

NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE SAME-SEX MARRIAGE (PROHIBITION ACT) IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Following the recent outcry against same-sex practice in Nigeria and buoyed by heavy resentment of it, a law criminalizing same sex marriage was recently enacted captioned Same-Sex Marriage (prohibition) Act. This new law has been attacked, discussed and interpreted in numerous ways. Newspapers do not only provide a platform for the elaborations but also contribute to shaping public understanding on the issue. This study examined how Nigerian newspapers covered the Same-Sex Marriage (prohibition) Act in Nigeria. It specifically sought to find out: the extent of newspapers' reports on the law; the prominence attached to press publication on Same-Sex Marriage (prohibition) Act; whether press reports on Same-Sex Marriage Act reflected the views of homosexuals and whether newspapers' reports on the law were interpretative and analytical. A content analysis of 188 editions of The Daily Sun and The Nation Newspapers showed that the law was regularly reported by the newspapers, but was not given enough prominence. Findings also showed that the press reflected the views of the homosexuals in their reports and that the reports were analytical and interpretative. Based on these findings, recommendations were made: that the newspapers should ensure regular reportage of the law; reflect Nigerian culture in their reports, utilize spaces, headlines, graphics, to make Same Sex Marriage Act prominent and popular and ensure reflection of health related effects of same sex practice in their publications.

Keywords: Newspaper coverage, Same-sex marriage, prohibition act, Nigeria

Introduction

Same sex marriage also known as gay marriage or homosexuality used to be considered a taboo. But now, it has changed too quickly, one may say. Same sex issue has grown from its silent days when those attributed to its preference deny it with all their might, to an era where it has metamorphosed into an issue of right that must be protected.

Until recently, there was no known open discussion on the matter. The gale of attitudinal change towards homosexuals in other countries, especially in the western world, has emboldened the local gays and lesbians so that in the recent past, Nigeria gays and lesbians started coming out of the closet, demanding to be accorded respect and legal protection given the fact that the world has

become a global village, and a very small one at that, it is very easy for what is happening to one end of the village to influence the happening at the other end. On the influence of globalization on the spread of homosexuality in Nigeria, Igbodo (2012) posited thus:

Trends have shown that we derive most of our present day culture and behavioural pattern from the west. Slowly, but surely, their way of life creeps into our land and totally overtake us. It is a well known fact that the world is a global village and a very small one at that; and this means that it is very easy for us to catch up with what is new and in vogue and hope on that train.

Since the wind of same sex relationship is blowing across the globe, it is no surprise that the number of homosexuals in Nigeria is in the rise with many embracing homosexuality with open arms and ease. In the recent past, same sex practice has become common in Nigeria with many established cases of such acts in various cities in Nigeria. In 2006, one Reverend Rowland Macaulay was reported to have set up House of Rainbow, a homosexual church at No 36/38 Yakoyo Street, Ojudu Berger, Lagos, Sessou (2012). He was initiating new members into the gay club and at same time running the church secretly in Nigeria. His members were only men who worshipped as brethren and lovers. He was also said to have appeared sometime ago on Cable News Network (CNN) where he proudly talked about his gay church.

Igbodo (2012), also gave an instance of a Nigerian gay reported in one of the social media, as being married to German lawyer and later divorced him. Similarly, he (Igbodo 2012) added that another Nigerian gay was found to be operating a gay entertainment company in Abia state. Okechukwu, as he is fondly called opined that his company provides gay dancers and entertainment services for private parties and business functions amongst others. There was also the case of one Adisa, accused of sodomizing teenagers for ritual purpose. The instances of same sex practice in Nigeria are many and endless.

