounding marriage and parenthood. The 'Baby Mama Syndrome' represents one such manifestation of these societal changes, highlighting tensions between tradition and modernity in Nigerian family structures.

### 2.2. Existing Literature on Media Representations of Baby Mamahood

Scholarly literature on media representations of baby mamahood, in most cases, shows how the 'Baby Mama Syndrome' is depicted and discussed within Nigerian media as economically empowering for young ladies. Imiti and Anyanwu's (2023) research, revisiting the changing prism towards sustaining societal development in Nigeria, studied Nigerian popular culture artefacts, such as Nollywood films and Afrobeat music, reveals the pervasive influence of media in shaping societal attitudes towards family structures and gender roles. Imiti and Anyanwu argue that Nigerian media often glamorises the 'Baby Mama Syndrome,' presenting it as a viable and even desirable lifestyle choice for women. Furthermore, Anyanwu et al. (2024) explore the portrayal of baby mamahood in Nigerian news media, highlighting the sensationalised narratives and stereotypes perpetuated by mainstream media outlets. The study underscores the role of media in constructing and reinforcing societal perceptions of baby mamahood, often at the expense of empathetic portrayals of women's experiences.

Additionally, Shamlishvili and Sabashvili (2023) examined social media discourse on the 'Baby Mama Syndrome' to shed light on the role of digital platforms in shaping public perceptions and debates surrounding baby mamahood. They argued that social media platforms amplify diverse voices and perspectives on the 'Baby Mama Syndrome,' reflecting broader societal attitudes and tensions surrounding the issue.

### 2.3. Theoretical Frameworks for Analysing Media Influence on Societal Attitudes

The analysis of media influence on societal attitudes towards the 'Baby Mama Syndrome' can be situated within theoretical frameworks that elucidate the mechanisms through which media representations shape public perceptions and behaviors. Social constructionist theory, as articulated by Berger and Luckmann (1966), posits that reality is socially constructed through language, symbols, and discourse. Within the context of the 'Baby Mama Syndrome,' media narratives serve as powerful discursive tools that frame and perpetuate specific interpretations of baby mamahood and absentee fatherhood.

Cultural studies perspectives offer further insights into the role of media in constructing and contesting dominant cultural norms and values (Aketema & Ladzepko, 2023). Within Nigerian society, media representations of the 'Baby Mama Syndrome' reflect broader cultural shifts and tensions surrounding gender, family, and parenthood. By analysing media texts within their socio-cultural contexts, scholars can discern the underlying ideologies and power dynamics that inform media portrayals of baby mamahood.

Moreover, agenda-setting theory posits that media organisations have the power to influence public perceptions by determining the prominence and framing of issues in news coverage (Oliveira-Araujo, 2023). Within the context of the 'Baby Mama Syndrome,' media agenda-setting shapes public discourse and policy debates surrounding baby mamahood and family structures. By examining patterns of media coverage and agenda-setting dynamics, researchers can identify the factors driving media narratives and their impact on societal attitudes and behaviors.

In summary, the literature review provides a comprehensive overview of historical and cultural perspectives on family structures in Nigeria, existing scholarship on media representations of baby mamahood, and theoretical frameworks for analysing media influence on societal attitudes. By synthesising diverse sources of literature, this review lays the groundwork for the analysis of media discourse on the 'Baby Mama Syndrome' in Nigeria, offering valuable insights into the contextual factors, scholarly discourse, and theoretical underpinnings relevant to the study.

### 3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative analysis approach to examine the complexities of media discourse surrounding the 'Baby Mama Syndrome' in Nigeria. Qualitative analysis, as adopted in this study, facilitates a rigorous examination of media representations of the 'Baby Mama Syndrome' in Nigeria, elucidating the complexities of societal attitudes towards baby mamahood and family structures within the Nigerian context, offering perspectives into the underlying factors driving this phenomenon and its implications for societal attitudes and behaviours. Media representations selected for analysis include a diverse range of sources, such as social media content, news articles, and opinion pieces. The selection criteria prioritise relevance to the 'Baby Mama Syndrome' discourse, encompassing both mainstream and niche media outlets. Additionally, a variety of genres and formats are considered to capture the multifaceted nature of media representations and their impact on public perceptions.

