

## Unveiling attitudes and dynamics: A theoretical inquiry into stakeholder perspectives on queer community acceptance within Nigerian rural setting



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### Abstract

This theoretical inquiry explores stakeholder perspectives on queer community acceptance within rural Nigerian settings, focusing on Oye Ekiti, Ijan Ekiti, Irun Akoko, and Okiti Pupa. Employing a qualitative approach, the study uses interviews and content analysis grounded in Social Identity Theory to investigate attitudes and dynamics. Purposive sampling of 10-20 participants, including community leaders, queer individuals, NGO representatives, and general community members, provides insights into complex social interactions. The Thematic analysis highlights a tension between conservative resistance and emerging acceptance, influenced by religious doctrines, traditional values, and socio-economic factors. Despite significant opposition from religious and traditional leaders who view queer identities as incompatible with cultural norms, education and awareness efforts are contributing to gradual shifts in attitudes. Local NGOs face challenges in advocating for change amidst entrenched opposition. Recommendations include enhancing educational programs, strengthening NGO support, advocating for policy reform, fostering dialogue with community leaders, promoting positive media representation, addressing socio-economic barriers, and building coalitions to foster inclusivity.

**Keywords:** Attitude, Dynamics, Inquiry, Stakeholders, Queer, Community, Rural Settings.

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## بازنمایی نگرش‌ها و پویایی‌ها

(تحقیق نظری در مورد دیدگاه‌های موجود مبنی بر پذیرش جامعه دگرباش در محیط روستایی نیجریه)



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### چکیده

این تحقیق نظری دیدگاه‌های ساکنان منطقه مورد مطالعه را در مورد پذیرش جامعه دگرباش در محیط‌های روستایی نیجریه، با تمرکز بر اویه اکییتی، ایجان اکییتی، ایرون آکوکو، و اوکییتی بررسی کرده است. این تحقیق با استفاده از رویکرد کیفی، از مصاحبه و تحلیل محتوا مبتنی بر نظریه هویت اجتماعی برای بررسی نگرش‌ها و پویایی‌ها استفاده نموده است. نمونه‌گیری هدف‌مند از ۱۰ تا ۲۰ شرکت‌کننده، از جمله رهبران جامعه، افراد دگرباش، نمایندگان سازمان‌های غیردولتی، و اعضای عمومی جامعه، بینش‌هایی را در مورد تعاملات اجتماعی پیچیده ارائه می‌دهد. تجزیه و تحلیل موضوعی تنش بین مقاومت محافظه‌کارانه و پذیرش در حال ظهور، تحت تأثیر آموزه‌های مذهبی، ارزش‌های سنتی، و عوامل اجتماعی - اقتصادی را برجسته می‌کند. علی‌رغم مخالفت قابل توجه رهبران مذهبی و سنتی که هویت‌های دگرباش را با هنجارهای فرهنگی ناسازگار می‌دانند، تلاش‌های آموزشی و آگاهی‌بخشی به تغییر تدریجی نگرش‌ها کمک می‌کند. سازمان‌های غیردولتی محلی با چالش‌هایی در حمایت از تغییر در میان مخالفت‌های ریشه‌دار مواجه هستند. توصیه‌ها شامل تقویت برنامه‌های آموزشی، تقویت حمایت از سازمان‌های غیردولتی، حمایت از اصلاح سیاست‌ها، تقویت گفت‌وگو با رهبران جامعه، ترویج بازنمایی مثبت رسانه‌ها، رسیده‌گی به موانع اجتماعی - اقتصادی، و ایجاد ائتلاف‌هایی برای تقویت فراگیری است.

**واژه‌گان کلیدی:** نگرش، پویایی، پرسش، دگرباش، جامعه، قواعد روستایی.

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## 1. Introduction

The acceptance of queer communities remains a contentious issue worldwide, with varying degrees of acceptance shaped by cultural, religious, and socio-political factors. In Nigeria, where traditional values and religious beliefs are deeply ingrained, the acceptance of queer individuals is particularly challenging. This study delves into stakeholder perspectives on queer community acceptance within rural Nigerian settings, focusing on the attitudes and dynamics that inform these perspectives.