Following the recent outcry against gay practice in Nigeria and buoyed by heavy resentment of it as a result of demonstrations for same-sex marriage during the international conference on HIV/AIDS (ICASA) in 2005, on January 18, 2007, the federal executive council sent a bill-*same sex marriage (prohibition) Act* 2006, to the National Assembly for urgent action. The House of Representatives of Nigeria, on May 30, 2013 passed the bill which was sent to the president for his assent (Sessuo 2013). On 7th January, 2014 the then president of Nigeria Dr. Goodluck Jonathan signed the bill into law, officially becoming *same-sex marriage (prohibition) Act* 2014. The Act was made public to Nigerians on 14th January 2014. The law among other provisions criminalizes homosexuality (same sex marriage), homosexual clubs, associations, and organizations, with penalties of up to 14 years in jail. The law also made it illegal for gay people to even hold a meeting. Consequent upon the Act, it might be a hard time for both gay and religious leaders who are in support of the practice.

However, that the new law is a backlash to western pressure on African leaders to decriminalize homosexuality (same sex marriage) which is considered an anathema to African culture and religion cannot be denied. Nigeria reflects a highly religious and conservative society that considers *same sex* marriage a deviation. *Same sex* relationship is abhorred by majority of members

of the society. This according to Sessuo (2013) is attributed to mainly on account of Nigeria's cultural pattern and religious inclinations. On the other hand Igbodo (2012) would see it as thus:

The idea of having sex relationship was a taboo in our shores. As a matter of fact, it was almost unheard of. It was also embarrassing to see guys walking hand in-hand. It was awkward and out of place.

At the home front, the *Same Sex Marriage Act* has been applauded by many Nigerians as a welcome development and as a tool of curbing the ugly trend of homosexuality. On the contrary, various foreign governments and international organizations have criticized the law. They have also threatened cutting down aids given to Nigeria, if the law is not repealed. At present, Nigerian government has maintained its firm position on the matter. Moreover, the *Same-Sex Marriage Act* may have been applauded at home as a reflection of the beliefs and orientation of Nigerian people, the extent Nigerians internalize contents of the *Same-sex marriage act* will depend on the extent the media reported it and how much prominence they give the new law. It is pertinent to note that the greatest source of all the happenings in the country is through the press.

According to Daramola (2007, pg. 106):

Everywhere, News Media inform the public of important affairs, they transmit government policies and actions for the information of the people, and they also provide information on which many readers form opinion. Our daily newspaper reading undoubtedly affects our attitudes, our conduct, and even our fundamental moral values.

Also buttressing the same fact, Nwankwo (1984 cited in Ndolo, 2011, pg.3) stated that every society is made up of five major sectors. One of the sectors is the communication sector which shares the activities of each sector with not only itself but with other sectors for the overall benefit of the society. While the African culture is fast eroding and fading, the critical role of the press in preserving the African cultural identity cannot be undermined. Same sex marriage has been discussed and interpreted in numerous ways, and newspapers not only provide a platform for their elaborations but also contribute to shaping public understanding on the issue. Based on the foregoing, the focus of the study is to find out how the newspapers have covered the *Same Sex Marriage Act* in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Marriage as an institution is one of the most important aspect of African culture. The value it holds is fast eroding and fading. It faces threat of extinction due to global trend in decriminalization of same sex marriage in many countries of the world.

However, the *Same Sex Marriage (prohibition) Act* has been enacted in Nigeria to serve as a moral restraint against same sex marriage or homosexuality. This new law has been variously attacked, discussed and interpreted in different ways. The newspapers do not only provide the platform for elaboration of issue like same sex marriage act, but also contribute to shaping public understanding on the issue. This study, therefore, tries to determine the basis of the argument whether the press have appropriately covered the *Same Sex Marriage (prohibition) Act* in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

1. To ascertain the extent newspapers reported the *Same-Sex Marriage (prohibition) Act* in Nigeria.
2. To ascertain if the *Same Sex Marriage (prohibition) Act* was given prominence in the various reports of Nigerian newspapers.
3. To determine the extent press reports on *Same Sex Marriage (prohibition) Act* were interpretative and analytical.
4. To ascertain if the (press) newspapers' reports on *Same Sex Marriage Act* reflected the views of the homosexuals.

Research Questions

1. To what extent did press report *Same Sex Marriage (prohibition) Act*?
2. Were the stories given enough prominence in the press publications?
3. To what extent were the stories interpretative and analytical?
4. Did press reports on *Same Sex Marriage (prohibition) Act* reflect the views of the homosexuals?

