

Perception and Attitude of Ekwulobia Diocesan Faithful Towards Channels Television News Report on Blessing of Same-Sex Couples By Vatican

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the perception and attitude of Ekwulobia Diocesan faithful towards Channels Television's news report on the Vatican's blessing of same-sex couples. This topic is significant given the Catholic Church's traditional stance on marriage and the implications of the Vatican's actions for its global followers. The research aims to understand how the news report has influenced the opinions and attitudes of the diocesan faithful considering their religious beliefs and cultural context. Among the objectives of the study are to find out respondents' level of exposure to Channels TV's news report on Vatican's blessing of same-sex couples and to determine respondents' perception of the news report. Cultivation and Acculturation theories served as the theoretical underpinnings in this study. The study employed survey research method and with Cozby's table, 322 respondents were selected. Findings revealed a high exposure to the Channels TV's news report on the blessing of same-sex couples by the Vatican and that the major view of the news report is negative because the respondents had negative perception of the report which affected their attitude towards the reception of the report leading to anger, frustration, frenzy, outburst and uneasiness. It was recommended that channels TV and other media outlets should strive for balanced reporting on sensitive issues and they should engage religious leaders and communities to foster understanding and respect for diverse viewpoints.

Keywords: Perception, Attitude, Ekwulobia diocesan faithful, Channels TV news report, Blessing of same-sex couples, the Vatican.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding news reports involves the ability to critically evaluate and interpret information, which is a core component of media literacy (Potter, 2018). Cognitive processes such as perception and memory play significant roles, as complex information can overwhelm these capacities, leading to misunderstandings (Sweller et al., 2011). Communication theories like framing suggest that the presentation of news shapes public perception by highlighting specific aspects of a story (Entman, 1993). Television serves multiple functions and plays several crucial roles in society, encompassing entertainment, information dissemination, cultural transmission, and socialization. Television as a primary source of entertainment provides a wide range of contents including drama, comedy, reality shows, and sports. This entertainment function helps in relaxation and stress relief, contributing to the overall well-being of viewers. TV shows and movies significantly influence popular culture and societal norms. They introduce new trends, fashion, and behaviors, often reflecting and shaping societal values and beliefs (Gerbner, 1998). One of the most vital roles of television is

to provide information to the public. News programmes, documentaries, and educational shows provide viewers with essential information about current events, weather, politics, and more.

Television news broadcasts are a key source of information for many people, shaping public awareness and understanding of significant events and issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Television serves as a medium for cultural transmission, showcasing diverse lifestyles, traditions, and practices. This exposure fosters cultural exchange and understanding, promoting social cohesion and tolerance. Through programming that features different cultures and perspectives, television can promote inclusivity and awareness of global diversity (Lull, 2000). Television also plays a role in socialization, particularly for children and adolescents. It helps in the development of social norms, values, and behaviors by providing models for viewers to emulate. TV contents especially aimed at younger audiences, can significantly influence their social development by presenting norms and values that they integrate into their own lives (Bandura, 2001). Television is a multifaceted medium that entertains, informs, educates, and influences societal norms and values. Its role in shaping public perception and culture underscores its significance in modern society. Television news reports play a crucial part in informing the masses on the happenings around.

One of the information passed through the television is the Pope/Vatican's announcement of the blessing of same sex couples by priests and religious. The term same sex marriage has been defined as the practice of marriage between two men or between two women; although same-sex marriage has been regulated through law, religion, and custom in some part of the world, the legal and social responses have ranged from celebration on one hand to criminalization on the other. Pope Francis backed the possibility of blessings for couples in irregular situations and for couples of the same sex. "One should not disallow the Church's closeness to people in every situation in which they might seek God's help through a simple blessing. However, it does not change the Catholic Church's position on same-sex unions. The Church insists marriage is only between a male and a female, for the purpose of procreation. This blessing should never be imparted in concurrence with the ceremonies of a civil union, and not even in connection with them," the document stressed.