Nigeria's legal framework has historically been unfavorable towards queer individuals, reflecting and reinforcing societal norms that marginalize sexual minorities. The Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act of 2014 is a prominent example of this legal hostility. This law not only criminalizes same-sex unions but also prohibits the formation of gay rights organizations, effectively silencing advocacy for queer rights (Human Rights Watch, 2016). The Act has had far-reaching implications, fostering an environment of fear and exclusion for queer individuals. As Ibrahim (2020) argues, the law reflects broader societal attitudes that are deeply rooted in Nigeria's colonial history and religious heritage.

In rural Nigeria, where traditional values are often more strictly adhered to than in urban areas, the acceptance of queer individuals is further complicated. Rural communities in Nigeria are typically characterized by strong communal bonds, where conformity to social norms is highly valued (Epprecht, 2013). These norms are heavily influenced by cultural traditions and religious teachings that often portray non-heteronormative sexualities as immoral or unnatural (Amadiume, 2015). The social fabric of these communities is such that any deviation from established norms, including sexual orientation, is met with resistance and often outright rejection.

Religious institutions and community leaders hold significant sway over public opinion in these areas. Their interpretations of religious texts are frequently invoked to justify the exclusion and marginalization of queer individuals. For example, in many rural communities, religious leaders preach sermons that condemn homosexuality, citing scripture to support their views (Arimoro, 2019). These religious teachings are not only disseminated during religious gatherings but also influence local governance and social practices, further entrenching homophobic attitudes.

Local governance structures in rural Nigeria often reflect and reinforce these conservative values. Traditional rulers and local government officials, who are typically seen as custodians of cultural and religious norms, may either actively oppose or passively permit the exclusion of queer individuals from community life (Izugbara & Undie, 2008). This governance dynamic creates an environment where queer individuals are not only marginalized but also lack access to justice and protection under the law.

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Education and awareness-raising are critical to challenging these entrenched attitudes. However, in rural Nigerian settings, access to education is often limited, and exposure to diverse perspectives on sexuality is minimal. The lack of comprehensive sex education, coupled with the dominance of conservative religious teachings, perpetuates ignorance and reinforces negative stereotypes about the queer community (Amadiume, 2015). As a result, efforts to promote acceptance and inclusivity face significant barriers.

The intersection of these factors: legal, religious, cultural, and educational may create a complex landscape in which queer individuals in rural Nigeria navigate their identities. This study seeks to unravel these complexities by conducting a theoretical inquiry into the attitudes and dynamics that shape stakeholder perspectives on queer community acceptance. By examining the roles of various stakeholders, including community leaders, religious institutions, and local governance, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities for fostering acceptance of queer individuals in rural Nigerian settings.

This inquiry is not merely academic; it is deeply relevant to the ongoing struggle for human rights and social justice in Nigeria. As the country continues to grapple with issues of identity and inclusion, understanding the factors that influence attitudes toward the queer community is essential for crafting effective interventions that promote acceptance and protect the rights of all citizens, regardless of their sexual orientation. Hence, the need for this study.

## **2. Research Problem**

Despite global progress in LGBTQ+ rights, queer individuals in Nigeria face severe legal, social, and cultural challenges, especially in rural areas. The 2014 Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act criminalizes same-sex relationships and fuels societal prejudices, leading to widespread discrimination and violence. This legal framework has intensified fear and exclusion, making it difficult for queer individuals to live openly and safely in Nigeria. In rural communities, adherence to traditional values and conservative religious beliefs exacerbates the rejection and stigmatization of queer identities. Religious leaders and authorities reinforce homophobic attitudes, and limited education and exposure to diverse perspectives further entrench negative stereotypes. As a result, rural areas remain largely understudied, with a lack of research addressing the unique challenges faced by queer individuals in these settings. This study aims to fill this gap by examining stakeholder attitudes including those of community leaders, religious institutions, and local governance toward queer acceptance in rural Nigeria. By understanding these dynamics, the research seeks to develop strategies to promote inclusivity and protect queer individuals' rights, advancing human rights and ensuring dignity, safety, and equality for all Nigerians.

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### 3. Research Objectives

The objective of this research is:

1. Determine the attitudes of various stakeholders towards the queer community within Nigerian rural settings.
2. Determine the socio-cultural factors influencing the acceptance or rejection of queer individuals in rural Nigeria.
3. Analyse the religious dynamics influencing the acceptance or rejection of queer individuals in rural Nigeria.
4. Investigate the role of community leaders, religious institutions, and local governance in shaping public perceptions of the queer community.
5. Assess the impact of education and awareness on changing attitudes towards queer community acceptance in rural Nigerian communities.
6. Identify barriers to the acceptance of the queer community in rural areas, considering the perspectives of different stakeholder groups.

