

# Nigerian Newspapers' Use of Discursive Strategies as Tools to Enhance Message Credibility in Editorials on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013*

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**Abstract:** This study, "Nigerian newspapers' use of discursive strategies as tools to enhance message credibility in editorials on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013*" sought to analyse the frequency and nature of the use of discursive strategies by *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers' editorials in their arguments and contributions to public opinion on Nigeria's *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013*. The study drew a sample of 36 issues of the two newspapers for analysis. Among other findings, it established that Nigerian newspaper editorials employed discursive strategies in all their editorial content on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013* with the highest discursive strategy category being interpretation and the lowest being commendation. However, the use of advocacy as a strategy was below average. The study therefore recommends that more advocacy be built into Nigerian newspaper editorials on public policies by media practitioners as this would enhance the quality of newspaper contribution to public opinion on public policies in the country.

**Keywords:** newspapers, editorials, discursive strategy, *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013*, public opinion.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the Study:

On 7th January, 2014, Goodluck Jonathan, former President, Federal Republic of Nigeria, signed into law, the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013*. The law which "prohibits homosexuals from even meeting in groups of two or more, bans marriage or civil unions between people of the same sex, and criminalizes gay clubs, events and shows of same-sex public affection. Those convicted may be imprisoned for 14 years" (Section 5, (1)). In express terms, the law states that "a person or group of persons who administers, witnesses, abets or aids the solemnization of a same sex marriage or civil union or supports the registration, operation and sustenance of gay clubs, societies, organizations, processions or meetings in Nigeria commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a term of 10 years imprisonment" (Section 5, (3)).

Following the promulgation of this law, reactions filled the media. This was not unexpected because the issue was at the heart of the very life of the people. Strong reactions were recorded by citizens and non-citizens alike on both sides of the divide - that is, those who supported the signing of the bill into law and those who saw it as an infringement on the rights of a section of the citizenry. From Cairo to Cape Town, the North to the South and in various European capitals over the world, strong reactions and opinions reverberated over and over. For once, Nigerian citizens, despite religious, cultural, political or even ideological differences coagulated their opinions either for or against the law (Ikpang, 2015).

The bill which had earlier been passed into law by both chambers of the nation's National Assembly on 17th December 2013, (the Senate passed it in December 2011; the House of Representatives did same in May 2013, while both chambers passed a harmonized version on 17th December, 2013), attracted an immediate reaction from the West and western media and even the United Nations Organisation (Ikpang, 2015).

Before the bill was signed into law, the Sultan of Sokoto, Sa'ad Abubakar III had urged Muslims to pray fervently against "the conspiracies to legalise gay and under-age marriage in the country adding that "we urge Muslim brothers and sisters to pray fervently for the Ummah against all manner of conspiracies in the name of gay marriage... in the country" (Owolabi, 2015). Similarly, the Secretary General of Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, CSN, Rev. Fr Ralph Madu said Nigerians should not forget that culturally, morally and biblically gay marriage is not right and that they cannot swallow everything from Europe and America. He further said President Jonathan and the National Assembly were right in putting the law in place, pointing out that in certain matters like tradition, culture and religion, Nigerians should consider their own interests first before thinking of pleasing the international community.

Scholars in the literature have always maintained that the mass media in all climes shape and direct public opinion and in turn public opinion colours to an appreciable degree, media content and slant (Innocent, 2016). In a democratic society, government policies, should *ab initio*, be built on and reflect public opinion. The implication of this is that the government is supposed to, at all times be careful to gauge, accurately analyse and influence public opinion. Since modern states have expanded in population and complexity far from the Greek city states where democracy first came into being, governments and leaders cannot therefore realistically attempt a person-to-person interaction to gauge opinion; it follows that the mass media would naturally take the place of the traditional town halls and therefore become platforms where public opinion could be congregated and profiled (Innocent, 2008).

Simply put, the mass media, to which the government and policy leaders take recourse, serve as a reservoir or conduit pipe of public opinion for these leaders. What this implies is that the mass media reflect the opinions of the people, (or what approximates it). At the same time, the citizenry depend on media agenda to form their opinions on governmental policies and actions, and in the long run, these opinions aggregate into what would approximate public opinion.