According to Channels TV news report, the head of the Vatican's faith department, which wrote the document emphasized that it was "a broadening and enrichment" of the Vatican's stance on blessings, "based on the pastoral vision of Pope Francis," who wants a Church open to all. In 2021, the Vatican said the Church does not have the power to bless same-sex unions because God cannot "bless sin"; it upheld that line. "To avoid any form of confusion or scandal", blessings for same-sex couples cannot be "performed in close circumstances as in a wedding". "Such a blessing may instead find its place in other contexts, such as a visit to a shrine, a meeting with a priest, a prayer recited in a group, or during a pilgrimage".

Meanwhile, media are influential way for individuals to receive knowledge about various groups, beliefs, and cultures. TV allows viewers to feel they have entered another world, one that is similar to or different from their own. For some, TV is a source for sexual information. This means that people tune into TV to watch how society acted towards the different genders and sexual orientations, looking for clues about how to act. Generally, the media are powerful at influencing viewer's attitudes towards minorities. The Vatican's blessing of same sex marriage is one which has brought many controversies and misunderstandings among the faithful and the less faithful, and this has brought about this research. The possibility is that the faithful in Ekwulobia diocese may have some conflicting stances at that pronouncement. The conflicting situation may have arisen based on the reportage and the framing of the report by the press or even a misconception of the report by the audience. This is the backdrop upon which this study seeks to explore the perception of Ekwulobia diocesan faithful on the announcement of the blessing of same-sex couples by the Vatican and their subsequent attitude based on their perception of the announcement.

Statement of the Problem

The prohibition of same-sex marriages cannot be deemed to be as quiet as past times owing to an international conversation. This conversation has been ongoing in international spaces such as the UN for the apparent disregard of human rights. One of such is documented in the Worldly report news website. To the contrary and the agitation by citizens directly and indirectly affected by it, there have been conversations by citizens home

and abroad to repeal the Act. It raises the question of whether or not the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act lacks the support and willing obedience of the citizens. It is also a thing of concern whether the State is encouraging homosexual citizens to bask in their attraction without the fulfillment of their relationship in marriage. The instruction by the Vatican has raised eye brows and a lot of misunderstanding both in the church and outside. To the knowledge of the researcher, little or nothing has been studied on this aspect. Hence, this study is geared towards ascertaining the perception of the Ekwulobia Diocesan faithful as far as the Vatican's announcement is concerned. The essence is to find out how they received the announcement as reported by the media and what they think about the position of the Vatican about blessing of same sex couples.

Objectives of the Study

To explore the awareness level of Channels Television's news report on the Vatican's blessing of same-sex couples by the respondents.

To analyze the perception of the respondents towards the Vatican's stance on blessing of same-sex couples as portrayed in the Channels TV news report.

To assess the attitude of the respondents towards Channels Television's news report on the blessing of same sex couples.

To identify factors influencing the perception of the respondents towards Channels TV news reports on blessing of same sex couples.

Theoretical Framework

This research is anchored on cultivation theory and the theory of acculturation.

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory, developed by George Gerbner in the late 1960s and early 1970s, is a significant framework in media studies that examines the long-term effects of television on viewers' perceptions of reality. This theory posits that prolonged exposure to television content, particularly violent or dramatic programming, can shape viewers' beliefs and attitudes about the world, leading to a distorted perception of reality. Cultivation theory is crucial for understanding the role of media in shaping societal norms and values. George Gerbner, along with his colleagues, developed cultivation theory as part of the Cultural Indicators Project at the University of Pennsylvania. The primary goal was to explore the relationship between television viewing and viewers' conceptions of social reality. Gerbner's research was grounded in the idea that television, as a dominant cultural medium, has a unique ability to influence the collective consciousness of its audience. Gerbner's work was pioneering because it shifted the focus from short-term effects of media (such as immediate behavioral changes) to long-term, cumulative effects. He argued that television creates a "common symbolic environment" that integrates viewers into a shared cultural reality regardless of their individual differences.