Significance of the Study

The importance of press coverage of *Same Sex Marriage (prohibition) Act* cannot be over-emphasized in Nigeria. The African culture is fast eroding and losing its grip and mark on the African soil. This is mainly as a result of globalization, which imports foreign cultures that are alien and anti-thetical to people's belief.

Therefore this work will help the media practitioner devise better strategies that would help them in reflecting right values and happenings of the time in their reports. The study will also reinstate and revalidate the cultural values, norms and honour in a typical African society.

The work will further add to existing literature on the press reportage on same-same marriage. As such it will be of great value to students and communication scholars who may have interest in knowing or in carrying out research in related fields.

Literature Reviews

Homosexuality and the Media

The media play a major role in the formation of public opinion. This is because they act as gatekeepers of public information and they may not be successful in telling the public what to think but they are successful in telling them what to think about (Wogu, 2008, p. 142). This implies that it is the information passed to the public that feeds their thought. In his research, Gross (2000, as cited in Kanter, 2012) discussed the power the mass media have on their audience and culture. Viewers obtain the knowledge about their culture through the media, because they take audiences to places they have never been, with characters they have never met, or into situation they have never encountered. The change in the tide of public opinion concerning homosexuality can be attributed to the change in media representation of homosexuality. Prior to this age, the media portrayed homosexuality negatively as queer, abnormal and this affected public opinion of that time. But today,

the media portray homosexuality positively. Movies like *My Best friend's wedding*, *Lesbians*, *Mean girls* and so on, are effective in portraying homosexuality positively.

The issue of homosexuality is now more common as homosexuals feel more comfortable and open with their sexuality. Perhaps part of the reason for this is because of the rise of new shows on television that features gay individuals. Homosexuality and relationships are increasingly common due to the evolving coverage in the mass media (Roush and Simpson, n.d). In an article, "the Media's Influence on Public Perception of Homosexuality", McGovern (2011) stated that "considering the all-consuming effect the media have on society, it would be erroneous to discount the media as having a largely important role in the perception of the Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community" (p.2).

The attention given to an issue plays a vital role in moving events into the public sphere. However, framing suggests that the media can in fact tell audience how to think about a public controversy. A frame is a way of packaging and positioning an issue so that it conveys a certain meaning. It is the process by which a communication source, such as a news organization, defines and constructs a political issue or public controversy (Scheufele, 1999, pp. 107). Colvin (1989) explains this best:

The problem with the agenda-setting position is that the distinction between 'what to think' and 'what to think about' is misleading. Nobody, no force, can ever successfully 'tell people what to think...' the way to control attitudes is to provide a partial selection of information for a person to think about, or process. The only way to influence what people think is precisely to shape what they think about... influence can be exerted through selection of information, but the conclusions cannot be dictated. If the media can affect what people think about- the information they process- the media can affect their attitudes.

Through framing, the media achieve positivity in the perception of homosexuality. When compared to the past, public opinion in the United States of America was unfavourable to homosexuals when media coverage and attention was negative. In the past, homosexuals were portrayed as misguided individuals, who had a problem whether mental or biological. Because of the negative attention placed on the issue, the people hated homosexuality. However, in this present age, homosexuality is portrayed as a way of life to the American society.

Perception of Homosexuality

Research has shown that attitudes toward gay men and women have generally tended to be negative. As stated in Louderback and Whitely (1997, as cited in Herek, 1984, p. 23) perception about homosexuality refers to an individual's awareness or knowledge of concepts and ideas relating to homosexuals and their behaviour. Anti-gay prejudice has been distinct and well documented in research done with convenience samples from college students (Herek, 1984, p.21). The unfavourable attitudes towards gay men and lesbians, according to him, have been explained by numerous factors. He said individuals holding negative attitudes toward gay men and women tend to be more authoritarian, less educated, and more traditional in sex roles and show negative attitudes towards minority groups.

