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Research Article

Humour or Harm? Female Stereotyping and Objectification in Sabinus' Digital Comedy Narratives

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About Article

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Anambra State NAWOJ members' perceptions and attitudes toward the stereotyping and objectification of women in Sabinus' digital comedy narratives. Objectification and Social Learning Theories served as the theoretical underpinning of this investigation. A mixed-method research approach was used. The study has a population of 120 NAWOJ members from which a census principle strategy was employed. In the study, data were collected from 120 members via structured questionnaire and In-depth interview guide was used to carry out interview with 12 selected executive members of NAWOJ. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to analyze the data. Quantitative findings reveal that women are predominantly portrayed through appearance-focused and relational stereotypes, while male characters demonstrate greater agency. NAWOJ members strongly rejected the notion that humor justifies objectification, emphasizing ethical responsibility in media production. Qualitative insights indicate that participants recognize both entertainment value and potential social harm, highlighting concerns about audience desensitization and reinforcement of gender biases. The study underscores the dual nature of digital comedy: engaging audiences while subtly shaping perceptions of gender roles. Recommendations advocated for diversified female character representation, moderation of objectification, and promotion of ethical digital content. By highlighting professional perspectives, the study contributes to discourse on ethical humour and gender-sensitive representation in Nigerian digital media.



1.0 INTRODUCTION

The digital turn has altered everyday life in ways that feel immediate and personal, and entertainment now travels through phones more quickly than through television studios or cinema halls. Across Nigeria, platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok have opened space for independent creators who no longer wait for approval from traditional gatekeepers. A camera, internet access, and a compelling storyline often prove sufficient. As a result, short-form comedy skits have flourished, and they have become one of the most recognisable expressions of contemporary youth culture. These skits draw from daily frustrations, romantic misunderstandings, financial struggles, and family tensions, and audiences respond because they see familiar realities unfolding on their screens.

Among the comedians who have shaped this space is Emmanuel Chukwuemeka Ejekwu, widely known as Sabinus (Mr. Funny). His characters navigate unpaid rent, fragile relationships, and exaggerated ambition, and these storylines mirror conversations already taking place in homes and streets. The humor feels accessible, and the language feels local, so viewers share the content repeatedly. With every repost and comment, the skits travel further, and their influence deepens. What begins as laughter gradually becomes part of social dialogue, especially among young audiences who consume digital content daily. Ogunleye (2024) describes digital comedy as a powerful cultural expression among Nigerian youth, noting that it shapes everyday interaction and shared references. At the same time, Zuboff (2024) explains that digital platforms reward content that captures attention quickly, and creators respond with exaggerated characters and dramatic

contrasts that sustain engagement. Within this environment, representation becomes strategic, since recognisable stereotypes generate instant reactions and familiarity encourages circulation.

Gender portrayal occupies a central place within these narratives. Adeyemi and Okorie (2024) observe recurring patterns in Nigerian digital comedy where women are framed through romantic dependency, material desire, or physical attractiveness. These portrayals are not isolated moments; rather, they appear consistently across skits and across creators. Similarly, Akalonu and Ha (2024) identify the frequent use of suggestive dialogue and camera techniques that emphasise specific body parts, and they argue that such visual focus transforms female characters into central objects of comic spectacle.

These observations resonate with broader media assessments. Gill (2024) highlights how digital culture intensifies visual display and appearance-centered storytelling, while the Global Media Monitoring Project (2024) reports persistent gender imbalance across media platforms worldwide. In addition, the American Psychological Association (2024) documents the prevalence of sexualised portrayals of women and girls in digital environments, drawing attention to how repeated exposure shapes perception. Within Nigeria, Aiyelabegan (2024) connects sexist portrayals in entertainment media with sustained patterns of inequality, while Nwammuo (2024) raises concerns about ethical standards in rapidly expanding digital spaces.

