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Combating LGBTQ+IA Lifestyle Choices Using Relgiocentric Communication Approaches in Port Harcourt, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Background: The increasing emergence and visibility of LGBTQ+IA individuals has continued to spark intense debates and controversies worldwide, particularly in typical African societies such as Port Harcourt, Nigeria due to their deep-rooted socio-cultural and religious beliefs against such practices.
Objective: This study investigated the use of religiocentric communication approaches in combating LGBTQ+IA lifestyle choices, with a focus on the intersection of religion, culture, and human sexuality.
Method: The study adopted qualitative research method, and used interviews to generate data from participants with experience in religious communication approaches. The population of the study was clergymen. Snowball sampling was used to select four clergymen of the Anglican Church in Port Harcourt. Interview guide and interview schedule were used to collect data from participants. The method of data analysis was the Yinn's Explanation Building Techniques. Generated data were analysed and presented in tables.
Result: Findings show that access to new media through smartphones, tablets and computers have increased indulgence in LGBTQIA lifestyle, immorality, nudity, cyberbullying and hook-ups. The religious communication approach used were production of regular salvation messages (podcast), intentional discipleship training aimed at grooming, and mentoring the youths, organising crusades, revivals, youth conferences, bible studies, and counselling; as well as awareness campaign on the danger of wrong application of the new media. It also found that the benefits have led to reduced inordinate affection, engaging in spiritual exercises such as reading and applying God's word to situations, living a purpose driven life, and enhanced economic growth and stability.
Conclusion: The conclusion of the study is that some youths in Port Harcourt, Nigeria practice LGBTQ+IA, though secretly; but religion is however, playing a noticeable role in dissuading them from the act.
Unique contribution: The **s**tudy contributes to the ongoing discourse on the role of religion in shaping attitudes towards LGBTQ+IA individuals, and provides insights into the development of

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effective communication strategies for promoting social acceptance and inclusion. **Key recommendation:** The study recommends that the religious bodies, government, teachers and parents should undertake measures to control adverse effects of new media consumption by the youths. Youth counsellors should provide information specifically on the danger inherent in the negative uses of new media and analyze the safe, respectful use of technology and possible benefits.

Keywords: Combating, LGBTQ+IA, Lifestyle Choices, Relgiocentric, Communication Approaches.

INTRODUCTION

In recent time, there has been a gradual increase in the rate at which young people show interest in the practice of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual (LGBTQ+IA). Meanwhile, people who practice LGBTQ+IA are usually exposed to several physical illnesses and mental health, including the possibility of a reduced lifespan due to aberrant lifestyles. The past two decades, specifically, have witnessed more public and scientific awareness of LGBTQ+IA. This awareness can be traced to larger socio-cultural shifts in understanding of sexual and gender identities, including the emergence of the "gay rights" movement in the 1970s and the advent of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s. Yet the first public and research attention to young LGBTQ focused explicitly on mental health. A small number of studies in the 1980s began to identify concerning rates of reported suicidal behaviour among "gay" youths. During the past two decades there have been not only intense shifts in public attitudes toward LGBTQ people and issues (Gallup 2015), but also an emergence of research from multiple and diverse fields that have led to what is now a solid foundation of knowledge regarding mental health in LGBTQ youths (Nwonyi, Oketa, Nwankwo, Nweze, Nwafor, Udude, & Onwe, (2024).

According to (Rosario et al. (2006) and Saewyc et al. (2004), sexual identities are usually informed by individuals' romantic, sexual, or emotional attractions and behaviours, which may vary within persons. There is no doubt that LGBTQ persons and their experiences must be understood as intersecting with other significant personal, ethnic, cultural, and social identities (Consolacion et al. 2004, Kuper et al. 2014). Young adolescents may be developmentally vulnerable to social rejection behaviour and attitudes, whereas older youth are able to make more sophisticated evaluative judgments regarding human rights, fairness, and prejudice (e.g., Horn 2006, Nesdale 2001). Therefore, today's LGBTQ youths come out during a developmental period characterized by strong peer influence and opinion (Brechwald & Prinstein 2011, Steinberg & Monahan 2007) and are more likely to face peer victimization when they come out (D'Augelli et al. 2002, Pilkington & D'Augelli 1995). Such victimization has well-documented psychological consequences (Birkett et al. 2009, Poteat & Espelage 2007, Russell et al. 2014). Changes in societal acceptance of LGBTQ people have made coming out possible for contemporary youths, yet the age of coming out now intersects with the developmental period characterised by potentially intense interpersonal and social regulation of gender and sexuality, including homophobia. Given this social/historical context, and despite increasing social acceptance, mental health is a particularly important concern for LGBTQ youths.