#### ***The Guardian Newspaper:***

*The Guardian* is Nigeria's most respected and influential newspaper and also the third most-read newspaper in the country (Eghosa, 2013). Founded in Lagos, Western Nigeria in 1983 by Chief Alex Ibru and published by Guardian Newspapers Limited, *the Guardian* appeals to mostly the elite, expatriate and middle class segments of the Nigerian society and has the slogan "*Conscience, nurtured by truth.*" According to Nwagbara (2010), *The Guardian* has a reputation for integrity as the most reliable information source about news events in Nigeria. It is also conservative in its approach to news treatment.

#### ***Daily Trust Newspaper:***

*Daily Trust* is a national daily based in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria. The newspaper reports current general interest news and commentary, especially news on events in the Federal Capital Territory and Northern Nigeria. Established in January 2001, it was the first daily newspaper from the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja). *The Daily Trust* newspaper is printed and published by Media Trust Nigeria Limited. It is the most influential newspaper in Northern Nigeria. It is mostly a political interest newspaper but also has additional features ([www.nigeriandailynewspaper.com](http://www.nigeriandailynewspaper.com)).

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem:**

In 2006, two attempts were made by some members of the then National Assembly to push through a bill to criminalize gay or same-sex relationship among Nigerians. The attempts failed on the two occasions. Although sodomy was already a crime in the Nigerian law, another attempt was made by some members of the National Assembly to enact a law criminalizing not just same-sex marriage but same sex relations as well. The proponents of the said bill wanted far reaching legal measures against same-sex relationship and to widen the scope of the sodomy law already in existence.

Debate on the new bill threw up two camps among the Nigerian citizenry: those who supported the bill and those who opposed its passage into law. Religious and human rights groups, gay rights movements, political and cultural organisations, the Nigerian government and even international organisations, were all at the forefront of the two different camps, arguing for and against the proposed bill and all the groups found platforms to ventilate their arguments in the mass media.

Newspapers gave adequate coverage and reportage to the bill within the period leading to its passage and immediately after it received presidential assent. However, findings of various studies on Nigerian newspapers coverage of issues relating to the law show that there was a sharp division among Nigerian newspaper readers as it relates to newspaper coverage of the law. Though volume of coverage to the law could have conferred importance on the issues reported;

editorials offer interpretation, persuasion and advocacy. Such advocacy also offers education for opinion leaders who shape public opinion therefrom. It is obscure how newspaper editorials debated and presented the issues concerning the Act using discursive strategies. Based on this observation, the problem of the study is stated thus: how did Nigerian newspapers use discursive strategies as tools to enhance message credibility in editorials on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013*?

### 1.3 Research Questions:

- 1 What is the frequency of use of discursive strategies in editorials on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013* in Nigerian newspapers?
- 2 What categories of discursive strategies were used in editorials on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013* in Nigerian newspapers?
- 3 What is the most used category of discursive strategy in editorials on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013* in Nigerian newspapers?

## 2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

### The Framing Sub-Theory:

According to Nwachukwu, Asak and Asadu (2012), this is not a full blown theory but a second level effect or attribute of agenda-setting. They add that framing often occurs when interpreting complex issues in the news. Goffman (2002) argues that frames define schemata of interpretation that enables individuals to locate, perceive, identify and label occurrences or information. Framing involves selecting certain aspects of an issue and make them look important by excluding other sides of the issue. In simple terms, framing refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or re-orient their thinking about that issue. Fairhaust and Starr (1996) submit that:

the concept of framing is related to the agenda-setting tradition but expands the research by focusing on the essence of the issues at hand rather than on a particular topic. The basis of framing theory is that the media focus attention on certain events and then place them within a field of meaning. The underlying notion in this theory is the presentation of topics from a preconceived perspective, using frames, which are abstract notions that structure social meaning. Framing compels audience members to accept one meaning over another. It consists of 3 elements: language, thought and fore-thought (p.212).

### The Priming Sub-Theory:

This theory describes the ability of the mass media to enhance their effects by offering the audience a prior context that would be used to interpret subsequent communications. While agenda-setting refers mainly to the importance of an issue, priming tells the audience whether an issue is good or bad. Priming creates a psychological underpinning that dovetails into judging a message (Fairhaust and Starr, 1996).