Data collection involves systematic sampling of media texts within the last five years, ensuring comprehensive coverage of relevant content. Media texts are subjected to thematic analysis, identifying recurring themes, narratives, and discursive strategies employed in the portrayal of the 'Baby Mama Syndrome'. Furthermore, content analysis methods are used to measure how frequently and prominently a certain theme appears in media representations. Moreover, triangulating data sources improves the analysis's robustness and enables cross-referencing and validation of results. Scholarly articles, news reports, and opinion pieces are also included in the analysis to provide broader contextual insights and comparative perspectives on the 'Baby Mama Syndrome' discourse.

### 4. Media Discourse on the 'Baby Mama Syndrome'

This section examines the portrayal of baby mamahood with absentee fathers within Nigerian media, exploring themes of tolerance, normalisation, and the tension with traditional moral and cultural norms. The analysis of media discourse on the 'Baby Mama Syndrome' in Nigerian media reveals a complex interplay of prevalent themes, narratives, and contrasting representations that reflect broader societal attitudes and values.

#### 4.1. Prevalent Themes and Narratives in Nigerian Media

Nigerian media representations of the 'Baby Mama Syndrome' encompass a range of narratives that vary in tone, emphasis, and ideological orientation. Television programs, films, music videos, and social media content contribute to this diverse landscape of portrayals, ranging from sympathetic depictions of baby mothers to sensationalised narratives that reinforce stereotypes. For example, the Independent newspaper of May 17, 2021, reported that "Davido's Kind Gesture towards his first Baby Mama stirs controversy on social media."



Figure 1: An Excerpt from Independent Newspaper Online

While others glamorised it, some respondents were more sympathetic. Some of the responses were as follows:

- @diaryofakitchenlover wrote, "They're co-parenting guys! It doesn't have to be a war all the time!"
- @theprincesscrazy wrote, "Davido is Father of the Year worldwide. He's obviously had a good experience with his father as well. Well done, Davido."
- @leaddyskincare wrote, "Davido is a good father, and only if he has stayed with one woman and given all his love to her and her children!"
- @fumedfoodsltd wrote, "Man like Davido! He sure knows how to play the game well! Make her happy and ur child will forever be happy! Davido kudos to u! No one is perfect, but u are a great father."

One prevalent theme that emerges is the dichotomy between victimhood and empowerment experienced by baby mothers. Nigerian media often depict these women as victims of circumstance, facing societal stigma and economic challenges. For instance, news articles highlight the struggles of baby mothers living in poverty or facing discrimination in employment opportunities. On the other hand, there is also a narrative of empowerment, where baby mothers are portrayed as resilient individuals who defy societal expectations and succeed against the odds. This narrative is often reinforced through human interest stories or opinion pieces celebrating the achievements of baby mothers who have overcome adversity. For example, popular blogger GistLover.com carried the headline "Nigerians react to rumors of 2face Idibia and his Baby Mama Pero expecting their 4<sup>th</sup> child" (September 12, 2021)



Figure 2: An Excerpt from gistlover.Com

The screenshot of the Twitter (currently 'X') responses below shows people's sympathy tilting towards the supposed Baby Mama "Pero" even though, at the time, 2face Idibia was already married to a different woman (Annie).



Figure 3: A Screenshot of Responses on Twitter about 2face's Baby Mama (Gistlover.Com)

Another prevalent theme in Nigerian media is the romanticisation of baby mamahood, often depicted as a courageous and empowering choice for women. Television dramas and films frequently feature strong female protagonists who navigate the challenges of baby parenthood with resilience and determination, challenging societal norms and



expectations. A prime example is the 2024 Nollywood movie "My Baby Mama." Additionally, music videos and social media influencers contribute to the normalisation of baby mamahood by portraying it as a lifestyle choice embraced by confident and independent women.



Figure 4: My Baby Mama (2024 Nollywood Movie on Youtube.Com)

Another recurring theme in Nigerian media is the sensationalisation of celebrity 'Baby Mamas.' Celebrities and public figures who become baby mothers often attract significant media attention, with their personal lives scrutinised and dissected in tabloids and gossip columns. For example, controversies surrounding paternity disputes or custody battles are frequently covered in entertainment news, contributing to the normalisation of baby mamahood within popular culture. This sensationalised portrayal can both glamorise and trivialise the experiences of baby mothers, shaping public perceptions and attitudes towards non-traditional family structures. For instance, pulse.ng blog on March 13, 2020, carried the headline "5 hot Nigeria celebrity baby mamas you should know."