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Despite the breadth of literature highlighting disparities in symptoms and distress, relatively lacking are studies that explore the presence and prevalence of mental health disorders or diagnoses among LGBTQ youths. Using a birth cohort sample of Australian youth 14 to 21 years old, Fergusson and colleagues (1999) found that LGBTQ youths were more likely to report suicidal thoughts or attempts, and experienced more major depression, generalized anxiety disorders, substance abuse/dependence, and comorbid diagnoses, compared to heterosexual youths. Results from a more recent US study that interviewed a community sample of LGBTQ youths ages 16 to 20 indicated that nearly one-third of participants met the diagnostic criteria for a mental disorder and/or reported a suicide attempt in their lifetime (Mustanski et al. 2010). Studies also show differences among LGBTQ youths. For example, studies on LGBTQ youths suicide have found stronger associations between sexual orientation and suicide attempts for sexual minority males comparative to sexual minority females (Fergusson et al. 2005, Garofalo et al. 1999), including a meta-analysis using youth and adult samples (King et al. 2008). Conversely, lesbian and bisexual female youths are more likely to exhibit substance use problems when compared to heterosexual females (Needham 2012, Ziyadeh et al. 2007) and sexual minority males (Marshal et al. 2008); however, some reports on longitudinal trends indicate that these differences in disparities diminish over time because sexual minority males "catch up" and exhibit faster accelerations of substance use in the transition to early adulthood (Hatzenbuehler et al. 2008a).

Although not explicitly tested in all studies, results often indicate that bisexual youths (or those attracted to both men and women) are at greater risk for poor mental health when compared to heterosexual and solely same-sex-attracted counterparts (Marshal et al. 2011, Saewyc et al. 2008, Talley et al. 2014). In their meta-analysis, Marshal and colleagues (2011) found that bisexual youths reported more suicidality than lesbian and gay youths. Preliminary research also suggests that youths questioning their sexuality report greater levels of depression than those reporting other sexual identities (heterosexual as well as LGB; Birkett et al. 2009) and show worse psychological adjustment in response to bullying and victimization than heterosexual or LGBTQ-identified students (Poteat et al. 2009).

Relatively lacking is research that explicitly tests racial/ethnic differences in LGBTQ youths mental health. As with general population studies, researchers have observed mental health disparities across sexual orientation within specific racial/ethnic groups (e.g., Borowsky et al. 2001). Consolacion and colleagues (2004) found that among African American youths, those who were same-sex attracted had higher rates of suicidal thoughts and depressive symptoms and lower levels of self-esteem than their African American heterosexual peers, and Latino same-sex-attracted youths were more likely to report depressive symptoms than Latino heterosexual youths. Still other studies find no racial/ethnic differences in the prevalence of mental health disorders and symptoms within sexual minority samples (Kertzner et al. 2009, Mustanski et al. 2010).

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Research Questions

The following questions were raised to guide the study.

1. What are the religious communication approaches adopted to address the malaise of youths consumption of sexual and gender oriented contents on new media?
2. How do the religious communication approaches address youths consumption of sexual and gender oriented contents among Nigerian Youths?
3. What are the challenges faced by the religious communication approach in the fight against consumption of sexual and gender-oriented contents among Nigerian Youths.

Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender and Queer Movement

LGBTQ pride (also known as **gay pride** or simply **pride**) is the promotion of the self-affirmation, dignity, equality, and increased visibility of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people as a social group. Pride, as opposed to shame and social stigma, is the predominant outlook that supports most LGBTQ rights movements. Pride has lent its name to LGBTQ-themed organizations, institutes, foundations, book titles, periodicals, a cable TV channel, and the Pride Library.The Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, Manhattan, site of the June 1969 Stonewall riots, the cradle of the modern LGBTQ rights movement, and an icon of queer culture, is adorned with rainbow pride flags. Helsinki Pride at the Senate Square in Helsinki, Finland (2019)Original gay pride flag with eight bars. First displayed at 1978 San Francisco Gay Freedom Day Parade.

Ranging from solemn to carnivalesque, pride events are typically held during LGBTQ Pride Month or some other period that commemorates a turning point in a country's LGBTQ history, for example Moscow Pride in May for the anniversary of Russia's 1993 decriminalization of homosexuality. Some pride events include LGBTQ pride parades and marches, rallies, commemorations, community days, dance parties, and festivals. Common symbols of pride include the rainbow flag and other pride flags, the lowercase Greek letter lambda (λ), the pink triangle and the black triangle, these latter two reclaimed from use as badges of shame in Nazi concentration camps (Njoku, Nwazonobi, Anugwo, Eluu, Nwafor, Orji, Ngwakwe, Afoke, Ujebe, Ede, Alor, Nwoba, & Aleke, (2024)..

The 1950s and 1960s in the United States constituted an extremely oppressive legal and social period for LGBTQ people. In this context American homophile organizations such as the Daughters of Bilitis and the Mattachine Society coordinated some of the earliest demonstrations of the modern LGBTQ rights movement. These two organizations in particular carried out pickets called "Annual Reminders" to inform and remind Americans that LGBTQ people did not receive basic civil rights protections. Annual Reminders began in 1965 and took place each July 4 at Independence Hall in Philadelphia.