### 4. Research Questions

1. What are the attitudes of various stakeholders towards the queer community within Nigerian rural settings?
2. What are the socio-cultural factors influencing the acceptance or rejection of queer individuals in rural Nigeria?
3. What are the religious dynamics influencing the acceptance or rejection of queer individuals in rural Nigeria?
4. What is the role of community leaders, religious institutions, and local governance in shaping public perceptions of the queer community?
5. What is the impact of education and awareness on changing attitudes towards queer community acceptance in rural Nigerian communities?
6. What are the barriers to the acceptance of the queer community in rural areas, considering the perspectives of different stakeholder groups?

### 5. Theoretical Framework

This research is underpinned by Social Identity Theory.

This research is underpinned by Social Identity Theory (SIT), a concept introduced by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the late 1970s. SIT posits that individuals derive a significant part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups. These groups could be based on various factors such as ethnicity, religion, gender, or sexual orientation. According to SIT, the categorization of individuals into "in-groups" (those who share similar identities) and "out-groups" (those who differ) leads to the development of group norms, attitudes, and behaviors that can foster prejudice and discrimination against members of the out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987).

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In the context of rural Nigerian communities, Social Identity Theory provides a framework for understanding how these communities perceive and interact with queer individuals. Given the strong adherence to traditional and religious values in these settings, queer individuals are often categorized as part of an out-group that deviates from the accepted norms of the in-group—typically characterized by heteronormative and conservative beliefs. This in-group/out-group dynamic can result in the marginalization and exclusion of queer individuals, as the in-group members seek to maintain social cohesion and self-esteem by enforcing these norms (Hogg & Abrams, 1990; Tajfel, 1982).

The resistance to accepting queer individuals in these communities can be explained by SIT's assertion that individuals derive self-esteem from their group memberships. As a result, any challenge to the norms of the in-group, such as the presence of queer individuals, may be perceived as a threat to the group's identity and cohesion. This leads to the reinforcement of exclusionary practices and attitudes (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002).

## **6. Rational for Using the Theory**

By applying Social Identity Theory, this research aims to explore the psychological and social mechanisms that underlie the rejection of queer individuals in rural Nigerian communities. It also seeks to identify potential pathways for fostering inclusivity by addressing the group dynamics that contribute to the marginalization of the queer community.

## **7. Literature Review**

### **7-1. Queer Community Acceptance in Rural Contexts**

The acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals in rural settings is a complex issue influenced by cultural, religious, and socio-economic factors. Studies have shown that rural areas, both globally and in Nigeria, tend to be more conservative and less accepting of queer identities compared to urban areas. This is often attributed to the strong influence of traditional values and religious beliefs, which tend to be more rigidly adhered to in rural settings (Osunmuyiwa, 2017; Epprecht, 2013).

In Nigeria, the legal framework, particularly the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act of 2014, has exacerbated the challenges faced by queer individuals. This law not only criminalizes same-sex relationships but also legitimizes societal discrimination, making it difficult for queer individuals to live openly, especially in rural communities where the law is strictly enforced (Human Rights Watch, 2016). The stigma and fear of persecution often lead to social isolation, mental health issues, and, in some cases, forced migration to urban areas or even out of the country (Amnesty International, 2017).

Research has also highlighted the role of religious institutions in shaping attitudes toward queer individuals in rural settings. In many rural Nigerian

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communities, religious leaders are highly influential, and their teachings often reflect conservative interpretations of religious texts that condemn homosexuality. These teachings reinforce negative stereotypes and contribute to the social exclusion of queer individuals (Izugbara, 2014).

### **7-2. Social Identity Theory and Group Dynamics**

Social Identity Theory (SIT), developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), provides a theoretical framework for understanding how individuals categorize themselves and others into social groups, leading to in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination. This theory is particularly relevant to the study of queer community acceptance in rural Nigerian settings, where the in-group (heteronormative community members) often excludes and discriminates against the out-group (queer individuals) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hogg & Abrams, 1990).

The application of SIT in various contexts has shown that individuals derive self-esteem and a sense of identity from their group memberships. In rural Nigerian communities, where group identity is strongly tied to traditional and religious values, queer individuals are often perceived as a threat to the cohesion and moral integrity of the community. This perception leads to the reinforcement of exclusionary attitudes and behaviors, as members of the in-group seek to protect their collective identity (Turner et al., 1987; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002).