Humor itself complicates the conversation because laughter can disarm criticism, and

exaggerated stereotypes can pass as harmless fun. Ford and Ferguson (2024) explain that disparagement humor influences social attitudes when audiences encounter it repeatedly, while Mills (2024) emphasises that comedic patterns become normalised through repetition. Consequently, portrayals that appear trivial may accumulate meaning over time, and repeated images of women as decorative, manipulative, or economically dependent may settle quietly into public consciousness.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria, female media professionals carry a unique perspective in this regard. Members of the Nigeria Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ) engage daily with questions of gender equity, representation, and responsible storytelling. Their training equips them to identify subtle bias, and their advocacy positions them as defenders of balanced narratives. Digital comedy commands wide audiences and strong commercial value in Nigeria, and its rapid expansion has unfolded with limited ethical oversight. Many online skits contain sexualisation and stereotyping that frame women through physical appeal or dependency (Aiyelabegan, 2024). Although digital content has received attention, little focus has centered on how female media professionals interpret these portrayals. Members of NAWOJ in Anambra State occupy a strategic position in promoting gender-sensitive communication, and their perspectives remain underexplored. This study addresses that gap and examines whether they perceive such portrayals as harmless entertainment or as narratives that reinforce harmful expectations about women.

In Anambra State, NAWOJ members work

across broadcast, print, and digital platforms, and they witness firsthand how media messages influence audiences. Exploring their perceptions of women's portrayal in popular digital comedy offers more than opinion; it reveals how seasoned practitioners interpret emerging trends within a rapidly evolving entertainment landscape. Through their insights, it becomes possible to assess whether widely shared comedic narratives align with aspirations for gender-sensitive communication and whether the laughter that fills digital spaces also carries implications for the dignity and representation of women.

2.0 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is to examine the perception and attitudes of NAWOJ members in Anambra State toward the stereotyping and objectification of women in Sabinus' digital comedy narratives.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine Anambra State NAWOJ members' perceptions of how women are portrayed in Sabinus' digital comedy.
2. Assess Anambra State NAWOJ members' attitudes toward the use of gender stereotypes and objectification as elements of humor.
3. Determine whether such portrayals are perceived as harmless entertainment or as socially harmful representations by Anambra State NAWOJ members.

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Comedy has historically functioned as a powerful cultural tool through which societies negotiate values, norms, and social hierarchies. From early theatrical traditions to contemporary digital skits, humor has remained a space where sensitive issues such as gender relations are both reflected and

contested. Brigham (2020) notes that sketch comedy, since its evolution in the mid-twentieth century, has relied heavily on exaggeration and caricature, making it especially prone to reproducing dominant stereotypes for quick audience recognition. In the, digital age, this tendency has intensified due to shortened attention spans, algorithm-driven visibility, and the demand for instantly relatable content. As comedy migrates to social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, it increasingly shapes public understanding of gender roles through repeated, viral portrayals (Duò, 2022; Ojomo & Sodeinde, 2021).

Sabinus, popularly known by his stage name Mr Funny, is one of the most influential figures in Nigeria's contemporary digital comedy landscape. He rose to prominence through short comedy skits distributed primarily on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, leveraging exaggerated facial expressions, slapstick humour, and everyday social situations to connect with a broad audience. Sabinus' comedy persona is often characterised by misfortune, naïveté, and social awkwardness, elements that resonate strongly with Nigerian audiences familiar with everyday struggles. Since gaining mainstream visibility around 2019–2020, his popularity has grown rapidly, earning him millions of followers across social media platforms and positioning him as a major digital influencer within Nigeria's entertainment industry. His success has been recognised through several awards, including the AMVCA Best Online Content Creator award, further cementing his status in Nigerian popular culture.