Lesbians, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Practice

New media when consumed often times, has varieties and wide range of information such as: adverts, daily posts, daily happenings, religious programs, bloggers' information, rational contents

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and wide range of queer activities. It is surprising to note that despite the rational and helpful information that are in there, large portion of the Nigerian youths spend more time on queer activities which often take them to pornographic sites where some of these LGBTQ are found.

New media addiction exposes young people to sexual contents and if they spend couple of hours watching these contents, they get enticed and start building interest that would help them identify their area of sexual interest. Most young people get enlisted into gay practice and start hooking up with people of same sexual orientation. For women they end up becoming lesbians and start practicing lesbianism. The male folks become homosexuals and as they get married, good number of them continue as bisexuals. When they get acquainted with it to the extreme, they could consider submitting themselves to become transgender.

There is a gradual shift where heterosexual Nigerians are being accustomed with their LGBTQ and perverse friends, family members, neighbours, and colleagues, where the minority community co-exists with the heteronormative society. This thesis documents and highlights the positive changes and indulgences brought in due to the arrival of New Media in Nigeria. The LGBTQ community has become gradually vocal about their sense of winning over detentions in other countries and feels that their other participants in Nigeria could gradually stand firm and promote gender perversion through their daily subtle media offers. The community is forging ahead with the intent to fulfill their ambitions, as many Nigerian Youths are now full-time subscribers (Onwe, Nwafor, & Nworie, 2021).

The multidimensional nature of sexuality, which distinguishes between desire, behavior and identity, is on rampage in Nigeria. The frequent same-sex feelings and behavior in men and women and across cultures are products of the givens of the new media which has been widely documented and scientifically proven (Rao & Jacob, 2012; Sadock, Sadock and Ruiz 2009). Homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexual, cross-dressing and body enhancement which are part of the gender perversion have gained social recognition through constant browsing, chatting, sexting, and nurturing pervasive desires and grow them into habits and addiction. This aspect of human behavior has been in existent in Nigeria for centuries although practiced under closed doors. Several Nigerian Youths through the new media links are participators and have embraced this perverse way of life. New media has succeeded in promoting deceit, complexity, fake status, naughtiness and brought down the fabrics of our moral conduct and bedeviled humanity. The 21st century human existence has been beclouded with confusion and several uncertainties that are affecting genuine co-existence and relationship, crippling our conscience to do those things that are not proper and acceptable both by religious and moral laws.

Example was the mid-night wedding which took place at Tibulus Hotel and Suites along Refinery Road in the Uvwie Local Government Area, Warri, Delta State on Sunday, 27th August, 2023. The Police Public Relations Officer, Bright Edafe, reported that Divisional Patrol Team attached to Ekpan Division intercepted a male cross-dresser by name ChuksChinyere who claimed to be an actor. However, upon interrogation, he made a confessional statement that he belongs to a gay club and was on his way to join his fellow gay members to witness a gay marriage ceremony. Acting

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on intelligent information gathered, operatives of the Divisional Patrol Team attached to Ekpan Division on duty stormed the venue, as some gay members immediately took to flight into different directions. The police arrested the suspects present at the midnight wedding ceremony between Daniel Pius (Groom) age 22 years and Maxwell Ohwonohwo (Male Bride) age 20 years.

About 200 persons were initially apprehended by the police but after much interrogations to ascertain culprits and accessories to the crime that were being committed, it was discovered that some persons were guests to the award evening that took place earlier, some were passer-by, some others came to witness the event if it were true, while 67persons that were arrested assumed to be the actual gay members evident in their cross dressed appearance, make-up and feminine disposition awaiting judgment in court. If found guilty, the 2013 anti-gay bill which was passed and approved will be administered. Fourteen years' imprisonment for the culprits while 10 years' imprisonment for the accomplices for committing same sex marriage prohibited by the law of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. However, the framework to understand and interpret these experiences as gay and lesbian practice is relatively modern (Joseph, 2016).

In Nigeria, like in most parts of Africa, homosexuality is generally viewed as unacceptable and the 2013 anti-gay law was affected despite international condemnation and disregard to the abnormal deviant behavior. It prescribes 14 years for those convicted, and bans gay marriage, same sex relationships and membership of gay rights groups. According to Leela Gandhi (2002), the '*catalogue of sexual irregularities*' was an established feature of ancient Africans like Nigeria. Same sex eroticism has been in existence for centuries. (Pattanaik, 2014). However, homosexuality was declared a crime in the Nigerian Law, which was enacted in 2013 as defaulter and offenders are liable to be prosecuted and jailed if convicted.

The Nigerian Senate approved the bill on November 29, 2011, and the House of Representatives passed on its third and final reading in May, 2013. "A harmonization committee" finalized the bill in December, 2013 under the presidential leadership of President GoodluckEbele Jonathan, signed 7th Day of January, 2014. The legislation could lead to imprisonment solely for a person's actual or imputed sexual orientation. People could face charges for consensual sexual relations in private; advocacy of LGBT right or public expression of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The term "same-sex marriage" and "civil union" are so broadly defined in the law that they include virtually any form of same-sex orientation.