Cultivation theory revolves around several key concepts and principles that explain how television influences viewers' perceptions: Mainstreaming refers to the process by which heavy television viewers, despite having diverse backgrounds and experiences, develop a homogenized view of the world that aligns with the dominant messages portrayed on television; Resonance occurs when the television content aligns closely with viewers' real-life experiences, amplifying the cultivation effect; Mean World Syndrome is a phenomenon that describes how heavy viewers of violent television contents are more likely to believe; First-Order and Second-Order Effects where first-order effects are beliefs about the prevalence of certain phenomena, such as crime rates and second-order effects are attitudes and assumptions about the world, such as general mistrust. The implication of this theory is that the content and the framing of the news report under investigation can have a very big effect on the members of Ekwulobia diocese by means if cultivating certain perceptions and attitudes in their minds. The theory suggests that prolonged exposure to the report under study could mainstream a more accepting view of same-sex relationships among the faithful, especially if this portrayal resonates with existing

experiences within their community. Conversely, it could also intensify feelings of moral decline if presented negatively, reinforcing traditional views.

Acculturation Theory

Acculturation theory, a concept rooted in anthropology and sociology, examines the process by which individuals or groups from one cultural background adopt the practices, values, and behaviors of another culture. This theory is crucial in understanding the dynamics of cultural exchange, identity transformation, and societal integration, especially in the context of globalization, migration, and multicultural societies. The concept of acculturation has significantly evolved since its inception. Early anthropologists such as John Wesley Powell first coined the term in 1880, focusing on the cultural changes experienced by Native American tribes due to European colonization. Over time, the understanding of acculturation expanded to encompass broader contexts of cultural interaction and change.

In the 1930s, Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits provided a more comprehensive definition, describing acculturation as the process of cultural change that occurs when two or more cultural groups come into continuous first-hand contact. They emphasized that this process affects both the dominant and the minority cultures involved, leading to mutual adaptation. Acculturation theory encompasses several models and dimensions that help explain the various outcomes of cultural interaction. One of the most widely recognized models is John W. Berry's fourfold model of acculturation strategies. Berry identifies four primary strategies used by individuals and groups in response to acculturation and they are – Assimilation which occurs when individuals adopt the host culture's norms and values while losing their original cultural identity; Integration involves maintaining one's original cultural identity while also adopting aspects of the host culture; Separation is the scenario where individuals reject the host culture and maintain their original cultural practices and values; while Marginalization occurs when individuals neither retain their original cultural identity nor adopt the host culture.

Acculturation theory offers valuable insights into the complex process of cultural exchange and adaptation. Understanding the various strategies, factors, and implications of acculturation can help individuals and societies navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by cultural diversity. The Channels Television news reports on the Vatican's blessing of same-sex couples may significantly influence the perception and attitudes of the Ekwulobia Diocesan faithful through the lens of acculturation theory. The theory implies that individuals may respond by assimilating these new views into their beliefs, integrating them with their existing values, separating and rejecting the new information to preserve their traditional stance, or experiencing marginalization, feeling disconnected from both their faith and the broader societal changes.

THE REVIEW

Blessing of Same Sex Couples by Vatican: A Review

The blessing of same-sex couples by the Vatican has been a highly debated topic within the Catholic Church and the broader Christian community. Historically, the Catholic Church has maintained a strict stance against same-sex unions, rooted in traditional interpretations of Biblical teachings. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) states that homosexual acts are "intrinsically disordered" and contrary to natural law (CCC, 2357). This doctrinal position has led to the exclusion of same-sex relationships from sacramental blessings traditionally reserved for heterosexual marriages. The traditionalist view within the Church upholds that marriage and its blessings are reserved for the union between a man and a woman, as outlined in the Scripture and Church's teachings. Scholars such as Robert Gagnon argue that any form of blessing for same-sex couples would contradict the Church's teachings on the sanctity of marriage and sexual ethics (Gagnon, 2001).