### Critical Discourse Theory (CDT):

The theory was advanced by Van Dijk (1987) in his work, *Communicating racism: Ethnic prejudice in thought and talk*, in which he discussed the link between micro and macro levels of analysing patterns of communication (Okoro, Odoemelam and Martin, 2013). This theory does not view discourse only as a reflection of existing social structures, but also extends it to the prevailing environments where social structures are produced, reproduced, reconstructed, confirmed, legitimised or resisted (Okoro, Odoemelam and Martin, 2013). Hence the critical analysis of discourse acknowledges the larger socio-political sphere within which the discourse is situated. According to Fairclough and Wodak (1997) and van Dijk (2008), discourse has "mind control" properties as recipients of discourse tend to accept beliefs, knowledge and opinions from sources they perceive as authoritative, trustworthy or credible (i.e. the media).

### The Editorial:

Akpan (2000) says an editorial is an article that expresses the opinion of the editors or publishers. Editorials are a form of what is known as personal journalism, personal in the sense that unlike news, an editorial is simply someone's opinion (the editor or editorial board on behalf of the newspaper) on any issue of public interest. On his part, Uwakwe (2010) states that the editorial is the mouthpiece of the editor, staff and the loyal audience. In other words, the editorial is the

platform through which the editor (representing the medium) offers comments, analysis and advocacy on topical issues which the medium has reported in the news. The import of this is that editorials dwell on societal issues that generate interest, conflict and debate. By focusing on these issues, editorials seek to influence action, persuade and aim to redirect policy decisions (Okoro, Odoemelam and Martin, 2013). Specifically, Idemili (n.d) as cited in Uwakwe (2010) outlines the following as the functions of an editorial, among others:

- Provision of a pattern of meaning in the confusion and complexity of societal events. Setting an agenda for the government, individuals and society;
- Provision of an opportunity for readers, in the editorial page, to air their views by providing space for letters-to-the-editor;

Uwakwe (2010) posits that a typical editorial is made up of a title, lead, body, editorial reaction and conclusion. However, Omega and Ochonogor (2012) believe that in terms of structure, an editorial has four parts: title, introduction, body and editorial reaction. However, no matter the number of parts different authors might claim for an editorial, within each editorial, there must be an editorial opinion (a collection of varying opinions by different sources and finally the opinion of the editorial on the issue under discourse and the reasons for such opinion), editorial standpoint (the position the editorial takes based on the facts and logic it has presented to the reader concerning the issue it presents which could be for or against the issue or neutral) and editorial reaction (a call for action by the editorial concerning the issue it presents). Again, as advocacy platforms, editorials most times, if not all the time, employ persuasion to sell a point of view to the reading populace. To do this effectively, editorials utilize discursive elements in their arguments and presentations. Such discursive elements or strategies include 'source attribution', 'attribution of responsibility', 'advocacy' and 'articulation of solutions' in line with the identified problems.

The classification of editorials varies with different authors. While Akpan (2000), maintains that editorials can be classified as explanatory or interpretive, argumentative and exhortive, Uwakwe (2010) and Omega and Ochonogor (2012) classify editorials as persuasive, praise, explanatory, attack, crusading and light or amusing.

#### **Public Opinion formation and the mass media:**

Public opinion is not formed over night. It is a process with identifiable stages, components and actors. Hodkinson (2011) posits that the life cycle of public opinion is made of five distinct stages. In these five stages, the media play a continuing role to shape and aggregate opinion. From the initial stage of awareness creation to the resolution stage in which government or regulatory bodies initiate action in line with public sentiment, the media make a continuing input that in the final analysis colours the whole process. In addition to this, the mass media remain the vehicle for publicizing what happens at every stage.

#### **Same-Sex marriage in Africa:**

Since the gale of campaigns for and against legalization of same-sex marriage swept across the globe, questions have been asked as to whether same-sex marriage was alien to African culture and its peoples. Answers to this question have never had a meeting point. For instance, in an article entitled 'It is legalized homophobia, not same-sex relations, that is alien to Africa', a professor of law, at the University of Makerere, Uganda, Sylvia Tamale noted as follows:

During a prime time interview with BBC's "Hard Talk" show in March 2012, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni noted, "Homosexuals in small numbers have always existed in our part of black Africa ... They were never prosecuted. They were never discriminated." Confronted by internal and external pressure, Museveni reversed himself and signed the Anti-Homosexuality Bill in the full glare of the media — declaring that homosexuality was Western-imposed. Before signing the law, Museveni asked a team of top-notch Ugandan scientists to help him make an educated decision. The panel's report did not mince words: "In every society, there is a small number of people with homosexual tendencies" (Damian, 2013, p.6).