Nigeria has the world's third-largest number of people living with HIV/AIDS, and its National Agency for the control of Aids has recognized the need to target vulnerable groups in HIV/AIDS outreach efforts, including people who engage in same-sex conduct. Internet forums designated for LGBTQ youths help them to cope with the special challenges at the turning point in their lives concerning their identity, and helps decrease the risk of detrimental outcomes, such as depression or even suicide. (Cerni& Talmud, 2015).

The young generation now use the digital platforms to illustrate their identity through clothing, cross-dressing, make-up and other queer practices. In recent times, celebrities now advertise some

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sensitive parts of their body, video their sexual activities and post them online to build fame, some even showcase their pregnancy with wide nudity including their cleavages. 'The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans Queer (LGBTQ) community has been in existence in Nigeria, although not legally approved by the Federal Government. However, due to the current socio-political ambiance it has remained unclear and looked upon with skepticism.

The Nigerian Youths keep using the new media to promote sex and gender perversion in order to make their status visible and voice heard is a subject that the religious body need to address. The LGBTQ community has always existed quietly in Nigeria since the law does not approve of it. Nigerian will continue to flourish and fight against sex and gender perversion as it is a deviation from normalcy. There was always a strong sense of connection within the community, through common meeting grounds, however the invasion of social media completely changed the landscape of how people could connect. (Bhandari et al., 1991; Johnson, 2015). The research conducted proves that digital communication has paved the way for the LGBTQ community to freely and safely communicate their viewpoint, thus creating a positive impact and giving them visibility in their favour. 'New Media constitute an arena of public communication where norms are shaped and rules get contested to give room for vices to strive' (Dijck, 2013 and Onwe, Nwafor, & Orji-Egwu, 2017).

The present active relationship between society and technology is leading to drastic evolution in the way the latter is used to communicate. As per the World Bank report in 2017, 45.7% of the human population has an active internet connection, i.e. approximately 3.5 billion people have a digital presence (Bank, 2017). The arrival of social networking platforms (SNPs) has led to active online communication between many minority groups in order to encourage each other and express their sexual feeling as they desire.

Research has shown that internet use assists operators with similar background and interests in bonding and forming associations to promote their evil schemes and agenda. Through the new media, several Nigerian youths watch and like certain media contents from nude sites, and with time they develop interest to emulate what is been offered and search out for people of same sexual background to hook-up with and grow their sexual orientation into a habit.
It has also been found that internet use can assist users from different background in bridging differences. The new media such as Facebook, Google, Whatsapp and gender perversion such as lesbianism, gay, bisexual and transgender practice among Nigerian Youths is a strong evil that the religious body should war against vehemently. Gender perversion has eaten deep, growing like wide fire and gradually becoming the order of the day among the young generation.

Homosexuality among Nigerian Youths
Homosexuality also known as gay practice, is the sexual relationship and intercourse that exist between two men or same sex. The occurrence of homosexuality has been under medical scrutiny for a long time as it has baffled scientists from an evolutionary perspective. However, research confirms that homosexuality is indeed very common in the human population and appear not to have an end especially among youths (Bailey &Zuk, 2009).

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In the post-industrial society, the medical profession has played a central role in relating homosexuality with deviance and mockery (Bhandari, et al., 1991). Members of the LGBTQ community in Nigeria constantly experience violence, rejection and discrimination in spheres such as education, employment, healthcare and access to social services. (Badgett, 2014).

There is a lack of Nigerian psychiatric literature systematically investigating issues related to homosexuality, as everyone appears to be busy with the media contents. Research into these issues is crucial for increasing our understanding of the local and regional context related to sexual behavior, orientation and identity in Nigeria. (Rao & Jacob, 2012).

In the 21st century, it appears as though the society have come to endure homosexuality practice as a normal variant of human sexuality rather than a crime or mental disorder. (Sadock, Sadock , & Ruiz, 2009) The American Psychiatric Association, in 1973, and the World Health Organisation, in 1992, officially accepted its normal variant status courtesy of the offers of new media.

In the Nigeria context, sexual orientation and gender identity are entwined, and not necessarily a distinct concept (Badgett, 2014). Despite having a long history of homosexual existence in Nigeria, it is assumed as a recent and western phenomenon (Bhandari, et al., 1991). Despite the hidden collaboration gender perversion appears to be having, some of the biases embedded in social response and triviality related to homosexuality still exists in 21st century Nigeria. The matter further is compounded as the idea of sexual identity itself is an ambiguous one, even amongst the general gay population (Joseph, 1996).

However, the present bill advocates state authority to determine the sexual identity of the person without any medical or legal process (Hindu, 2018). Nigeria, with a current population of over 1.3 billion has no confirmed data to measure the actual population of LGBTQ. While conducting the research the latest official census data published by the government of Nigeria available is from 2022, which confirms the total population of LGBTQ at 4.88million, which is an under-reported figure (Nagarajan, 2014) (Roy, 2022).