On the other hand, progressive theologians advocate for a more inclusive approach, emphasizing the need for the Church to adapt to contemporary understandings of human sexuality and relationships. James Alison, a prominent theologian, suggests that the Church's refusal to bless same-sex unions reflects a broader resistance to recognizing the dignity and equality of LGBTQ+ (Lesbians, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and more) individuals within the faith community (Alison, 2003). Pope Francis has adopted a more pastoral approach to

LGBTQ+ issues, emphasizing compassion and inclusivity. His statement, "Who am I to judge?" in response to a question about gay priests, marked a significant shift in tone, though not in official doctrine (Winfield, 2013). In 2020, Pope Francis expressed support for civil unions for same-sex couples, acknowledging their right to legal protection and family life, but stopped short of endorsing sacramental blessings within the Church (Francis, 2020). In March 2021, the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) issued a statement reaffirming that the Church cannot bless same-sex unions because "God cannot bless sin" (CDF, 2021). This statement highlighted the distinction between welcoming LGBTQ+ individuals into the Church and endorsing their unions, maintaining the doctrinal position against recognizing same-sex marriages.

The Vatican's stance on same-sex blessings has significant sociopolitical implications influencing public opinion and policy, especially in predominantly Catholic countries. It also affects the Church's relationship with LGBTQ+ Catholics and their allies, often leading to tension and calls for reform. Many LGBTQ+ Catholics and advocacy groups have expressed disappointment with the Vatican's refusal to bless same-sex unions, arguing that it perpetuates discrimination and alienation within the Church. Organizations such as New Ways Ministry continue to advocate for greater acceptance and recognition of LGBTQ+ relationships in the Church's pastoral practices. Reactions to the Vatican's position vary globally; in some regions, particularly in Europe and North America, there is growing support for same-sex blessings among the laity and some clergy. Conversely, in more conservative regions, such as parts of Africa and Asia, the traditional stance is strongly upheld. The blessing of same-sex couples by the Vatican remains a contentious issue, reflecting deeper theological and doctrinal debates within the Catholic Church. While Pope Francis' pastoral approach has fostered greater dialogue and inclusivity, the official doctrine continues to reject the possibility of blessing same-sex unions. This ongoing tension highlights the complex interplay between tradition, modernity, and the evolving understanding of human relationships within the Church.

An Introduction of Same-Sex Marriage Act

Same-sex marriage has evolved from a largely unrecognized or persecuted practice to a legally and socially acknowledged institution in many parts of the world. Same-sex relationships have been documented in ancient civilizations such as Greece and Rome, where they were often accepted in certain contexts but did not equate to marriage. For instance, in ancient Greece, relationships between adult men and younger males were socially acknowledged and sometimes seen as educational or mentoring relationships (Dover, 1989). However, these relationships did not have the legal or social status of marriage. In medieval Europe, the Christian Church's influence led to the condemnation and persecution of same-sex relationships. The rise of Christianity brought a stricter view of marriage as a union exclusively between a man and a woman, primarily for procreation (Boswell, 1994).

The early 20th century saw little progress in the recognition of same-sex relationships. However, the groundwork for future movements was laid by early LGBTQ+ activists who began to challenge societal norms and push for greater acceptance and rights. The latter half of the 20th century marked significant progress in the LGBTQ+ rights movement. The 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York City are often cited as a turning point, galvanizing the LGBTQ+ community to demand equal rights and recognition (Duberman, 1993). In 1989, Denmark became the first country to establish registered partnerships for same-sex couples, offering many of the rights and benefits of marriage without the title (Eskridge, 1996). In 2001, the Netherlands made history by becoming the first country to legalize same-sex marriage, granting full marital rights to same-sex couples (Waalwijk, 2001). Canada legalized same-sex marriage nationwide in 2005, following a series of court rulings that recognized the equality of same-sex unions (Lahey, 2005). South Africa became the first African country to legalize same-sex marriage in 2006, a significant achievement because of the continent's conservative stance on LGBTQ+ rights (Judge, Manion, & de Waal, 2008).

The landmark Supreme Court decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) legalized same-sex marriage across the United States, affirming the constitutional right to marriage equality (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015). The recognition of same-sex marriage is often framed as a fundamental human right issue. Legal scholars argue that marriage equality is essential for achieving full civil rights for LGBTQ+ individuals, as it grants equal access to the legal, social, and economic benefits of marriage (Herek, 2006). Public opinion on same-sex

marriage has shifted dramatically in many countries, often following legal recognition. Studies indicate that legalizing same-sex marriage contributes to greater social acceptance and reduces stigma against LGBTQ+ individuals (Baunach, 2011). The issue of same-sex marriage remains contentious, particularly within religious and culturally conservative communities. Religious objections often center on traditional interpretations of marriage, while proponents argue for a more inclusive understanding of love and commitment (Sullivan, 2004).

