

Perception of Gender Roles Among Undergraduate Students of Abu Zaria: An Analysis of Hausa Series *Manyan Mata* on Arewa24 Television Station

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Abstract

This paper investigates the influence of the television long series programme *Manyan Mata* on undergraduate students' perceptions of gender roles and equality at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The study employed a quantitative survey to collect data from a sample of 154 students. Anchored on the Cultivation Media Theory findings from this study indicate that, despite the positive portrayals of female characters in *Manyan Mata*, some respondents still perceived women as submissive and dependent. This suggests that *Manyan Mata*, while challenging traditional gender roles, may still reinforce some stereotypes. *Manyan Mata* has the potential to spark discussions and debates about gender roles and expectations, leading to a more nuanced understanding of gender. Additionally, *Manyan Mata* can be seen as a valuable tool for promoting gender equality and challenging traditional gender norms, rather than reinforcing them. This paper concludes that *Manyan Mata* affects respondents' perceptions of gender roles and equality. The programme challenges traditional gender stereotypes, promotes gender equality and inspires nuanced behavioural changes among its viewers. This paper therefore recommends a need for more television programmes and other media content that challenge traditional gender stereotypes and promote gender equality in Northern Nigeria.

Keywords: *Gender, Perception, Manyan mata, Analysis and Hausa Series*

Introduction

Nigeria has long-standing gender inequality issues, such as women's limited access to education and economic opportunities, which restrict their ability to achieve financial independence and participate fully in the workforce (Uduju & Okolo-Obasi, 2022). Cultural traditions, such as child marriage and female genital mutilation, have a devastating impact on women's physical and mental well-being, hindering their overall development. Additionally, women are underrepresented in positions of political and public life, limiting their voices and influence in shaping societal decisions (Jayant, 2022).

Gender roles in Nigeria, as in many societies, are deeply rooted in cultural, religious, and historical contexts. Nigerian societies have adhered to a patriarchal structure, with distinct roles and expectations for men and women. Women have been primarily confined to domestic spheres, assuming responsibilities for childcare, household chores and some forms of agricultural labour (Lamphere, 2024). Conversely, men have been perceived as the primary breadwinners and decision-makers within the family and community (Khalid, 2025). These gendered divisions of labour and power have persisted over time, shaping societal norms and expectations. While globalisation and modernisation have introduced new ideas about gender equality, traditional gender roles remain influential in many parts of Nigeria, particularly in rural areas. These roles are often reinforced by cultural practices, religious beliefs, and social norms that prioritise male dominance and female subordination (Ali, 2024, & Mensah, 2023). Consequently, women still face significant challenges in accessing education, employment opportunities, and political participation.

In relation to the above, the media play a crucial role in shaping societal perceptions of gender roles. Through its content, the media both reflects and reinforces existing gender norms while also having the potential to challenge and transform them. Television, as a dominant medium in Nigeria, impacts viewers' understanding of gender.

Traditional portrayals often reinforce stereotypes, depicting women as passive and domestic caregivers, while men are portrayed as strong, assertive, and must be family heads (Igiebor, 2022). These stereotypes can limit aspirations and opportunities for both men and women. However, there is growing recognition of the need for more inclusive and diverse representation in the media, leading to a gradual shift in the portrayal of gender roles.

Manyan Mata, a Hausa-language television series on *Arewa24*, has gained attention for portraying empowered women navigating societal challenges in northern Nigeria. However, there is a gap in understanding the programme's influence on young adults, particularly university students. This demography is important because university years are a key period for identity formation and the development of societal viewpoints. Media exposure during this time significantly shapes attitudes and behaviour towards gender roles and equality, ultimately impacting their future roles in perpetuating or challenging gender inequalities. Despite growing interest in the media's role in shaping gender perceptions, few studies have specifically analysed Hausa-language series in Northern Nigeria. Existing research, such as Musa's (2020) and Okonkwo's (2019), focuses on cross-sectional analyses, offering snapshots of media effects without detailed examination of specific media content or long-term impact. Musa's study provides a broad overview of gender representation. However, it lacks focus on a particular series or demographics, while Okonkwo's research does not address *Manyan Mata* or the unique cultural context of Northern Nigeria. Therefore, this research aims to explore the influence of *Manyan Mata* on undergraduate students' perceptions of traditional gender roles at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Objectives of the Study

- a) To examine how *Manyan Mata* portrays gender dynamics and expectations for male and female characters.
- b) To explore whether *Manyan Mata* challenges or reinforces stereotypes for female and male viewers.