Homosexuals do not necessarily have queer parents or family as a primary support system, which can lead to extreme isolation in the worst cases (Nunez, 2017). Primary observational study of the online profile of LGBTQ respondents have confirmed that they use Facebook to meet and interact with queer people, and also use it as an avenue to express their fears and desires. In the absence of family support, it is imperative to know that new media (online groups) have offered accessible alternatives to form a community outside of family. Primary research had revealed online platforms like *Gaysi9* and *Gaylaxy10,* and publishers like *Queer Ink11* have helped create spaces for LGBTQ people to interact, share and collaborate. Numerous digital influencers from the LGBTQ community are working towards creating awareness and a digital eco system to support each other.

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There are two types of homosexuals. The male depicting homosexuals appear as men who prefer to walk like men, they wear male clothing fully and during sex prefer to be on top (they play top) as to penetrate their fellow men from the anus. The feminine depicting homosexuals are males who combines both male and more of female attributes in their gesture, activities and practice. During sex they prefer to be the bottom who receives the male organ or are penetrated from the anus during sex. The feminine depicting homosexuals are very easy to identify as their posture gives them out. They behave like women and most times can be very irritating.

Homosexuality, the Bible and the Church

Scriptures condemn homosexuality as cited in Genesis 19; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1Timothy 1:10; 2 Peter 2:7; and Jude 7. The true biblical teaching on the subject requiresthe church to condemn the sin of homosexuality, convert the homosexual, confronterroneous teaching, and cleanse itself. The church must be careful to resist evil and not to adopt the customs of the world.

Is homosexuality condemned or condoned by the Holy Scriptures? Are homosexuals guilty of practicing a sinful lifestyle, or are they simply living out their God-ordained functions? Are homosexuals to be excluded from the church, or should they be included in the assembly of God's people? These are questions facing most religious organizations and needs to be addressed in order to salvage those who are held captive by the devil. Secular society in their pretense and passive approach havecondemned, while some others have succumbed to the pressure from the gay and lesbian community to accept homosexuality as a viable and legitimate lifestyle. Aligning themselves with Blacks, Hispanics, women, and the disabled, the homosexual community has won over large segments of society to their side.

Three big automobile manufacturers in America just voted to recognize gay unions as legitimate for the purposes of granting spousal rights. The religious organizations must take a courageous and intelligent step to withstand and halt immorality among the Nigerian youths, considering the gay movement and socialization. The church must intensify teachings aimed at addressing this deviant lifestyle and crusade the society with God's word for their liberation and sanity.

Homosexuality Condemned In Holy Scriptures

When considered contextually and objectively, the Scriptures are not silent concerning homosexuality. They always treat homosexuality as a violation of the divine order. The major references to homosexuality in Scriptures are: Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10; Genesis 19; 2 Peter 2:7 and Jude 7.

These scriptures clearly spelt out the punishment accrue to those who indulge in homosexual and it is considered evil. The bible says:

> If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads" Leviticus 20:13

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> Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor frauds will inherit the kingdom of God? 1 Corinthians 6:9-10.
>
> Food for the stomach and the stomach for food-but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" 1 Corinthians 6:13.
>
> For adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which He entrusted to me" 1 Timothy 1:10.

In all these scriptures, God expressed how grievous the sin of homosexuality is in his sight, as such persons are bound to face both immediate and eternal damnation. It is a sin against oneself and God and must not be condoned. Leviticus 18:22; 20:13 Moses gives two clear prohibitions of homosexuality: You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination (18:22). If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their blood guiltiness is upon them (20:13).
Impurity in the Old Testament was a violation of God's law and holiness. The basis of New Testament holiness is found in the very moral code stipulated in the OT. The condemnation of incest in 1 Corinthians 5:1 goes back to Leviticus 18:18 and 20:11.

The list of vices in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and 1 Timothy 1:9-11 go back to Leviticus 19–20. The moral separation of the Christian from unbelievers as emphasized in the New Testament is an extension of the separation of God's people from the immoral practices of the heathen nations surrounding the nation of Israel. Leviticus forms the basis for Peter's injunction for holy living, "You shall be holy for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16; cf. Leviticus 11:41; 19:2; 20:7).

Romans 1:18-32 reveals the harmful effect of homosexuality which Apostle Paul in his argument said that the whole world (Gentile and Jewish), is under the influence of sin and thus in need of the righteousness of God provided in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:9-26). In his description of the sin of the Gentile world, Paul shows God's response to mankind's infidelity. Three times Paul states that God "gave them over to depravity" (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). God judges' sin and condemns those who indulge in it. Homosexuality is a consequence of mankind's abandonment of the truth, a just punishment for exchanging the truth for a lie (Romans 1:24) and thus a revelation of the wrath of God upon unrighteousness (Romans 1:18).