Despite significant progress, many countries still do not recognize same-sex marriage, and LGBTQ+ individuals face legal and social discrimination. In some regions, same-sex relationships are criminalized, and activists face persecution (ILGA, 2020). Cultural resistance to same-sex marriage persists, particularly in areas with strong traditional or religious values. Efforts to legalize same-sex marriage in these areas often encounter significant opposition, highlighting the need for continued advocacy and education (Encarnación, 2016). Advocacy for same-sex marriage and broader LGBTQ+ rights continues worldwide. Organizations and activists work tirelessly to challenge discriminatory laws and promote equality, often facing significant challenges and risks (Kollman, 2013). The history of same-sex marriage is a testament to the resilience and determination of the LGBTQ+ rights movement. From ancient societies to modern legal battles, the journey towards marriage equality has been long and arduous. While significant progress has been made, ongoing challenges and resistance highlight the need for continued advocacy and education. The recognition of same-sex marriage not only provides legal protections but also symbolizes broader acceptance and inclusion within society.

Hence, Same-Sex Marriage Act is a legislative framework enacted in various countries to recognize and legalize marriage between two individuals of the same sex. This type of legislation represents a significant step toward achieving equality for LGBTQ+ individuals by granting them the same legal recognition and rights as heterosexual couples. The key components of the Same-Sex Marriage Act are Legal Recognition which is basically to provide legal recognition of marriages between individuals of the same sex; Equal Rights and Benefits ensure that same-sex couples receive the same legal rights and benefits as opposite-sex married couples including inheritance rights, tax benefits, social security and pension benefits, healthcare and insurance, as well as adoption and parenting rights; Non-Discrimination Clauses provide protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation in relation to marriage; Religious Exemptions address concerns from religious organizations.

Implications of the Same-Sex Marriage Act

Social and Cultural Impact

The legalization of same-sex marriage contributes significantly to the normalization and acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals and relationships. It challenges long-standing social prejudices and promotes inclusivity and equality.

Legal Precedents

The Act often sets important legal precedents that influence other areas of law, such as anti-discrimination laws and family law, fostering broader protections for LGBTQ+ individuals.

Public Health

The legalization of same-sex marriage can have positive health outcomes for LGBTQ+ individuals. This is because legal recognition reduces the stigma associated with same-sex relationships, leading to improved mental health and well-being.

Case Studies

United States - Obergefell vs. Hodges (2015)

The landmark Supreme Court ruling in Obergefell vs. Hodges legalized same-sex marriage across the United States. The decision was based on the principles of equal protection and due process under the Fourteenth Amendment. The ruling emphasized that the right to marry is a fundamental liberty that cannot be denied based on sexual orientation.

United Kingdom - Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013

The UK's Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 legalized same-sex marriage in England and Wales. It ensured that same-sex couples could marry in civil ceremonies and allowed religious organizations to opt in to perform same-sex marriages if they wished.

Canada - Civil Marriage Act (2005)

Canada's Civil Marriage Act of 2005 made Canada one of the first countries outside Europe to legalize same-sex marriage nationwide. The Act amended the definition of marriage to "the lawful union of two persons to the exclusion of all others" ensuring equal marriage rights for same-sex couples.

METHODOLOGY

The research method used for collecting the required data in this study is the survey research method which helped in gathering information using questionnaire. The geographical location of this research work is within the institution of Ekwulobia Diocese. This is a community of catholic faithful that believe and practice the Roman Catholic faith. The population of the study comprised of all Ekwulobia diocesan faithful whose population was given as 605,651 by the Cathedral Administrator, Rev. Fr. Jude Mbanefo. Hence 605,651 served as the population for this study. According to the 2024 sample size determination table by Cozby, at 95% confidence level, since the population is over one hundred thousand, Cozby's table states that at +/- error margin, a population of 2000 or less will have a sample size of 322. The sampling technique used in this study is purposive sampling technique. The researcher selected those who have seen the Channels TV News Reports on the Blessing of Same-Sex Couples. The questionnaire was used for the collection of the data.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Out of the 322 copies of the questionnaire distributed to the respondents, 315 copies were retrieved and found usable showing 97.8%. This section is divided into two which are the demographics and the thematic. Tables were presented based on the data gathered from the field.