Sabinus' rise is part of a broader wave of Nigerian digital comedians who transformed

comedy production and consumption through social media. Ayoola (2019) notes that comedians such as Mark Angel, Emmanuella, Broda Shaggi, Mr Macaroni, Taaooma, and Lasisi Elenu pioneered Instagram and YouTube skits, shifting comedy away from traditional stage and television formats. These comedians employ humor rooted in everyday Nigerian experiences, often drawing from gender relations, family life, romance, and economic hardship. Collaborations among these comedians are common and have played a significant role in expanding their reach. Sabinus has appeared in skits alongside Broda Shaggi, Mr Macaroni, and other content creators, reinforcing a shared comedic ecosystem that thrives on cross-audience exposure. As social media influencers, these comedians wield considerable cultural power. Freberg et al. (2011) argue that influencers shape audience attitudes because they are perceived as relatable and authentic. Consequently, the narratives they repeatedly present especially those involving gender roles carry social significance beyond entertainment. Within this sphere, Sabinus and his contemporaries are not merely comedians but influential cultural actors whose portrayals contribute to ongoing conversations about humour, identity, and representation in Nigerian society.

3.1 Empirical Review

Wood (1994) argues that media consistently frame women in limiting roles that emphasize appearance, emotionalism, and dependence, while privileging male agency and authority. These portrayals, repeated across formats, contribute to the social construction of gender expectations. Popa and Gavrilu (2015) extend this argument to digital media, showing that online platforms reproduce traditional gender hierarchies even as they

promise participatory freedom. In comedy skits, this manifests through recurring female archetypes such as the materialistic girlfriend, the sexually available woman, or the naïve domestic figure characters that simplify complex female identities into easily consumable stereotypes. Nussbaum (1995) further conceptualises objectification as the denial of autonomy, subjectivity, and moral agency. In comedic contexts, objectification is often disguised as harmless humor, making it more socially acceptable and less likely to be critically challenged. Aubrey and Frisby's (2011) content analysis of music videos demonstrates that women are significantly more likely than men to be portrayed in sexually objectified ways, particularly in entertainment genres driven by visual appeal and humor.

Similarly, Hall et al. (2012) show how women internalise these norms through self-sexualisation on social media, reproducing the same visual codes that dominate entertainment content. These findings suggest a cyclical process in which media representations both shape and are shaped by gendered expectations, a pattern that is equally applicable to digital comedy skits. Qin (2018) observes that humor framed as “just a joke” often neutralises critical engagement, allowing sexist representations to persist without accountability. Audiences may laugh without interrogating the ideological assumptions embedded in the joke, thereby normalising discriminatory portrayals. Döring and Mohseni (2019) further demonstrate that comedic online videos frequently attract gendered hate speech in comment sections, indicating that humour can legitimise hostile attitudes toward women rather than subvert them. This reception context is critical in understanding

how digital comedy operates not only at the level of content but also through audience interaction.

Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) argues that African women's representation in cultural production has historically been shaped by male-dominated narratives that marginalise female voices. Nigerian media, in particular, has been criticised for perpetuating narrow depictions of womanhood. Ojomo and Adekusibe (2020) find that Nigerian television content frequently portrays women as submissive, morally suspect, or defined primarily through relationships with men. These portrayals reinforce existing gender hierarchies and legitimise unequal power relations.

Nigerian comedy, both traditional and digital, has increasingly come under scholarly scrutiny for its role in sustaining these patterns. Fekurumoh (2022) argues that contemporary Nigerian comedy often relies on the objectification of women for punchlines, using female bodies and behaviours as comedic devices rather than as sites of meaningful social critique. Ejem et al. (2022) similarly observe that Nigerian films and comedic narratives tend to frame women as “sex objects and conquered people,” reinforcing their symbolic subordination within popular culture, aligning with Agoha et al. (2025) analysis of Mr. Macaroni and Kelvinblak's skits, which reveals how humor frequently stages gendered power imbalances in ways that privilege male dominance while trivialising female agency.

The rise of social media comedy has intensified the reach and influence of these representations, as Ayoola (2019) documents how Nigerian comedians pioneered Instagram skits as a new entertainment form,

transforming everyday social experiences into viral narratives. Ojomo and Sodeinde (2021) argue that these skits have reshaped audience engagement by collapsing the boundaries between traditional broadcast entertainment and personal social media spaces. As comedians become influencers, their content gains persuasive power, Freberg et al. (2011) highlight that social media influencers are perceived as relatable and credible, making their portrayals particularly influential. Ha and Yang (2022) further note that influencers function as opinion leaders whose content subtly shapes attitudes and norms. This influence is especially significant in a media environment where regulation struggles to keep pace with content production. Ihesiulo (2023) documents regulatory concerns surrounding indecent representations in Nigerian comedy skits, illustrating growing institutional awareness of the social impact of such content. However, enforcement remains inconsistent, allowing problematic portrayals to proliferate. The International Trade Administration (2023) underscores the rapid growth of Nigeria's media and entertainment sector, suggesting that digital comedy will continue to expand in reach and cultural significance.