The context reveals homosexuality as a further manifestation of the "ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18). Although revisionists have found ways to avoid Paul's assessment of homosexuality as sin and a violation

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of the ordinance of God. They have offered numerous arguments to explain the supposed condemnation of homosexuality. The advocates of homosexuality say that Paul is looking at the Gentile world and not the entire world. In this he identifies both lesbianism and the gay lifestyle as a forbidden conduct in the sight of God and man. The list of expressions used for these vile affections clearly condemns homosexuality: "dishonored among them" (Romans 1:24) "degrading passions" (Romans 1:26) "exchange the natural function" (Romans 1:26) "unnatural" (Romans 1:26) "burned in their desire" (Romans 1:27) "indecent acts" (Romans 1:27) "penalty of their error" (Romans 1:27) and "worthy of death" (Romans 1:32).

Perhaps what homosexual advocates to do with Romans chapter 1, was what Peter meant when he condemns those who took Paul's letters and distorted them, as they do also to the rest of the Scripture, to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16; cf. Romans 1:32). Paul is condemning sin and vices practiced by the unbelieving world, which should not be practiced by God's people. These are characteristics of the "unrighteous" (1 Corinthians 6:9) and the "lawless and rebellious" (1 Timothy 1:9). In light of what some have done to these texts, the Holy Spirit's warns, "Do not be deceived!" (1 Corinthians 6:9), is understandable.

Religious Communication Approach

The objective of the Church or any religious organization is to bring people to Jesus (McKinney, 2014). The Church as an agent of transformation should deploy energy and intensify teachings in educating our young ones on sex education and the biblical injunctions instituted by God. The way in which youths understand sex education play a vital role in equipping the individuals for future purpose. Thus, sex education is that aspect of healthy education that enables the youths to be aware of the biological, psychological, social and moral development towards maturity as a man or a woman (Decrek, 2012). Sex education enlightens the youths to be conversant with the meaning of sexuality in the right context and as a form of behavior that should arise genuinely and practiced legally (Omeje&Okeke, 2009).

Further, sexual immorality can be controlled through improved strategic Godly counseling infused with God's word and prayer. Conscious self-discipline, proper dressing by youths, and adequate/systematic moral education in schools. It was recommended that young people should by all means decide on individual basis to disengage and disintegrate from immoral friends and peers whose persuasions and offers could be detrimental. Sex education should be a mandatory aspect of the school's academic activities, expatiating on the fact that sex was intended by God to be exercised legally through mutual agreement by partners and consent from both families and a stage that should be celebrated with decency and dignity.

Churches or religious bodies should intensify their teaching against sexual immorality, guidance and counseling services should be offered in all institutions where the youths are found. Often times the church appear to be reactive to burning issues than being proactive to addressing issues of great concern to the society. There should be a systematic discipleship programs aimed at dislodging the tendency and the habit of engaging in sexual immorality.

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Churches have moved from relying heavily on audience participation in their services over the last few hundred years, to a passive model where the congregation receives a presentation. Many people in the Church have bought into the idea that what happens online is virtual, rather than an embedded part of our everyday lives (Lewis, 2016).

If new media is properly and rightly utilized, it would have a direct impact on the worship life of young Nigerians who are compliance to it. Young ones make use of Google, whose vibrant search engine used the growing Internet and has access to information for the religious body to create a platform to serve it faithfuls (Mangematin and Baden-Fuller, C., 2015, pp. 11-25). The Religious bodies can as well use the new media to reach a wide variety of people (McKinney, 2014). In the pursuance of quality and to embrace all round growth, Churches must remain faithful to doctrine and theology, but accept the rapid advancing society and environment (Wrenn, Shawchuck, Kotler, &Rath, 1995).

Majority of religious organizations who are already in touch with nearly half of the community online, have been actively engaged in reaching people with the gospel to achieve a mission. Churches should spend more time on social media and use it for conferences that can reach millions of persons. There is need to engage the young generation in conversations through various forms of the new media. It gives one an idea on the participation level of such persons who are victims of the new media, their performance, and broadens your knowledge on what decision to take. The religious bodies can strategically make friends with the youths with the aim to influence them positively. Your ministry can have greater returns if you extend it through new media. New media changes continuously because it is constantly being modified and redefined by the interaction between users, emerging technologies, and cultural changes, etc.

Theoretical Background

Functional Theory of Religion

Functional Theory of Religion, being one of the theories of religion propounded by Taylor and Frazerin 1991,focuses on what religion does to the people, the social or psychological functions that religion performs for a group or a person. The theologian, Rudolf Otto, asserts that religious experiences are fascinating and terrifying. He sees religion as emerging from experiences of ancient people and these experiences arise from a special and non-rational faculty of the human mind. Functional theory sees religion as "performing certain functions for the society". One of these functions is helping to create social order and maintaining value consensus. It is believed that religion influences our thinking, gradually removing certain human ideology to re-orient and transform us to what it wants us to be.

As it relates to this work, we can state that through the influence of religious teachings, the youths can be disoriented from moral decadence and social vices (for instance as traditionally perceived of in Africa with respect to LGBTQ+IA relationships) to living a purpose-driven life. Religion is both persuasive and influential in changing the mindset of the youths which is the functional aspect of its role.