Table 1: Gender Distributions of the Respondents

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Male	126	40%
Female	189	60%
Total	315	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

From the table above, 126 (40%) out of 315 respondents were males while 189 (60%) respondents were females. That means that the females dominated the respondents' population.

Table 2: Marital Distributions of Respondents

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Married	69	22%
Single	239	76%
Widow/Widower	7	2%
Total	315	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

From the table 2 above, out of 315 respondents, 69 (22%) were married, 239 (76%) were single and 7 (2%) were either widows or widowers. That means that the greater majority of the respondents are not married, and are perhaps, youths.

Tables 3: Age distributions of respondents

Response	Frequency	Percentage
18-27	132	42%
28-37	107	34%
38 & above	76	24%
Total	315	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

From the table 3 above, out of 315 respondents, 132 (42%) fell under the age bracket of 18-27, 107 (34%) fell under the age bracket of 28-37, 76 (24%) fell under the age bracket of 38 and above. These show that majority of the respondents are within the age range of 18 and 27.

Answers to Research Questions

Four research questions were formulated in this section.

Research Question One

What is the awareness level of Channels Television's news report on the Vatican's blessing of same-sex couples by the respondents?

Table 4: Showing the awareness level of Channels news report about the blessing of same-sex couples by the respondents.

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
Very High	102	32%
High	158	50%
Moderate	47	15%
Low	5	2%
Very Low	3	1%
Total Number of Response	315	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

Table 4 above shows that 158 respondents, accounting for 50% of the total population are aware of the news report on the Vatican's blessing of same-sex couples. This indicates a notable level of awareness among a segment of the audience. This shows that the faithful of Ekwulobia Diocese are well aware of the Channels TV news report on the blessing of same-sex couples.

Research Question Two

What is the respondents' perception of the Vatican's stance on blessing of same-sex couples as portrayed in the Channels TV news report?

Table 5: Showing respondents' perception of the Vatican's blessing of same-sex couples

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
Favorable	25	8%
Neutral	100	32%
Unfavorable	190	60%
Total	315	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Data from the above table proved that greater majority of the respondents, 60% (190 respondents) view the Vatican's blessing of same-sex couples negatively based on the portrayal by Channels Television. This suggests that majority of the catholic faithful in Ekwulobia Diocese did not take the announcement lightly.

Research Question Three

What is the respondents' attitude towards Channels Television's news report on the blessing of same-sex couples?

Table 6: Showing respondents' attitude towards Vatican's blessing of same-sex couples.

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
Positive (Calmness, Docile)	83	26%
Negative (Outburst, Uneasy, Anger, Frenzy)	232	74%
Total	315	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Data from the table above revealed the reactions of the respondents as regards the matter under study. Greater majority of the respondents have a negative attitude towards the blessing of same-sex couples. The negative attitude stemmed from their outburst, anger, frenzy, etc.

Research Question Four

What are the factors influencing the perception of the respondents towards Channels TV news reports on the blessing of same-sex couples?

Table 7: Showing factors influencing the perception of the respondents towards Channels TV news reports on blessing of same-sex couples

