

Who really wants to be a millionaire? How digital platforms reproduce, reflect and reinforce gender norms.

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Abstract

Persistent gender and other inequalities in education, employment, income and other resources, including technology use, continue to deter adults and children from attaining their full potential in many parts of the world. Although there is some progress in addressing inequalities across the world, rapidly increasing access to digital devices and platforms in many parts of the world poses new challenges. We analysed transcripts from 52 videos from a popular reality game show in Nigeria, “Who Really Wants to be a Millionaire”, to illuminate the potential for digital platforms to reinforce and reproduce existing social inequalities and norms. Our analysis uncovered significant gender differences in patterns of gameplay. There was also a preference for seeking help from males rather than women. The game host was also more likely to have casual conversations about family and households with women than men with whom they discuss finances, science and technology.

Introduction

Gender equality is a fundamental human right that is at the core of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). The fifth SDG aims to end all forms of systemic discrimination and violence against women and girls (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2017). Achieving this goal in itself is important because the inclusion of women in education and employment opportunities has beneficial effects on developmental outcomes such as economic growth (Baliamoune-Lutz & McGillivray, 2009; Klasen & Lamanna, 2009; Minasyan et al., 2019) and population health (Cools & Kotsadam, 2017). A large and growing body of literature has shown that gender equality is related to gender attitudes and norms, especially those that shape individuals' expectations, prescribe acceptable roles and behaviours, and determine the opportunities available to men and women in different societies. Although there has been some progress in addressing gender inequality in many parts of Africa, rapidly increasing access to digital devices and platforms across the continent poses new challenges, especially because they are likely to shape norms and expectations both online and offline.

In this study, we leveraged videos from a popular reality game show in Nigeria, "Who Really Wants to be a Millionaire", to illuminate the potential for digital platforms to reinforce and reproduce existing social inequalities and norms. All the videos were in English and were uploaded between 2022 and 2023. We focused only on videos uploaded as part of the series 2 edition of the game show as these are more likely to reflect current realities and norms in the society. A total of 52 videos from 52 episodes were retrieved and considered for analysis. In our analysis, we focused only on videos for single plays while we excluded special edition games such as children's, charity and other editions. Our final analytic sample includes 73 unique gameplays from 48 episodes. All the videos selected were at least 50 minutes long. Content analysis was used to classify patterns in each episode based on a set of predefined coding schemes such as sex, hobbies, occupation and educational level of each participant. We also extracted information about whether and when each participant used each lifeline. A close discourse analysis was also conducted to qualitatively determine patterns in the quality of interaction between each participant and the host.

Our preliminary analysis uncovered significant gender differences in patterns of gameplay. The average sex ratio (1:5) for each episode suggests that more men than women tend to enrol to participate in the game show. There was also a preference for seeking help from males rather than women. There was no significant gender difference in the number of questions asked and

answered correctly (Figure 1), yet many participants still phoned a male friend more than a female friend. Of the 76 participants who selected to use the phone as a friend lifeline, about 81% chose to phone a male friend/relative rather than a female friend. The game host was also more likely to have casual conversations about family and households with women than men with whom they discuss finances, science, and technology. These findings raise important questions about the potential for digital platforms to reproduce existing social and gender norms particularly in low resource settings.

References

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Figure 1. Sex difference in number of questions asked and questions answered.