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Religious Communication Theories

Religion communication theories assume that the meaning and purpose of life derived from a faith tradition grounded in scriptures (Holy books), doctrines (collective teachings and beliefs), and communal religious experiences. The Latin word for religious likely derives from religo, meaning to bind or tie together, and the root word for communication is communicatus, meaning symbolic expressions of thoughts and feelings. In its broadest sense religious communication is a process of reconciling people who have been separated from their spiritual nature with each other and with God. Most Western religious communication theory evolves from the Jewish and Christian traditions and concentrates on the persuasive purposes of influencing the minds and hearts of audiences to believe in God, inspiring moral actions based on those beliefs, and inculcating a religious consciousness and identity in audiences. The prominent ancestors of religious communication are homiletics, psychology, language, and media theories.

METHOD

The study adopted qualitative research method, and used interviews to generate data from participants with experience in religious communication approaches. Interview was best suited for this study as it provided opportunity for interactions and follow-up questions arising from responses of participants. The population of the study was clergymen. Snowball sampling was used to select four clergymen of the Anglican Church in Port Harcourt. The choice of clergymen was because the study focused on religious communication approaches in combating LGBTQ+IA lifestyle choices amongst youths in Port Harcourt, Nigeria where such lifestyle practice is outlawed. The justification for using the snowball sampling technique was to identify participants through their profession as religious leaders and mentors of faith who have experience in combating the menace of LGBTQ+IA in a society that abhors the practice. An interview guide was used in the collection of data from interviewees. It contained interviewee A, B, C & D questions on relevant issues as regards the fight against the LGBTQ+IA menace among youths. Interview schedule was used to elicit data for the study. The interview questions were self-administered on the interviewees by the researcher. The method of data analysis was the Yinn's Explanation Building Techniques, which involves the analysis or interpretation of data generated for the study and presented in tables.

RESULT

Research Question 1: What are the religious communication approaches adopted to tackle the malaise of youths consumption of sexual and gender oriented contents on social media?\

The religious communication approach deployed by the Church was mainly crusade, youth conference, televangelism programmes and discipleship training which involves teaching them the word of God and exposing them to Godliness. In essence, religious communications approach such as crusade where God's word is adequately and powerfully preached, organizing youth conference and discipleship training to build up their faith in the Lord Christ Jesus. These approaches listed could use the following medium such as Facebook to live stream messages on salvation, bible

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teachings, gospel conferences, seminars on youth empowerment and counselling on the consequences of the abuse of new media.Sending podcast Christian videos and laws against LGBTQ+IA on WhatsApp has helped in disorienting our youths from evil, reduced the over consumption of new media intake, reduced distraction, fought against inordinate sexual affection, sensitizing the youths and defaulters that victimsof LGBTQ+IA are liable to face the law and be imprisoned.

Ukodie (2004) agrees to this fact that religious Communication approach has proven itself and has been accepted as agents ofdeliverance and transformation to humanity. Exposing the youths to Gods word often disorient them from evil and turn their heart towards God for a meaningful life. The phenomenal sanitization with regard to life transforming programs like discipleship trainings are having significant impact on the lives of the youthsand dislodging vices (Brakel and Chisengas, 2003). Economic, political, social, improved academic performance and other areas of our lives have been greatly affected positively by God's word. Therefore, since the society seeks for improved morality and proper upbringing of our children, it is necessary to investigate how the religious communication approach can be maintained to have a purpose driven youth generation (Ossai-Ugbah 2011).

Pautler (2010) noted that strategic and intentional religious activities aimed at transforming the lives of the youths have produced success over time. Churches and religious organizations should channel their energy and invest more in engaging the youths who are future leaders to seek for their spiritual and moral growth. No wonder Solomonsays in Ecclesiastes12:1-3 "remember your creator in the days of your youth". One of the main reasons why we are losing our youth to gender perversion, is because religious organizations have not yet seen the need to channel more effort in delivering the youths from the bondage of new media.

Research Question 2: How does the religious communication approach addresses new media and fight against sexual and gender-oriented contents among Nigerian Youths?

It was discovered that religious communication approach has had moderate impact on the lives of the youths in terms of their knowledge and attitude towards sexual and gender-oriented contents on new media. This shows that the religious communication approach has the potential of bringing down the prevalence of LGBTQ+IA practices in Nigeria if not totally eradicating it. When this happens, part of the benefits that shall accrue to the society when our youths are salvaged, is that more youths will be career productive which would lead to increased workforce, economic stability would bring about relative peace and youths living a purpose driven life. Again, the society would have good image, productive work force, improved economy, heightened morality and proper use of the new media. A society driven by Godliness and morality will do better than a society driven by moral decadence. This finding sees relevance in the admonition of the World Bank on the proper application of the new media by developing countries.