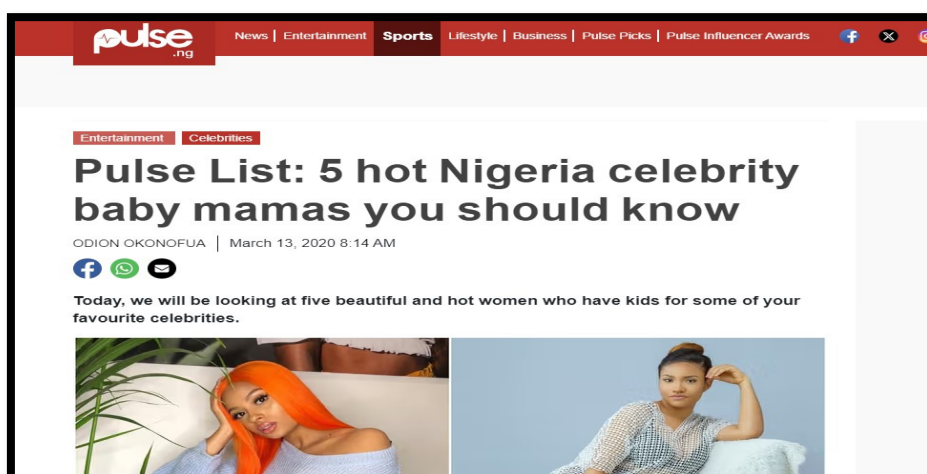


Figure 5: Pulse.ng Sensationalising Celebrity Baby Mamas

Moreover, Nigerian media often discuss the economic implications of baby mamahood, shedding light on the financial challenges faced by unmarried women raising children on their own. These discussions include debates on child support laws, access to affordable childcare, and the role of government assistance programs. For instance, news reports might highlight the struggles of baby mothers navigating the welfare system or feature interviews with policymakers advocating for reforms to support vulnerable families. Through these narratives, media outlets contribute to public discourse on social inequality and economic justice, drawing attention to the structural barriers that baby mothers face in Nigerian society.

However, alongside these portrayals, Nigerian media space also perpetuates negative stereotypes and stigmatising narratives surrounding the 'Baby Mama Syndrome.' News reports and opinion pieces often sensationalise stories of baby mothers, focusing on scandalous aspects of their personal lives and reinforcing societal judgments about morality and propriety. Furthermore, the absence of fathers in media representations of baby mamahood contributes to the marginalisation and erasure of their roles and responsibilities, perpetuating gender stereotypes and reinforcing patriarchal norms.

#### 4.2. Media Tolerance and Normalisation of Baby Mamahood

The examination of media tolerance and normalisation of baby mamahood in Nigeria reveals a shifting landscape of societal attitudes towards non-traditional family structures. In recent years, there has been a noticeable trend towards greater acceptance and even celebration of Baby Mamas within Nigerian media. This shift is evident in popular culture, where movies, music, and social media platforms often depict baby mothers as independent and empowered individuals.

For example, Nollywood films may feature strong female protagonists who navigate the challenges of baby parenthood while pursuing their dreams and aspirations. For example, the Twitter screenshot below shows a celebrity Baby Mama, Sophia Momodu, advocating for the normalisation of the phenomena with the hashtag #Normalizelt



Figure 6: Sophia Momodu Calling for the Normalisation of Baby Mama Syndrome on Twitter

Furthermore, the normalisation of Baby Mamahood is reflected in the language and imagery used by media outlets to depict these families. Instead of being portrayed as societal outcasts, baby mothers are often depicted as heroines who embody resilience and self-sufficiency. For instance, magazine covers may feature baby mothers alongside empowering slogans or images of strength and determination. This normalisation of baby mamahood in media contributes to shifting societal norms and expectations, challenging traditional views on marriage and family life.