A research was also carried out by Bowman (1979) on the topic, "public attitudes toward homosexuality in New Zealand" in 1978. Through the research, it was found out that public attitude towards homosexuality may be favourable than many homosexuals, legislators and researchers believe. This was shown in the research as a great majority of those surveyed did not express anti-homosexual attitudes and supported the removal of negative sanctions against homosexuals. Those expressing positive attitudes towards homosexuals tend to be younger, have either no religious affiliation or belong to a major Christian denomination, and to personally know homosexuals. Over half of the sample agreed that homosexuality is a natural sexual variation in humans, while 46% agreed that people are homosexuals because they want to be. The notions that homosexuality is determined at birth were rejected by 46.0% and 41.6% respectively. In addition, the imposition that most people become homosexuals through being seduced by older homosexuals was rejected by 62.1% of the sample.

A similar research was carried out in Germany by Stiffens and Wagner (2004) on the topic, "Attitudes towards Lesbian, Gay men, Bisexual women and Bisexual men in Germany". The survey research method was used and the sample size was 200 self identified heterosexual people in Germany. The findings revealed that younger people held more favourable attitudes than older people. The women held more favourable attitudes than men and men held more favourable attitudes towards female homosexuality than male homosexuality, whereas women did not differentiate. These findings support the notion that attitudes towards lesbians, gays and bisexual are related but distinct constructs.

Highlight of Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act

The recently signed *Same-Sex Marriage (prohibition) Act* has the following as its provisions.

- Make a marriage contract or civil union entered into between persons of same sex "invalid and illegal and... not recognized as entitled to the benefits of a valid marriage".
- Make void and unenforceable in Nigeria a marriage contract or civil union entered into between persons of the same sex by virtue of a certificate issued by a foreign country.
- Prohibit the solemnization of any marriage or civil union entered into between persons of the same sex "in any place of worship either Church or Mosque or any other place or whatsoever called in Nigeria".
- Prohibit the registration of "gay clubs, societies and organizations, their sustenance, processions and meetings".
- Prohibit the "public show of same sex amorous relationship directly or indirectly".
- Make a person who enters into a same sex marriage contract or civil union liable for 14 years' imprisonment.
- Make a person who "registers, operates or participates in gay clubs, societies and organization, or directly or indirectly make public show of same sex amorous relationship in Nigeria" liable for 10 years' imprisonment.
- Make a person or group of persons that "witness, abet and aids the solemnization of a same sex marriage or civil union, or supports the registrations, operation and sustenance of gay

clubs, societies, organizations, processions or meetings in Nigeria" liable for 10 years' imprisonment.

- Define "civil union" for purposes of this law to mean "any arrangement between persons of the same sex to live together as sex partners, and..... include such descriptions as adult independent relationships, caring partnerships, civil partnerships, civil solidarity pacts, domestic partnerships, reciprocal beneficiary relationships, registered partnerships, significant relationship, stable unions etc.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two theories of mass communication. They are Agenda setting theory and Social responsibility theory.

Agenda Setting Theory

According to McQuall (2010), the term "agenda setting" was coined by McCombs and Shaw (1972, 1993). The core idea is that the news media have great influence in defining what the main issues of the day are in that whatever is given prominence by the mass media is also given prominence by the public as exemplified in the Watergate scandal. However, Kayodo, Thany and Abisiga (2011, pg 157) further noted that due to many "criticisms and continuous research, the agenda setting theory has been revised into agenda building to indicate that matters reported in the media do not instantly become prominent on the list of what the public think and talk about" but definitely shapes their thought and activities. The relevance of this theory is premised on the suggestion that the newspaper, through its reportage, can give prominence to the same sex marriage act such that the public do same.

Social Responsibility Theory

This theory believes that freedom carries concomitant obligation. In it, the press is to be responsible to society by carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication. Wogu (2008, pg. 74) paints a better picture of this scenario, "the press should engage in realistic reporting of both the events and forces that militate against society's goals and values, as well as work for it that is, that the journalist should know the values and goals of society and be able to project them.