According to the World Development Report 1998/99 (World Bank 1999) developing countries need to take advantage of new technologies for acquiring and disseminating knowledge in order

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to further development. In this sense new media was viewed as a tool with which to achieve all manner of targeted goals. Church as a social institution needs to make impact and expand through organizing life transforming spiritual programsand live stream to reach millions of youths from different parts of the world. This implies that a device must be involved to ensure connectivity, as to monitor the impact and effectively manage the youths. Moreover, advanced communication has become the order of the day, people now visit face books, use WhatsApp, send YouTube, and even download pornographic videos in their cell phone for constant viewing and practice. In the society today, both young and old have come under severe pressure to align its self to the trend and what is invoke. The young generation have gradually submitted to the social vices and corruption occasioned by the abuse of new media which is now the order of the day.

Nagy (2003) posited that new media is becoming a powerful tool for mobilizing the society and misdirecting the youths more into depravity. Chandler (2004), in her research on exploring cross-generational attitudes and opinions on the use of multimedia in the Christian church, investigated the attitudes and opinions across generations regarding to the relatively new implementation of multimedia which has promoted social vices, compared to traditional way of life. Before collecting the data, it was believed that the younger generation would be more in favour of multimedia use, because of their exposure and familiarity with multimedia in engaging in modernity. It was predicted that the older generation would be in favour of maintaining a conservative life not addicted to new media.

Research Question 3: What are the challenges faced by the religious communication approach in the fight against consumption of sexual and gender oriented contents among Nigerian Youths.
Findings show that high cost of organizing regular transformational programmes such as crusade, discipleship training and youth conference etc is a challenge. In the quest for salvaging the youths from moral decadence and vices caused by abuse of new media while the youths keep feasting on new media contents is one of the highest challenges faced in the adoption the religious communication approach.

By implication, the high cost of organizing regular transformational programs is the greatest challenge by religious organizations in their quest to liberate the youths who are victims of moral decadence. Breaking into the new media space of the youths carefully hounded becomes a problem because new media have become part of their personal accessory cum accoutrements. Filtau (2010) cited in Ossai-Ugbah (2011), stated that technology as used by different individuals may be very costly not only in terms of money and time, but in the conflict, it ignites in many strata of life. Still, many religious organisation task themselves to engage technology in organizing programs aimed at transforming the youths and giving them sense of direction. For religious organizations, like the Anglican Communion in Evo Kingdom, the money for organizing programs which requires online publicity, printing of banners, books, fliers, hiring of instruments, honorarium to speakers, purchase of data for live streaming of event and electricity has been a challenge. Considering the economic situation, cost of putting together programs is quite expensive and need huge amount of funds.

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This finding aligns itself with earlier studies by Salau et al (2007) whose studies show that there were acquisition and set up problems that are associated with organizing programs. These acquisition problems are traceable to the unavailability of funds. The requirements for effectively deploying religious communication approach is being vision orientation in improving the lives of the youths through strategic programs and intentional counseling.

Conclusion/Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, it will be safe to conclude that LGBTQ+IA practices are no longer hidden as there is a widening net of practitioners among the youths. The observations by the researcher show that a lot of people are involved in these practices under several cover. The major problem is that sexual acts are carried out under the cover of darkness and it is very difficult to see open display of affection by the practitioner in the light of the *taboo* tag placed on it by the society. The only hope for the society is to utilize the religious communication approach to tame this unseeingly *new normal* threatening the cultural and religious orientation of the African society. So far, gospel crusades, bible study, Christian youth conferences, discipleship training, revival, counseling, seminars and trainings have been deployed by the church but the malaise has acquired new dimension by some youths forming themselves into gay clubs for the on propagation of their belief and acts. This cannot be allowed to hold sway in the society for the sake of future generations. Religious organizations have used Facebook to live stream online messages on salvation, engaged the Nigerian Youths in one-on–one counselling, videos on religious activities and skill acquisition using Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp as new media tools to improve their sanity. Also, the religious communication approach has given rise to positive living, increased morality, restored family value, and reduced vices and corruption among the Nigerians youths but the malaise has persisted. This is because the new media is very accessible and affordable to the youths with minimal restrictions on sexual and gender-oriented content. This has made the trend to fester. Meanwhile, the cost of organizing regular transformational programs by the church has continued to soar in the face of harsh economic realities compared to the cost of accessing the new media by the youths.

In the light of the above, the following are recommended: Religious Organization should expand their engagement on media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Tiktok to attract more youths and give them sense of direction. Religious organisations should sustain the push for a sane and safe society and devise for creative ways of reaching out to the youths beyond the traditional approaches so far deployed. Religious organisations should work in partnership with non-governmental organisations and civil society to overcome the challenges of reaching the youths in combating sex and gender pervasive contents on new media.

Ethical clearance
Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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Conflict of Interest
The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions.
Chukwudi Evans Theophilus conceived the study, including the design, Nduka Nwankpa collated the data, and handled the analysis and interpretation, while Chukwudi Evans Theophilus wrote the initial manuscript under the supervision of Professor Barigbon Nsereka. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft, and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

Availability of data and materials.
The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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