According to Damian (2013), Tamale further claims that the claim that 'homosexuality is un-African' is anchored on an old practice of selectively invoking African culture by those in power. She said that the mistaken claim that anything is un-African is based on the essentialist assumption that Africa is a homogeneous entity, noting that in reality, however, Africa is made up of thousands of ethnic groups with rich and diverse cultures and sexualities. She concludes that as appealing as the notion of African culture may be to some people, no such thing exists.

To support her position, Tamale adds that African history is replete with examples of both erotic and non-erotic same-sex relationships. According to her, the ancient cave paintings of the San people near *Guruve* in Zimbabwe depict two men engaged in some form of ritual sex and during pre-colonial times, the “*mudoko dako*,” or effeminate males among the *Langi* of Northern Uganda were treated as women and could marry men. In Buganda, one of the largest traditional kingdoms in Uganda, it was an open secret that Kabaka (king) Mwanga II, who ruled in the latter half of the 19th century, was gay.

Again, Murray and Roscoe (2011) in their book *Boy Wives and Female Husbands: Studies in African Homosexualities*, claim that “from the 16th century onwards, homosexuality has been recorded in Africa by European missionaries, adventurers and officials who used it to reinforce ideas of African societies in need of Christian cleansing” (p.5).

In summary, the “Africanness” of homosexuality remains an increasingly engaged-in and consistently controversial topic. One deduction we can make in this whole argument is that though there are words in African languages that seemingly describe same-sex marital unions and homosexuality, we must agree that what these words describe are “other” sexual inclinations and practices and not same-sex marriages as conceptualized and practised by the West.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study analysed newspaper editorials on Nigeria’s *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013*. The population of the study included all editions of *The Guardian*, and *Daily Trust* newspapers published in Nigeria within the timeframe of the study, July 2013 – July 3, 2014. The population of the study therefore was 262 issues of the two newspapers. This study’s sample comprised all editorials on the Act in Nigerian dailies. The multi-sampling technique was used to draw the sample. Using the purposive sampling technique, the two newspapers to be studied were selected to reflect the North-South/cultural divide. *The Guardian* was purposively chosen because of the perceived ‘Southern’, Christian dominance, while *Daily Trust* was chosen to reflect the ‘Northern’ Muslim bias. 36 (13.7%) issues of the two newspapers selected constituted an adequate sample out of 182 issues of the two selected newspapers, (18 issues of each newspaper for the first and second periods of the study). All days of the week except weekends, were represented in the sample. To collect data, this study used the code-sheet while units of analysis and content categories facilitated the analysis of the contents of the newspapers.

### 4. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Table 4.1: Issues of Newspapers Analysed

Newspapers	July – December, 2013		January – June, 2014	
	No.	%	No.	%
<i>The Guardian</i>	11	30.6	8	22.2
<i>Daily Trust</i>	7	19.4	10	27.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4.1 is a summary of the total number of issues of newspapers whose editorials were sampled and analysed. Each of the newspapers contributed 18 issues for analysis, making a total of 36 issues. In the first time frame, the *Guardian* yielded 11 (30.6%) issues, while *Daily Trust* had 7 (19.4). In the second time frame, the *Guardian* yielded 8 issues (22.2%), while *Daily Trust* had 10 (27.8%).

Table 4.2: Frequency of use of discursive strategies in editorials on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013*

Attribution	Frequency	Percentage
Source attribution	5	16
Attribution (Causals)	5	16
Advocacy (Direction)	6	19.2
Implication (Interpretation)	8	25.6
Commendation	3	9.6
Background Information	4	12.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100</b>



**Table 4.3: Frequency of Nigerian newspapers' editorials' use of attribution as a discursive strategy on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013* from 1 July, 2013 to 3 July, 2014**

Use of Attribution	Frequency	Percentage
News Agency of Nigeria (NAN)	0	-
International News Agencies and Media	1	20%
Foreign Governments	2	40%
Internet Sources	0	-
Rights Groups	0	-
Same-Sex Groups	0	-
Government Officials	2	40%
Religious Groups	0	-
Ethnic Nationalities	0	-
Total	5	100%

**Table 4.4: Nigerian newspapers editorials' use of attribution of responsibility as a discursive strategy on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013***

Attribution of Responsibility	Frequency	Percentage
Individualistic	2	40%
Systemic	3	60%
Total	5	100%

As table 4.4 shows, Nigerian newspaper editorials on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013* attributed the circumstances surrounding the Act to societal and governmental systems, and not to individuals.