According to Okunna (2002, pg 11) the theory tries to reconcile three somewhat principles: individual freedom and choice, media freedom, and media obligation to society". This theory is also relevant to this study. The newspaper has the obligation not just to inform Nigerians about same-sex marriage Act but should point the right value people should follow. It also portrays that the press is expected to embrace the principles of social responsibility in the coverage of the *Same-Sex Marriage Act* in Nigeria by ensuring reflection of various opinions on the issue.

Methodology

The research method employed in this study was content analysis, which allows a systematic objective and quantitative analysis of written, printed and transcribed communication. Content analysis as defined by Kercinger (2000), cited in Wimmer and Dominick (2003, p. 141) is a "method

of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables”.

Population

The universe of this study was 118 editions of the *Sun* and the *Nation* newspapers for the month of January and February, 2014. Both newspapers were chosen first for their national spread and extensive coverage and secondly both papers cater to the masses and elites.

Sampling

All 118 editions of the two newspapers were studied, hence there was no need for sampling, considering the two-months period covered by the study.

Inter Coder Reliability

Inter coder reliability was done using the Hoslstis formula Hottis (1969):

$$R = \frac{2m}{N_1 + N_2} = \frac{20 \times 2}{25 + 22} = \frac{40}{47}$$

The correlation was 0.85. Since the correlation should not be less than +0.80 (Wimmer and Dmninick, 2005) it therefore means that the inter-coder reliability is very high.

Presentation of Data

RQ 1: To What Extent did Newspapers Report Same-Sex Marriage Act?

Table 1: Frequency of Same-sex Stories.

Newspapers	Jan	Feb	Frequency	Percentage (%)
The Sun	17	8	25	56.8
The Nation	13	6	19	43.2
Total	30	14	44	100

The table above shows that out of 44 publications on *same-sex marriage act* for the months of January and February, the *Sun* newspaper contributed 25 (56.8%) reports, while the *Nation* newspaper contributed 19 (43.2%) of the total reports.

RQ2: Were the Stories Given Enough Prominence in the Publications?

Table 2: Prominence of Same-Sex Stories

Story Placement	The Sun	The Nation	Total	Percentage (%)
Front page	-	-	-	-
Back page	1	-	1	2.3
Inside front page	-	-	-	-
Inside back page	-	1	1	2.3
Centre spread	-	-	-	-
Inside page	24	18	42	95.4

Total	25	19	44	100
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The table above shows distribution of stories by their position. It shows that is only the *Sun* that put just one (2.3%) publication in its back page. The *Nation* also put one (2.3%) publication in its inside back page. Other 42 (95.4%) publications were tucked in inside pages.

Table 3: Stories with Illustrations

Illustration	Frequency	Percentage (%)
No illustration	37	84.1
Black and white	3	6.8
Colour	3	6.8
Graphic	1	2.3
Total	44	100

From the above table, it shows that 37 (84.1%) stories were without any illustration, 3 (6.8%) stories were published with black and white illustration, 3 (6.8%) stories were published with colour illustration, 1 (2.3%) story came with graphic illustration.

RQ3: To What Extent Were the Stories Interpretative and Analytical?

Table 4: Story Genre/Type

Story Type	The Sun	The Nation	Total	Percentage (%)
News	13	9	22	50
Editorials	1	1	2	4.5
Features	1	3	4	9.1
Opinion/article/ comments	10	5	15	34.1
Cartoons	-	1	1	2.3
Others	-	-	-	-
Total	25	19	44	100

The table above shows that out of the 44 publications, 22 (50%) were news stories, 2 (4.5%) were editorials, 4 (9.1%) were features, 15 (34.1%) were opinion/articles/ comments and 1 (2.2%) was cartoon.

Table 5: Length of Stories

Story length	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1-250 words	5	11.4
251-1500	5	11.4
501-750	8	18.2
751-1000	10	22.7

1001 and above	16	36.3
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The table above shows distribution of stories on *same sex marriage act* by their length. 5 (11.4%) stories have 1-250 words, 5 (11.4) stories have 251-500 words, 8 (18.2%) stories have 501-750 stories, 10 (22.7%) stories have 751-1000 words and 16 (36.3%) stories have 1001 and above.

RQ4: Did Press Reports on *Same-Sex Marriage Act* Reflect the Views of the Homosexuals?