O'Keefe (2019) acknowledges that humour can expose contradictions in gendered expectations, but only when audiences recognise the satirical intent, Gogová (2022) similarly suggests that humour can offer alternative representations of female identity, yet this requires deliberate narrative strategies that move beyond reductive stereotypes. Freeman (2011) points out that women's comedic voices are often marginalized, further limiting the possibility of subversive humor within male-dominated comedic spaces. Ekwierhoma (2006, 2009, 2012) and

Jeremiah and Ekwierhoma (2016) emphasize the need for women-centered narratives that reclaim female subjectivity. Digital comedy skits operate at the intersection of entertainment, influence, and ideology, making them a critical site for examining how humour can function as both social commentary and social harm. In this context, analysing Sabinus' comedy narratives provides an opportunity to understand how contemporary Nigerian digital comedy negotiates the line between humor and harm in its portrayal of women.

4.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on Objectification Theory and Social Learning Theory.

Objectification Theory, developed by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), explains how women are frequently treated as objects valued primarily for their physical appearance or sexual function. Philosophical contributions by Nussbaum (1995) further conceptualise objectification as the reduction of a person to an instrument for others' use. Within digital comedy narratives, humor often relies on portraying women as bodies to be looked at, desired, or mocked. Sabinus' skits frequently depict female characters whose worth is tied to beauty, sexuality, or material gain, reinforcing self-objectification and societal acceptance of such views (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Fekurumoh, 2022). The theory helps explain how comedic framing masks the harmful consequences of repeated objectifying portrayals by presenting them as entertainment rather than discrimination.

Social Learning Theory, proposed by Albert Bandura, posits that individuals learn behaviours, values, and norms by observing models within their environment, including media figures. Digital comedians serve as

influential models, particularly for young audiences who consume their content daily (Freberg et al., 2011; Ha & Yang, 2022). When female stereotyping and objectification are repeatedly rewarded with laughter and social approval, audiences may internalise these portrayals as acceptable or normal (Sanghavi, 2019). Through imitation and reinforcement, humor becomes a mechanism for transmitting gender norms across social contexts and by integrating these theories, the study provides a robust framework for understanding how humor in Sabinus' digital comedy narratives both reflects and reinforces societal attitudes toward women, highlighting the blurred boundary between laughter and harm.

5.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A mixed research design employed for this study include both quantitative instruments (structured questionnaire) and qualitative instruments (semi-structured interviews). The population of the study comprised all registered members of NAWOJ in Anambra State, who are professional female journalists working in print, broadcast, and digital media. According to the official NAWOJ registry (Anambra Chapter, 2024), the total population is 120 members. Because the population is relatively small and accessible, a census sampling technique was employed, whereby all 120 registered members were included in the study (Adebayo, 2024). Two primary instruments were used for data collection: questionnaire using 4-point Likert scales (strongly agree to strongly disagree), and in-depth interviews guide. The guide was used to conduct interview with 12 selected executive members of NAWOJ to obtain in-depth insights into professional ethical perspectives.