**Table 4.5: Nigerian newspapers editorials' use of advocacy as a discursive strategy on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013***

Advocacy	Frequency	Percentage
Clearly stated	3	100%
Not clearly stated	-	-
Logical	3	100%
Emotional	0	-

Nigerian newspaper editorials on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013* from 1 July, 2013 to 3 July, 2014 contained advocacy.

**Table 4.6: Nigerian newspapers editorials' use of commendation as a discursive strategy on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013***

Commendation	Frequency	Percentage
Contains commendation	3	100%
Does not contain commendation	-	-
Total	3	100%

In its treatment of the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013*, Nigerian newspaper editorials commended certain individuals for their roles as it relates to the Act. Table 4.6 contains further information on the use of this discursive strategy by Nigerian newspaper editorials on the Act.

**Table 4.7: Nigerian newspaper (*Daily Trust*) editorials' use of interpretation as a discursive strategy on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013***

Use of Interpretation	Frequency	Percentage
Legal consequences	4	50%
Cultural consequences+	1	12.5
Religious consequences	-	-

Rights consequences	1	12.5
Economic consequences	2	25%
Consequences for the family	-	-
Explanation of jargons	-	-
No explanation	-	-
Ethnic Nationalities	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4.7 above shows that Nigerian newspaper editorials on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013* from 1 July, 2013 to 3 July, 2014 provided for the reader, adequate interpretation on issues relating to the Act. Most of the interpretation however, related to the legal issues and economic consequences.

**Table 4.8: Nigerian newspaper editorials' use of background information as a discursive strategy on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013***

<b>Background Information</b>	Frequency	Percentage
Provides background information	4	100%
Does not provide background information	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4.8 indicates that Nigerian newspapers editorials provided background information for the reader on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013* from 1 July, 2013 to 3 July, 2014.

As tables 4.19 and 4.20 indicate, the most used discursive strategy by Nigerian newspaper editorials on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013* was interpretation while the least used was commendation. South-based newspaper editorials did not use any discursive strategies as there was editorial on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013* in the newspapers for the period of study.

#### **4.1 Discussion of Findings:**

##### **Research Question 1**

What is the frequency of use of discursive strategies in editorials on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013* in Nigerian newspapers?

The findings of this study reveal that Nigerian newspapers employed discursive strategies in their editorials on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013*. These strategies were used thirty one (31) times.

##### **Research Question 2**

What categories of discursive strategies were used in editorials on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013* in Nigerian newspapers?

Six (6) categories of discursive strategies were used by Nigerian newspaper editorials in the discussion of Nigeria's *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013*. These categories are source attribution, attribution of responsibility, advocacy, interpretation, commendation and background information.

##### **Research Question 3**

What is the most used category of discursive strategy in editorials on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013* in Nigerian newspapers?

As the findings in table 4.2 show, the most used discursive strategy by Nigerian newspaper editorials on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013* is interpretation, used 8 times while the least used is commendation, 3 times.

In terms of **attribution (qualification and capacity of major cited sources)** as a discursive element, the usage was 5 times or 23.8% usage rate by the *Daily Trust* editorial. The major sources cited, and which had capacity to be cited include: western nations (United Kingdom and America), the then British Prime Minister, David Cameron, and the British Broadcasting Corporation, BBC. On the local front, the only source attributed was the then Senate President, Senator David Mark. However, all the sources cited were politicians, no expert was cited. Nigerian newspapers also used