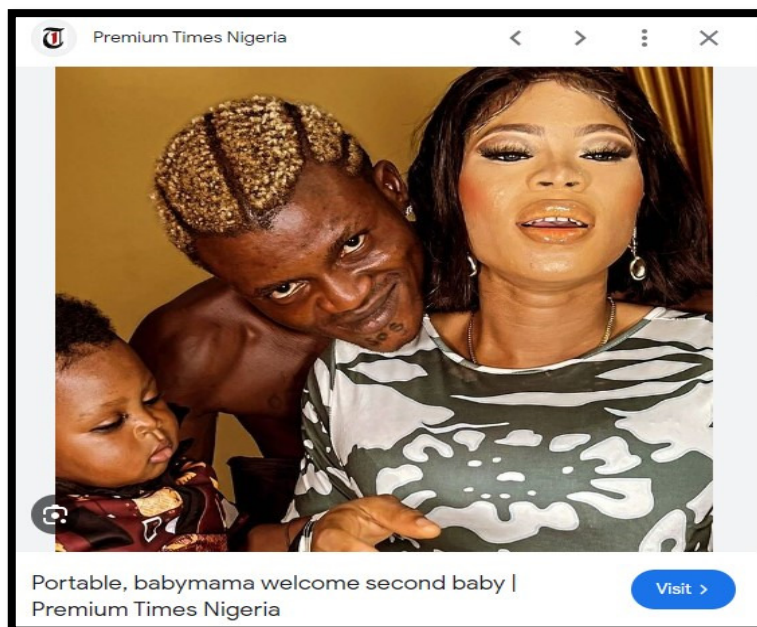


Figure 7: Premium Times Nigeria Lending Its Platform to the Baby Mama Syndrome

However, while media representations may celebrate the independence and resilience of baby mothers by downplaying the challenges and hardships associated with raising children without paternal support, they also risk oversimplifying the complexities therein through the presentation of a sanitised and idealised version of reality. By focusing primarily on success stories and positive outcomes, media outlets may overlook the structural inequalities and systemic barriers that perpetuate social and economic disparities among baby-parent households. Moreover, the idealised portrayal of baby mamahood may inadvertently reinforce gender stereotypes and downplay the importance of traditional parenting and familial support networks in child-rearing.

#### 4.3. Contrast with Traditional Moral and Cultural Norms

The normalisation of baby mamahood with absentee fathers in Nigerian media stands in stark contrast to traditional moral and cultural norms that emphasise the sanctity of marriage and the nuclear family unit. In traditional Nigerian society, marriage is viewed as a sacred institution, and societal expectations place a premium on marital stability and familial cohesion. However, contemporary media representations challenge these traditional norms by presenting baby mamahood as a legitimate and even desirable alternative to marriage. This contrast reflects broader shifts in societal attitudes towards family structures and gender roles, with Nigerian media serving as a reflection and catalyst of social change.

Moreover, the normalisation of baby mamahood in Nigerian media raises questions about the erosion of traditional values and the impact on societal cohesion and stability. By valorising baby mamahood with absentee fathers, media narratives undermine the institution of marriage and weaken traditional family structures, contributing to broader debates about the future of Nigerian society. For example, most Nigerian cultures place a strong emphasis on familial lineage and kinship ties, with baby mamahood perceived as a deviation from these societal norms and values.

#### 5. Conclusion

The examination of media discourse on the 'Baby Mama Syndrome' within Nigerian media illuminates a distinctive landscape of representations and narratives surrounding baby mamahood with absentee fathers. The analysis reveals a complex interaction of prevalent themes, contrasting portrayals, and evolving societal attitudes that reflect broader cultural and ideological shifts within Nigerian society.

Nigerian media representations of the 'Baby Mama Syndrome' span a spectrum of narratives, from sympathetic depictions of baby mothers to sensationalised portrayals that reinforce an otherwise frowned upon behaviour. Themes of victimhood and empowerment coexist, with media outlets often highlighting the struggles and resilience of baby mothers alongside glamorised narratives of celebrity 'Baby Mamas.' Economic implications of baby mamahood are also explored, shedding light on perceived financial incentive that reinforces the debates surrounding support for 'Baby Mama Syndrome.' However, alongside these portrayals, the sensationalism and scandalisation of personal stories for likes contribute to societal moral decline and acceptance of the 'Baby Mama Syndrome' as an easy escape route from hardship. The findings underscore the need for responsible media representation and informed policy interventions to address the complexities of baby mamahood in Nigerian society.

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