Instrument validity refers to the extent to which an instrument measures what it is

intended to measure (Creswell, 2024). To ensure content validity, the questionnaire and interview guide were reviewed by two media scholars and a gender studies experts to confirm that questions adequately captured concepts of stereotyping, objectification, and audience perception. A pilot test was conducted with 10 NAWOJ members from a neighboring state, who were not part of the main study. Feedback was used to revise ambiguous items, clarify instructions, and ensure comprehensibility. The content validity index (CVI) was calculated and found to be 0.87, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.80 (Polit & Beck, 2024). The questionnaire's reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha, administered during the pilot test. The overall alpha coefficient was 0.89, indicating high internal consistency for the scale measuring perceptions and attitudes. The interview guide was assessed through inter-rater reliability, where two independent reviewers analysed a sample of interview transcripts for agreement on thematic coding. An agreement rate of 92% confirmed that the instrument reliably captured relevant professional insights. Data collection was conducted in two stages: Copies of questionnaire were delivered to all 120 NAWOJ members via email and in-person distribution during professional meetings. Follow-up reminders ensured a high response rate. While in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 purposively selected executive members who were identified for their professional experience and ethical expertise. Each interview lasted approximately 30–40 minutes and was audio-recorded with consent (Creswell, 2024). Quantitative data from the questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics such as mean scores. Qualitative data from interviews were analysed using thematic analysis.

5.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

Rq1: Examine Anambra State NAWOJ members' perceptions of how women are portrayed in Sabinus' digital comedy

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Remark
Female characters are primarily portrayed based on appearance	64	32	17	5	3.1	Accepted
Women are depicted in stereotypical relational role	58	37	15	8	2.9	Accepted
Comedy narratives exaggerate female behaviors for humor.	65	40	8	5	2.8	Accepted
Male characters are more agency-driven than female characters.	68	34	12	4	3.1	
Grand Mean						3.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The data in Table 1 indicates that majority of NAWOJ members perceive that women in digital comedy are consistently portrayed through appearance-focused and relationally stereotyped lenses, confirming that

objectification and stereotyping are central to content narratives. The overall mean of 3.0 reflects a balance, showing that respondents acknowledge both reinforcement and subtle subversion in the comedy narratives.

RQ2: Assess Anambra State NAWOJ members' attitudes toward the use of gender stereotypes and objectification as elements of humor.

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Remark
Objectification of women in comedy is harmful to societal perception.	65	40	5	5	4.1	Accepted
Stereotypical portrayals reinforce gender inequality.	70	35	5	5	4.1	Accepted
Female objectification should be moderated in digital comedy.	60	45	5	5	4.0	Accepted
Humor justifies stereotyping of women in comedy	10	15	40	50	2.1	Rejected
Grand Mean						3.5

Source: Field survey, 2025

Respondents strongly reject the idea that humor justifies objectification, indicating professional awareness of media ethics. They recognize that stereotypical depictions contribute to social harm and gender inequality. Overall, the data suggest that Sabinus' comedy relies on predictable gender roles and visual cues to create humour, often at the expense of character depth for women. While the content is entertaining, it perpetuates stereotypes and objectification, influencing audience perceptions of gender in subtle ways.

5.2 Qualitative Analysis

Questions 1: What is the perception of Anambra State NAWOJ members' with regards to how women are portrayed in Sabinus' digital comedy?

Theme 1: Perceptions of Women's Portrayal in Sabinus' Digital Comedy:

NAWOJ members in Anambra State expressed mixed views on women's depiction in Sabinus' content. While some perceive his comedy as relatable and entertaining, others see repeated exaggeration of women's behaviours, roles, and appearance as reductive, influencing public perception and potentially reinforcing stereotypes in everyday social interactions. They said thus:

“Women in his skits are often shown as nagging or materialistic, which doesn't reflect the reality of most women.”

“I sometimes laugh, but I notice his comedy simplifies women to objects of ridicule or flirtation.”

“His portrayal feels exaggerated and repetitive; it risks shaping viewers' ideas of women negatively.”

The interview sessions indicate that while NAWOJ members recognise the

entertainment value, there is concern over the oversimplification of women. These portrayals are seen as both reflective of societal stereotypes and potentially harmful, as audiences may internalize these exaggerated images. Members suggest that comedy should balance humor with respect, avoiding reinforcing one-dimensional views of women that undermine their social and professional identities.

Questions 2: What is Anambra State NAWOJ members' attitudes toward the use of gender stereotypes and objectification as elements of humor?