**attribution of responsibility** as a discursive element in newspaper editorials on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013*. It was used 5 times or at a rate of 23.8%. The findings also reveal that this element was used at both individualistic (Individuals, institutions, etc.) and systemic (government, society) levels. At the individual level, then President Goodluck Jonathan and the National Assembly were singled out while at the systemic level, Western governments and the Nigerian society were attributed with some forms of responsibility. The third discursive element used by Nigerian newspaper editorials on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013*, is **advocacy**. It was used on 3 different occasions, at 14.3% rate. **Commendation** was also used as a discursive element by Nigerian newspaper editorials in covering the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013*. However, the rate of usage was 3 times (4.8%). Nigerian newspaper editorials on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013* also used **interpretation** as a strategy to situate its analysis of the Act for its readers. For instance, the implications of the actions of Western Governments towards Nigeria as it concerns the promulgation of the law, are explained for the reader. The final discursive element used by Nigerian newspaper editorials on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013*, is **provision of background information**. Appropriately provided at the lead of the editorial and also in the body (a form of priming and framing), it set the tone for the reader to situate the argument and analysis in the editorial. It had a percentage usage rate of 19.0%. Table 4.18 captures the details graphically.

The findings from the study reveal that the most used discursive element by Nigerian newspaper editorials was interpretation. This negates the claim by Okoro, Odoemenam and Martin (2013) that the most used discursive strategy by Nigerian newspaper editorials is source attribution. In addition, their second claim that Nigerian newspaper editorials use experts more than politicians as sources does not agree with the findings of this study which reveal that for the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013*, all sources cited were politicians. In addition to the above, Okoro, Odoemenam and Martin (2013) also posit that when it comes to attribution of responsibility, Nigerian newspaper editorials blame the system more than individuals. The findings of this study negate this position and advance that Nigerian newspaper editorials hold clearly identified individuals responsible for the societal issues which the editorials analyse, in this case, the issues relating to the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013*.

The finding that the discursive strategy, commendation, was used three times, the lowest of all the discursive elements, by North-South based Nigerian newspaper editorials on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013* for the period of study, seems to imply that Nigerian newspaper editorials on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013* were aggressive and combative in nature.

Finally, by their nature, editorials should naturally call for action, in other words, they advocate certain lines of action or philosophy. As Okoro, Odoemenam and Martin (2013) posit, editorials seek to influence action, persuade and aim to redirect policy decisions. Vermont Royster, a one-time associate editor of *Wall Street Journal* (Ekeanyanwu and Olaitan, 2009) maintains that

people read editorials, first, to get arguments to support their own opinion. A good editorial presentation serves to focus their thinking. It serves to give them a rationale for what they instinctively feel. Occasionally a reader will adopt an editorial point of view when it is on some subject with which they are unfamiliar and where they have a general confidence in the editorial writer or the 'paper's opinion ... (p.82).

Contrary to the above however, the data from this study show that Nigerian newspaper editorials contained an average-significant level of advocacy as it concerns the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013*. This can be gleaned from the percentage of usage of advocacy, 14.3%, as a discursive element in situating their analysis for readers. This finding has implications for the assigned and acclaimed role of editorials as influencers of public opinion on societal issues. As a form of opinion journalism, newspaper editorials are expected to have a clear opinion point of view, built on an array of facts and logical arguments. Having built this opinion, the newspaper editorial should champion or advocate this position for readers and policy makers. With the average level advocacy contained in newspaper editorials *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013* as shown by the study data, we can conclude that the newspaper editorials did not champion the cause of the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013*, prior to its passage and after it was passed and assented to by the president. Derivable from this conclusion is another conclusion that North and South based Nigerian newspapers did not drive public opinion on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013* and as a result, did not assert any significant influence on Nigerian policy makers as it regards the content and passage of the law. In summary, we can state that newspaper editorials on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013* did not advocate a position for the Nigerian society on the Act.



## 5. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have shown that Nigerian newspaper editorials on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013*, employed discursive strategies to persuade the reader to adopt the arguments they canvassed. The highest discursive strategy used was interpretation while the least was commendation. The import of this is that Nigerian newspaper editorials are more combative than commending in nature. While these newspaper editorials on the *Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013* employed advocacy in their coverage of the Act, the level of advocacy was insignificant. This implies that Nigerian newspaper editorials do not consider advocacy an effective tool for public opinion moulding through editorials.

### 5.1 Recommendation:

Consequent upon the findings, the study recommends that Nigerian newspaper editorials should use advocacy more as a discursive strategy as this would influence public opinion more on matters of public policy in the country.

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