Table 6: Direction of Story

Direction	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Positive	29	65.9
Negative	12	27.3
Neutral	3	6.8
Total	44	100

The table above shows that 29 (65.9%) of stories were positive to same-same marriage act. While 12 (27.3%) stories were negative to it. Also 3 (6.8%) stories did not any take side on the issue of *same sex marriage act*.

Table 7: Purpose of Story

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Anti-religions	23	52.2
Anti-culture	8	18.2
Human right	12	27.3
Civilization	1	2.3
Total	44	100

The table above shows that 23 (52.2%) of stories viewed same-sex marriage as anti religion. While 8 (18.2%) stories portrayed same-marriage as anti-culture, also 12 (27.3%) stories portrayed it as an aspect of human right while 1 (2.3%) saw it as a part of civilization.

Discussion of Findings

The focus of this study was to find out how the Newspapers covered or reported the *Same Sex Marriage Act* in Nigeria. *Daily Sun* and the *Nation*, were the two Nigerian dailies whose content were analyzed. The findings of the research were analyzed on the basis of the research questions raised in the course of this study. Based on the data adopted for this study, the following findings were made:

1. The frequency of the newspapers' reports on the *Same-Sex Marriage (prohibition) Act* was encouraging and commendable. The study showed that in the two months studied, the two newspapers (*Daily Sun* and the *Nation*) accounted for a total of 44 publications on the *Same-Sex Marriage (prohibition) Act* out of the 188 editions. Reports on same-sex marriage act amounted to a percentage of 37.28% of all the publications under the period of study. At the

- individual newspaper level, the *Sun* contributed 25 (56.8%) publication while the *Nation* had 19 (23.2%) of the publication for the two newspapers studied.
2. Findings also showed that the newspapers tucked most of their stories in inside pages. Apart from the *Sun* newspaper that did a story at the back of its page, both papers denied the Act the deserved prominence. Also most of the stories had no illustrations.
 3. From the study, it was revealed that the newspapers reflected the opinions and views of the homosexuals. This is evident in the story direction found in the course of analyzing the data. The researchers thematically analyzed the data in the course of the research and found out that some reportedly opened up as homosexuals while criticizing the law. Also, the researchers discovered that the homosexuals viewed *Same Sex marriage* act as anti human rights.
 4. Finally, the findings also showed that the newspapers' reports on *Same Sex Marriage* (prohibition) Act were interpretative and analytical. This is evident in the story length of the various publications on the issue. Also, for the fact that much of the publications could be classified as features and opinion articles showed that the newspapers were more analytical and interpretative in their reportage.

Conclusion

Same-sex marriage as a social problem (in African context) has been discussed and interpreted in numerous ways, and newspapers not only provide a platform for these elaborations but also contribute to shaping understanding on the issue. With the African culture fast eroding, the mass media which are powerful sources of information and tools of analysis can be used to shape people's perspectives and views on the *Same-Sex Marriage Act*. This communication strategy can have a significant impact by modifying the behaviour of individuals in order to generate popular support and pressure for positive cultural change.

The newspapers, as an authoritative and influential medium, have influence on social pattern and issue based on its level and manner of reportage. Hence the importance of this study cannot be overemphasized. By in-depth reportage, placement of *Same-Sex Marriage* stories in prominent newspaper spaces, regular reportage and other reporting styles, the newspapers can help make the African culture regain its status as it has to do with marriage institution in Nigeria.

However, when the agenda has been set by the media, the members of the society, either as individuals or civil societies, and the government should support the press' effort in ensuring positive cultural growth and overall development in Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. The press should reflect more of our culture in their reportage of *Same Sex Marriage* issues to encourage inculcation of right values.
2. Health related issues concerning side effects/disadvantage of *Same-Sex* intercourse should be reflected in the press reports.
3. The press should exploit all available means such as front space, headline, graphic and the likes to make *Same Sex Marriage Act* unpopular and not prominent.

4. The newspapers should not neglect their role as the ligament of the society and such should reflect in good light with regular reportage of *Same Sex Marriage* issues.

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