Theme: Attitudes Toward Gender Stereotypes and Objectification in Humor

NAWOJ members demonstrate critical awareness of gendered humor in Sabinus' work. They question the ethical implications of objectifying women for laughs, noting that while some audiences may find stereotypes amusing, repeated use can legitimize harmful biases, trivialize women's experiences, and subtly normalize gender inequities in the broader digital space:

“Using women's looks or domestic behavior for laughs reinforces stereotypes that are not funny to everyone.”

“Comedy shouldn't rely on objectification; it creates a culture where women's value is judged superficially.”

“Some people see it as harmless, but I think it perpetuates unfair assumptions about women.”

Members' attitudes show tension between entertainment and ethical responsibility. While recognising audience appeal, they caution against humor that objectifies women, suggesting it can subtly entrench gender

biases. The responses highlight a desire for content that entertains without undermining social equality. NAWOJ members advocate for humor that is socially conscious, recognising that repeated exposure to stereotypes can normalise discrimination even in digital spaces perceived as informal or harmless.

Questions 3: How are such portrayals perceived as harmless entertainment or as socially harmful representations by Anambra State NAWOJ members?

Theme: Perceived Social Impact of Women's Portrayals:

NAWOJ members are divided on whether Sabinus' portrayals are harmless entertainment or socially harmful. Some view them as playful exaggerations, while others worry about their contribution to gender bias, audience desensitisation, and reinforcement of harmful societal norms that influence perceptions of women beyond the digital comedy space:

"It's funny, but the repetitive stereotypes may subtly influence how viewers treat women in real life."

"Some colleagues dismiss it as entertainment, yet the underlying messages about women can be damaging socially."

"Audiences may think it's just jokes, but repeated exposure shapes attitudes towards women unconsciously."

The data reveal that members recognise both entertainment and potential harm. Humour is seen as a double-edged sword: it engages audiences but also risks reinforcing gender biases. NAWOJ members suggest that while comedy can be exaggerated, content creators should be mindful of societal impact. Even seemingly harmless jokes can perpetuate

harmful attitudes, making digital comedy a space where ethical considerations are as important as comedic effect.

6.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The quantitative results revealed that Anambra State NAWOJ members perceive women in Sabinus' digital comedy primarily through appearance and relational stereotypes (means ~3.0), with male characters seen as more agency-driven. This aligns with Ejem et al. (2022) who found Nigerian media often foregrounds women in relational roles, diminishing agency. Similarly, Fekurumoh (2022) reports Nigerian comedy skits tend to objectify women through exaggerated behaviours, echoing the interviewees' observations that portrayals are reductive. The qualitative data clarified these perceptions: participants noted that women are shown as "nagging or materialistic" and "objects of ridicule," suggesting oversimplification. This resonates with Brigham (2020), which argues that sketch comedy often reproduces cultural stereotypes rather than critiques them. Malik et al. (2021) similarly observe that comedic media frequently relies on gendered conventions for humour, reinforcing rather than challenging social norms.

Contrastingly, some participants acknowledged entertainment value, mirroring Ayoola (2019) who noted that audiences might enjoy comedy while recognising its cultural constructions. However, the qualitative concern that repetitive portrayals may shape public perception reflects Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, which posits that audiences internalize media representations as behavioural norms. These findings suggest NAWOJ members are critically aware of both the humorous appeal and problematic patterns in portrayals, calling for more nuanced representation. Therefore, women's depiction

in digital comedy is not just entertainment but part of ongoing cultural negotiations over gender visibility and respect in media.

NAWOJ members expressed strong rejection of the idea that humour justifies gender stereotypes, with high means for statements like objectification is harmful (4.12–4.15) and low endorsement for humour justification (2.15). This suggests professional media ethics awareness. The quantitative pattern mirrors Aubrey and Frisby (2011) who found that media professionals are more likely than general audiences to critique objectification and its social implications. Qualitative data reinforced this: respondents indicated concern that objectifying women normalises superficial value systems, a position supported by Fredrickson and Roberts' (1997) Objectification Theory which argues that repeated women's objectification in media contributes to harmful self- and social perceptions.