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
Personal Belief	211	67%
Level of Education	19	6%
Respect for the Pope	22	7%
Cultural perspectives	52	17%
Prior exposure	11	3%
Total Number of Response	315	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 7 above provides a comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing respondents' perceptions of matter under investigation. A significant majority, 67% (211 respondents) indicate that their personal beliefs and values play a crucial role in shaping their perception of issue at hand with some other respondents pointing out that cultural belief, respect for the Pope, etc are other points of consideration. This suggests that personal and cultural beliefs significantly impact on how respondents interpret and respond to such news.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this research provide a comprehensive understanding of public perception and influence of Channels TV's news reports on the Vatican's blessing of same-sex couples among various audiences especially in Ekwulobia Diocese. The first objective of the study examined the level of awareness of Channels TV's news reports on the issue under discussion. The result of this objective indicates that a significant portion of the respondents are well aware of the news reports under study. The implication is that the news story was well-publicized and broadly circulated, suggesting effective dissemination of information by the media outlet. This finding is in line with the position of McCombs and Shaw's (1972) agenda-setting theory, which posits that media do not tell us what to think, but rather what to think about (Asemah, 2011; Obiakor, Ezeorji & Okeke, 2024). Meanwhile, it has to be noted that this high rate of exposure to the news report on Channels TV was as a result of the fact that the news was circulated through the social media and this afforded greater majority of the respondents the opportunity of getting exposed to the news story.

Hence, this is in line with the findings of earlier media studies, that social media platforms provide direct access to contents to an unprecedented number of people (Ikegbunam & Obiakor, 2021, in Obiakor, Ikegbunam & Ezeumenwa, 2024; Obiakor, Onwuka & Chinedu, 2024), that social media is one of the most vibrant means of disseminating information to the masses ((Obiakor, & Ikegbunam, 2021; Obiakor, Ikegbunam & Ezeja, 2024; Obiakor, Okereke & Agbachukwu, 2024; Obiakor, Obiora & Okafor, 2025), that social media are also one of the major sources of information on politics for users (Duru, 2019, in Obiakor & Adikuru, 2024), about a demonstration of the universality of the internet and its permeation ability (Obiakor, Adikuru & Agbakaj, 2022), and that the role of the social media in projecting public information to the people is hereby acknowledged (Ikegbunam & Obiakor, 2023; Obiakor, Ikegbunam & Ezeaso, 2023). This finding also supports the assertion by Shadrach (2017) that social media are gaining popularity among citizens because they pass information freely without the control of government, powerful politicians and advertisers as well as free from conventional professional bottlenecks like gate-keeping. This may be attributed to the fact that "When audience members in the society distrust the mainstream media, they have a tendency to withdraw from it and turn towards alternative sources (Müller & Schulz, 2021, in Obiakor, 2024).

The second objective ascertained respondents' perception of the news report under study. The result indicates that majority of the respondents see Channels TV's portrayal of the news report as a bad sign because they had a negative perception of the news reports under study. Hence, the theory of media framing by Entman (1993)

suggests that how an issue is presented in the media can influence public perception and interpretation of that event. This research finding is in dissonance with the findings of Obiakor, Adikuru and Agbakaj (2022), whose research investigated the perception of digital broadcasting network in the 2021 Anambra guber election debate and found that the audience perception of the new technology is positive. The finding is also not in line with Obiakor (2025) whose study on audience perception of Mr. Peter Obi's "Opposition" comments at the world press conference established a positive perception because the respondents believed that the comment was curled to aptly change the facets of Nigerian democracy, build a new political system, and change politicking in general.

However, the finding of this research is in consonance with the result of Obiakor, Ikegbunam and Ezeumenwa (2024), who after a study on Governor Soludo's "There will be consequence" threat, found that the respondents had a negative perception of the comment because they felt that the Governor should have been more diplomatic in his speech. It is also in line with the finding of Obiakor and Adikuru (2024), that Tinubu's "Let the poor breathe" comment was negatively perceived because it was meant to mock Nigerians. Again, this reserach finding is in line with that of Obiakor, Okelue, and Okeke's (2024) study on Tinubu's petition letter to NBC against Datti's 'End of democracy' comment; the respondents in that study feel that NBC takes a position with the ruling party in the country, which should not be so.