Literature Review

Gender roles are socially constructed expectations about attitudes and behaviour deemed appropriate for males and females. Thus, the idea that gender roles are not innate but created and reinforced by societal norms (Chausariya, 2025). These expectations extend to attitudes and behaviour deemed appropriate for males and females. For example, the expectation that men should be assertive and independent, while women should be nurturing and caring, exemplifies traditional gender roles (Khalid, 2025). Television shows, movies, advertisements, and social media platforms frequently depict men as strong, assertive, and career-oriented, while women are portrayed as passive, domestic, and focused on physical appearance. These stereotypical portrayals are pervasive and influential, shaping societal expectations about what is appropriate for each gender (Ekeh, 2018).

Yan (2024), Appiah (2025) and Spasova (2025) have shown that these stereotypical representations can have a lasting impact on individuals' perceptions and behaviour. Seluman, Eguono, Arikebi, and Aimiodeal (2024) found that repeated exposure to media portrayals of women as primarily concerned with beauty and domestic responsibilities can limit young girls' aspirations and career choices. Similarly, boys who see male characters in dominant, aggressive roles may internalise this behaviour as ideal, impacting their interactions and relationships. Despite the potential for negative influence, the media can also be a powerful tool for promoting gender equality. Lauzen (2019) argues that an individual's perception of reality can be influenced by their media consumption. Adetoye (2025) examines how women are portrayed in selected Nigerian home videos, focusing on whether these portrayals reinforce or challenge traditional gender norms. Findings revealed that women are often depicted in stereotypical roles such as submissive wives or emotionally dependent figures, thereby reinforcing societal biases; however, there is a desire for more balanced and progressive representations.

Eyo's (2021) study on the Discursive Construction of Hegemonic Masculinity by Rural Youth in Nigeria showed that young men in rural Nigeria use cultural practices to create hegemonic masculinity, while Betül, Sezer, Tülay and Doğan's (2023) study provided a thorough understanding of young adults' perspectives on gender roles. The study's findings revealed that female students with a bachelor's degree or higher, enrolled in health-related faculties, and those with mothers who had an education level beyond primary education exhibited higher mean scores on the gender perception scale. Also, Smith's (2016) and Mohammad's (2024) studies examined gender representation in primetime television. Therefore, findings from these studies revealed that women are underrepresented in leading roles and often portrayed in stereotypical ways. Despite some progress, women are still frequently depicted in limited occupations and subject to unrealistic beauty standards and gender stereotypes in contemporary television shows.

On gender stereotypes, objectification, and sexualization in media, Fabrizio et al. (2023) found that gender representations persist despite advancements in civil rights and that exposure to such portrayals can reinforce stereotypes, leading to negative consequences for individuals' well-being and societal attitudes. Ward and Rivadeneyra (2020) investigated the influence of media on gender stereotypes among children and adolescents. They found that exposure to screen media can reinforce traditional gender roles, leading to negative consequences for individuals' well-being. Also, Beenish, Samia and Aasima (2020) examined gender representation in children's cartoon programmes. They found that male characters are over-represented and often depicted in leading roles. In contrast, female characters are more likely to be portrayed in domestic roles and as objects of beauty.

Generally, insights from the literature reviewed indicate that gender portrayals in the media, particularly audiovisual media such as television, have strong potential to influence the perceptions and attitudes of those exposed to them.