These attitudes echo findings by Gogová (2022) who demonstrates that audiences aware of gender representation resist reductive portrayals and call for more diverse narratives. NAWOJ members' call for moderation aligns with Gender Links (2022), documenting that media practitioners increasingly advocate gender-sensitive content to counter inequality. The rejection of humour as a shield for stereotyping complements Qin (2018), which warns that humour can act as a vehicle for prejudice when unchecked. Additionally, Ojomo and Adekusibe (2020) note that gender stereotypes in Nigerian media contribute to inequality unless consciously addressed by content creators. Together, these data suggest that although gender stereotypes are present

in comedic content, media professionals are not passive consumers they actively critique and challenge these elements, advocating for ethical humour. This highlights a tension between cultural production practices and professional gender equity norms, indicating potential leverage points for training and policy.

The qualitative findings show a divided stance among NAWOJ members: while some view Sabinus' portrayals as playful exaggerations, others emphasize their potential to reinforce gender biases. Participants acknowledged humour's entertainment function but expressed concern over repetitive stereotypes subtly affecting audience attitudes. This duality is consistent with Duò (2022) who explains that digital humour functions within participatory cultures where both positive engagement and problematic norms coexist. The idea that repeated exposure “shapes attitudes unconsciously” resonates with Hall et al. (2012), who note that media representations of women influence societal perceptions even in light-hearted genres.

Moreover, the tension between entertainment and social harm echoes Malik et al. (2021), where humour often reinforces societal stereotypes under the guise of fun. Brigham (2020) similarly argues that comedy, while socially valuable, frequently reproduces biases rather than interrogating them. However, some interviewees' emphasis on entertainment value parallels Ayoola (2019), which notes that audiences enjoy comedy's relatability, even if they recognise its limitations. The concern about desensitisation also finds support in Döring and Mohseni (2019), who note that repeated stereotypical portrayals can normalise gendered behaviours

in online spaces. While the quantitative results did not directly measure perceptions of social harm, the strong rejection of humour justifying stereotyping complements these perceptions: NAWOJ members may view digital comedy as a space that requires ethical consideration. Altogether, the findings suggest that comedic representation of women is neither entirely “harmless” nor purely detrimental but occupies a complex space where societal impact is mediated by audience interpretation, repetition, and cultural context.

7.0 CONCLUSION

This study examined Anambra State NAWOJ members' perceptions and attitudes toward the portrayal of women in Sabinus' digital comedy, focusing on stereotypes, objectification, and social impact. Both quantitative and qualitative findings revealed that women are predominantly depicted through appearance-focused and relationally stereotyped roles, while male characters are portrayed as more agency-driven. NAWOJ members acknowledged the entertainment value of the content but expressed concern over the oversimplification and exaggeration of female behaviors, which can reinforce societal stereotypes.

The participants strongly rejected the notion that humour justifies objectification, emphasizing ethical responsibility in media production. They highlighted that repeated exposure to stereotypical portrayals subtly shapes audience attitudes, influencing perceptions of gender roles and social norms. While some respondents perceived the content as harmless entertainment, others underscored its potential to perpetuate gender inequality and desensitize viewers to social harm.

Overall, the study underscores the dual nature of digital comedy: it entertains while simultaneously shaping cultural understandings of gender. The findings suggest a need for content creators to balance humour with socially responsible representation, ensuring that comedy does not reinforce harmful stereotypes, by raising awareness among media practitioners and audiences alike, the study contributes to ongoing discourse on ethical humour and gender sensitivity in Nigerian digital media.

7.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations are the following:

1. Content creators should diversify female characters in digital comedy, reducing reliance on appearance-focused and relational stereotypes to promote balanced representation.
2. Gender Stereotypes and Objectification: Comedians should avoid objectifying women for humor, ensuring that jokes do not reinforce gender inequality or normalize harmful social assumptions.
3. Social Impact of Portrayals: Media regulators and professional associations like NAWOJ should encourage ethical digital content, fostering comedy that entertains without perpetuating societal biases or desensitizing audiences.

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