The third research objective sought to find out respondents' attitude on the matter under investigation. The response shows a greater attitude of anger, outburst, uneasiness and frenzy by the respondents. Nonetheless, the framing effect, as discussed by Entman (1993) still played a pivotal role for this subset of respondents, where specific word choices and emphases could sway their interpretation of the news leading to outburst and anger. This is the result of Gerbner's cultivation theory whereby it is supposed that prolonged exposure to an issue could influence one's attitude and reactions. Therefore, respondents' attitude about the news report under study was negative contrary to Mr. Peter Obi's "Opposition Comments" at the world press conference, where Obiakor (2025) established that respondents' attitude was found to be steadfast; this is because the "Opposition comments" of Mr. Peter Obi is a shift in political discourse, democratic principle and the way people perceive the government in power as a manipulation entity; the comments were seen as a struggle in progress for future democratic salvation in Nigeria.

The fourth objective highlights the various factors influencing respondents' perception. Personal beliefs and values as well as cultural perspective emerged as the most significant factors. This finding emphasizes the deep-rooted influence of personal, cultural and religious values on media interpretation. Other factors such as the tone and framing of the report, educational background, timing, and prior media exposure also play different roles. This finding underscored the complex interplay of individual and contextual factors in shaping how audiences perceive media reports on contentious issues. This suggests that repeated exposure and the specific timing of news broadcasts can reinforce certain viewpoints or create a sense of urgency and importance around the issue. According to the cultivation theory by Gerbner et al. (1980), repeated exposure to particular themes in media can shape an audience's perception of reality over time. This point is made concrete by the views which uphold that perception of media contents leads to selective exposure, which leads to selective attention and then to selective retention (Agbanu, 2013; Nwabueze, 2014; Obiakor & Nwabueze, 2019). Meanwhile, the acculturation theory insists that there could be need for adaptation to a new culture by the people. The findings of this research show that the faithful in Ekwulobia Diocese are very strict with their culture of marriage between a man and a woman; this strictness is based on their personal beliefs and values. The implication is that many of the Catholic faithful are not ready for acculturation and that is the reason for their anger and outburst among the faithful in Ekwulobia Diocese.

CONCLUSION

From the results of the survey, it is safer to conclude that the Catholic faithful in Ekwulobia still hold firm their catholic principle of male and female in marriage which made them to feel slighted by the announcement of the Vatican towards the fact that same-sex couples deserved to be prayed for. This announcement came to many as a shock; that is the reason why it is good to always think about the aftermath of a particular comment before they are made. Hence, the study concludes as follows: that majority of the catholic faithful are well

aware of the Vatican's announcement on the blessing of same-sex couples as reported by Channels TV. The high awareness level was actually attributed to the fact that the information was circulated online which made the report to gather more prominence; this shows the power of the social media in information dissemination in the 21st century. It was discovered that major view of the news report is negative because the respondents had negative perception of the report which affected their attitude towards the reception of the report leading to anger, frustration, frenzy, outburst and uneasiness. This result negates the standpoint of acculturation theory which insists that there is need for adoption of new cultures. The catholic faithful especially in some part of Nigeria are not ready to imbibe the culture of same-sex marriage. That is the reason why they feel that they have been slighted by that singular pronouncement. This reason for the uneasiness was motivated by several factors which include level of education of the respondents, their deep respect for the Pope, their earlier media exposure, their cultural belief and most importantly, their personal belief and values. Most of them were observed to have made some negative comments while filling the questionnaire copies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations were made:

There should be initiatives to improve media literacy among the audience so they can better understand the framing and intentions behind certain news reports towards more informed and balanced perceptions.

Channels Television and other media outlets should strive for balanced reporting especially on sensitive issues in order to cater for a diverse audience and reduce perceptions of bias. This is because framing played a major role in the study.

Media organizations should engage with religious leaders and communities to foster understanding and respect for diverse viewpoints; this can help bridge the gap between media portrayals and audience values, reducing potential conflicts.

Establishing feedback mechanisms where viewers can express their concerns and opinions about news reports can help media organizations better understand their audience's values and perceptions towards more respectful and considerate reporting in the future.

There is need for implementation of educational programmes within the diocese to discuss contemporary social issues in a way that respects religious values while fostering open-mindedness; this will help mitigate the shock or controversy that might arise from media reports on progressive topics.

Further studies on the matter can be conducted in other dioceses to compare the result of this study; this will help to strengthen this research work to better address certain issues that have to do with faith and religion.

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