Theoretical Framework

Cultivation Theory, formulated by George Gerbner in the 1960s, serves as the theoretical basis for this study. The theory conceptualises the processes of viewing television over a long period and its impact on viewers' perception of real life. The theory assumes that Television is a dominant medium, long-term exposure cultivates perceptions, and media content reflects and shapes societal norms. As the basis for this paper, Cultivation Theory's strength lies in its ability to illustrate the power of media as a tool for shaping perceptions over time. The theory highlights how repeated exposure to certain types of content can lead to a homogenised view of social reality, particularly relevant in the context of gender roles. Cultivation Theory is particularly relevant to this research on "Manyan Mata" and its influence on gender role perceptions among undergraduate students, as it helps explain how sustained exposure to media portrayals of gender roles in the series can shape students' perceptions and attitudes toward traditional gender norms.

Research Methodology

This research employed a quantitative survey method to investigate the influence of the television program *Manyan Mata* on undergraduate students' perceptions of gender roles and equality in Northern Nigeria. The quantitative survey method was utilised to gather data on students' attitudes and perceptions regarding the assignment of gender roles in the television series *Kayan Mata*. The target population for this study comprises 2,388 students, representing the student population in the Faculty of Social Sciences as of the 2021/2022 academic session. Using an 80% confidence level and 5% margin of error on the SurveyMonkey sample size calculator, the generated sample size was 154. A purposive sampling technique was employed to explore participants with a relevant connection to the subject matter of this paper. This approach prioritises selecting students who watch the television programme *Manyan Mata* to gain focused insights into the program's influence. Data were presented in tables as frequencies and percentages.

Results

The one hundred and fifty-four (154) copies of the questionnaire distributed were fully collected and analysed for the study. The data are presented systematically based on the research objectives of this paper.

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18-20	32	21
21-23	72	47
24-26	43	28
27 and above	7	4
Male	95	62
Female	59	38
100 level	24	16
200 level	37	24
300 level	34	22
400 level	59	38
Department	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Mass Communication	42	27
Political Science	38	25
Int'l Relations	40	26
Sociology	34	22
Total	154	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The data presented in Table 1 show the age distribution of respondents. The majority of respondents fall within the 21-23 age range, accounting for 47% of the total sample. This indicates that the sample is predominantly composed of younger students, which may reflect the typical age distribution among undergraduate students in the university. Further, the gender distribution of respondents, as shown in the Table, indicates that the majority were male. Of the 154 respondents, 95 were male, representing 62% of the sample. This distribution indicates that male students were more represented in the study than female students, which may affect the perspectives gathered on gender roles, perceptions, and behaviour, potentially reflecting a more male-centric viewpoint. However, the female respondents still make up a significant portion of the sample, providing a balanced perspective that offers insights into gender differences. Also, the data reveal the level of respondents' study. Of the 154 respondents, the largest group is 400-level students, accounting for 38% of the total sample. This distribution highlights that the majority of the respondents are in their final year (400 level), which may be because they have more time to watch TV series as they are about to graduate. The representation from various academic levels ensures a balanced perspective across different stages of university education.

Table 2: Portrayal of Male Characters in *Manyan Mata*

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
As strong and independent leaders	31	20
As traditional breadwinners	15	10
As supportive and caring	8	5
As a mix of traditional and progressive traits	100	65
Total	154	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The data in Table 2 reveal that the majority (65%) of respondents observed that male characters are depicted as embodying a mix of traditional and progressive traits. This suggests that the series (*Manyan Mata*) portrays men who balance conventional masculinity. The roles with more modern perspectives, as portrayed in *Manyan Mata*, seem to blend both traditional and evolving gender roles, with an emphasis on adaptability and leadership.

Table 3: Portrayal of Female Characters in *Manyan Mata*

Variables	Frequency	Percentage(%)
As a submissive and dependent	14	9
As empowered and independent	26	17
As career-oriented and successful	36	23
As a mix of traditional and progressive traits	78	51
Total	154	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

In Table 3, the majority of respondents (51%) believe that female characters are portrayed with a mix of both traditional and progressive traits, indicating that these characters reflect a balance between cultural expectations and modern values. This suggests that the series attempts to present a nuanced depiction of women that resonates with evolving gender dynamics.

Table 4: Response to the power dynamics between male and female characters

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male-dominated	26	17
Equal	66	43
Female-dominated	19	12
Uncertain	39	25
Not applicable	4	3
Total	154	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The data from the table reveals diverse perceptions of the power dynamics between male and female characters in “Manyan Mata” among the respondents. A significant portion (43%, 66 respondents) perceives the power dynamics as equal, indicating that male and female characters have similar influence within the series.

Table 5: Responses on whether Manyan mata Challenges or reinforces gender stereotypes

Sn	Level of knowledge	SA	A	Neutral	D	SD	Mean	Std.Dev.
1	Manyan Mata challenges traditional gender stereotypes	68(44)	68(44)	12(8)	4(3)	2(1)	4.273	0.587
2	Manyan Mata reinforces traditional gender stereotypes	16(10)	26(17)	27(18)	67(43)	18(12)	2.708	1.150

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Portrays women in influential roles	68	44
Challenges traditional gender roles	33	22
Promote gender equality	53	34
Total	154	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2026.

The data from Table 6 indicates a strong consensus among respondents regarding the ability of the Hausa series *Manyan Mata* to challenge traditional gender stereotypes. A significant portion of respondents, with a mean score of 4.273, which is above the midpoint of 3.0, agree that the series challenges these stereotypes. At the same time, a small proportion (mean score of 2.708) agrees that the series reinforces traditional gender roles. This suggests that the majority of respondents perceive the series as a progressive force in addressing and redefining gender roles in society.

Table 6: Ways in Which Manyan Mata Challenges Traditional Gender Stereotypes

From the data presented in Table 7, 68 (44%) respondents indicated that the series portrays women in influential roles, suggesting that the show has a positive influence on perceptions of women's capabilities beyond conventional limitations. "Manyan Mata" plays a significant role in shaping its audience's views on gender, contributing to a shift toward more progressive attitudes.

Table 7: Ways in Which *Manyan Mata* Reinforces Traditional Gender Stereotypes

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Portrays women in domestic roles	48	31
Reinforces traditional gender roles	18	12
Promote gender equality	23	15
Depicts men as dominant decision-makers	65	42
Total	154	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

From Table 8, the majority of the respondents (42%) perceive the series as depicting men as dominant decision-makers, which underscores a prevailing patriarchal narrative. This distribution highlights a clear tendency among students to recognise and affirm traditional gender roles as depicted in the series, raising questions about its influence on their perceptions and behaviour related to gender.

Discussion of Findings

Objective (a): To examine how *Manyan Mata* portrays gender dynamics and expectations for male and female characters

Findings from Tables 1–4 indicate that *Manyan Mata* presents gender dynamics through a blend of traditional and progressive representations. The demographic distribution in Table 1 shows that male respondents (62%) dominated the sample and largely perceived both male (65%) and female (51%) characters as reflecting a mix of traditional and modern traits. This suggests that the programme does not strictly conform to rigid gender binaries but instead portrays evolving gender expectations. This observation supports the argument by Fabrizio et al. that contemporary media often constructs hybrid gender identities to balance cultural familiarity with gradual social change.

Further cross-tabulation reveals that female respondents (38%) and students in higher levels, particularly 400-level students (38%), were more inclined to interpret these portrayals as progressive. This aligns with Betül et al., who found that higher educational exposure enhances critical and egalitarian gender perceptions. Similarly, students from Mass Communication (27%) and International Relations (26%) disciplines associated with media literacy demonstrated a higher tendency to critically evaluate portrayals, supporting Ekeh, who emphasise that media literacy shapes audience interpretation of gender messages.

Age also played a role in shaping perceptions. Respondents aged 21–23 (47%) showed greater awareness of gender differences in portrayal (58%) and were more likely to perceive power relations as equal (43%). This reflects the identity-formation stage described by Yan, in which young adults are more receptive to changing social norms. However, the presence of 25% uncertainty regarding power dynamics suggests lingering tension between traditional socialisation and modern media influence.

In terms of specific portrayals, Table 2 shows that male characters are predominantly depicted as embodying both traditional and progressive traits (65%), while 20% still view them as strong and independent leaders. This reinforces earlier findings by Eyo that the media often sustains elements of dominant masculinity. Nonetheless, the inclusion of supportive and caring male roles indicates a gradual redefinition of masculinity.

Similarly, Table 3 reveals that female characters are largely portrayed as a mix of traditional and progressive identities (51%), with notable representations as career-oriented (23%) and empowered (17%). However, the persistence of submissive portrayals (9%) indicates that traditional expectations have not been entirely displaced. Overall, these findings suggest that *Manyan Mata* reflects a transitional gender landscape in which evolving roles coexist with entrenched cultural norms.

Objective (b): To explore whether *Manyan Mata* challenges or reinforces stereotypes for female and male viewers

Findings from Tables 5–7 demonstrate that *Manyan Mata* simultaneously challenges and reinforces gender stereotypes. A substantial proportion of respondents agreed that the programme challenges traditional gender norms, as reflected in the high mean score (4.273). This is evident in the portrayal of women in influential roles (44%) and the promotion of gender equality (34%). Such representations contrast with historically limited

portrayals of women and support Smith's argument that women are underrepresented in leadership roles in the media.

The depiction of women as independent and career-oriented further reinforces this progressive shift, aligning with Grau and Zotos, who observed an increasing trend toward counter-stereotypical portrayals. By presenting women as decision-makers and achievers, the programme contributes to reshaping societal expectations and expanding the perceived roles available to women.

However, the findings also reveal persistent reinforcement of traditional stereotypes. Table 8 shows that 42% of respondents identified the portrayal of men as dominant decision-makers, indicating the continued presence of patriarchal narratives. Additionally, 31% noted that women are still depicted in domestic roles, suggesting that traditional gender expectations remain embedded in the storyline. These findings are consistent with Mohammad and Mohammad, and with Beenish et al., who all highlight the persistence of stereotypical gender roles in media content.

The coexistence of these contrasting portrayals suggests that the programme operates within a dual framework challenging stereotypes while simultaneously reflecting societal realities. This duality is further explained by Cultivation Theory, which posits that prolonged exposure to media cultivates a perception of reality that blends both traditional and emerging norms. Viewers of *Manyan Mata* are therefore likely to internalise a “blended reality” in which progressive ideals coexist with enduring cultural beliefs.

Conclusion

These research findings demonstrate the influence of *Manyan Mata* on undergraduate students' perceptions of gender roles and equality at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The programme challenges traditional gender stereotypes, promotes gender equality, and inspires positive behavioural changes among its viewers. The study concludes that *Manyan Mata* portrays gender dynamics in a complex and evolving manner, reflecting both traditional expectations and progressive ideals. In relation to the first objective, the programme presents male and female characters as multifaceted, combining conventional roles with modern attributes. These portrayals are interpreted differently across demographic groups, with factors such as gender, age, academic level, and field of study influencing audience perceptions.

Regarding the second objective, the findings demonstrate that *Manyan Mata* functions as both a challenger and a reinforcer of gender stereotypes. While it promotes gender equality by depicting women in empowered and influential roles, it simultaneously sustains elements of patriarchal dominance, particularly in male decision-making and residual domestic expectations for women.

Overall, the study affirms that media representations are not purely transformative but operate within existing cultural frameworks. Consistent with Cultivation Theory, *Manyan Mata* contributes to shaping audience perceptions by gradually introducing progressive gender narratives while still reflecting societal realities. Consequently, the programme occupies a transitional space in the discourse on gender roles, serving as both a mirror of cultural traditions and a catalyst for social change.

Recommendations

- (1) This paper recommends more television programmes and other media content that challenge traditional gender stereotypes and promote gender equality in Northern Nigeria.
- (2) Also, there is a need for additional studies to explore the long-term effects of media exposure on gender attitudes and behaviour, particularly across different demographics and cultural contexts in Nigeria.

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