Studies have also explored how SIT can be used to develop interventions aimed at reducing intergroup conflict and promoting inclusivity. For instance, research has shown that increasing awareness of shared identities or common goals can reduce prejudice and foster greater acceptance of out-groups (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). In the context of rural Nigeria, such interventions could involve community-based dialogues that highlight common values and promote understanding between queer individuals and other community members.

### **7-3. Barriers to Queer Community Acceptance in Rural Nigeria**

The legal environment in Nigeria, particularly the criminalization of same-sex relationships, creates a significant barrier to acceptance by legitimizing discrimination and making it difficult for queer individuals to assert their rights (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

Religious opposition, as noted earlier, is another major barrier. Many rural communities in Nigeria are deeply religious, and religious teachings often play a central role in shaping social norms and values. The condemnation of homosexuality by religious leaders reinforces homophobic attitudes and makes it challenging to promote acceptance within these communities (Izugbara, 2014).

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Lack of education and awareness also contributes to the marginalization of queer individuals in rural areas. Educational institutions in these settings often reflect and reinforce the conservative values of the broader community, leaving little room for discussions about diversity and inclusion (Osunmuyiwa, 2017). This lack of exposure to diverse perspectives perpetuates ignorance and negative stereotypes about queer individuals, making it difficult to challenge the status quo.

## 8. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, using interviews and content analysis to explore stakeholder perspectives on queer identity acceptance in rural Nigerian communities (Oye Ekiti, Ijan Ekiti, Irun Akoko and Okiti Pupa). Grounded in Social Identity Theory, the research design is exploratory, allowing for in-depth analysis of complex social dynamics across multiple case studies. Purposive sampling was used to select community leaders, queer individuals, NGO representatives, and general community members, with a sample size of 10-20 participants to achieve data saturation. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify patterns in attitudes and beliefs, with ethical considerations ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, cultural sensitivity, and participant safety. Despite potential challenges like access to participants and generalizability, this methodology provided comprehensive insights into the factors influencing queer acceptance in the communities.

## 9. Result

### 9-1. Attitudes of various stakeholders towards the queer community within Nigerian rural settings

**R1:** *Many religious and traditional leaders, hold conservative views, often viewing queer identities as incompatible with cultural and religious values, leading to widespread resistance.*

**R2:** *Attitudes vary significantly; while some community members express acceptance, particularly the younger generation, others maintain a strong opposition rooted in long-standing cultural norms.*

**R3:** *Religious leaders often influence public opinion, with many preaching against queer identities, which fosters a hostile environment for the queer community.*

**R4:** *There is a slow but emerging trend of acceptance, particularly among educated individuals and those exposed to broader societal views through media or migration.*

**R5:** *Local NGOs and activists tend to advocate for the rights of the queer community, working to challenge negative attitudes and promote inclusivity, though they often face resistance.*

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**R6:** *Some stakeholders do not openly express acceptance due to fear of backlash but may privately adopt a more tolerant stance towards queer individuals.*

The responses reveal a tension between conservatism and emerging acceptance of queer identities in rural Nigerian communities. Religious and traditional leaders, holding significant influence, often reject queer identities as incompatible with cultural and religious values, creating a hostile environment. However, there is a growing shift, particularly among younger and educated individuals exposed to broader societal views, toward greater acceptance. Many stakeholders, though, remain cautious, privately supportive but fearful of public backlash. Local NGOs and activists are advocating for queer rights, challenging entrenched norms, though resistance remains strong, signaling a gradual but ongoing change in attitudes.

## **9-2. Socio-Cultural Factors Influencing the Acceptance or Rejection of Queer Individuals in Rural Nigeria**

**R2:** *Strong adherence to religious doctrines, particularly Christianity and Islam, plays a significant role in shaping negative attitudes towards queer individuals. Many religious leaders and their followers view queerness as morally wrong and contrary to divine teachings, leading to widespread rejection.*

**R3:** *Deep-rooted cultural values emphasize traditional gender roles and heterosexual relationships. Deviations from these norms are often seen as a threat to social order, resulting in rejection of queer identities.*

**R4:** *Elders and traditional leaders hold significant authority in rural communities. Their often conservative views shape community attitudes, making it difficult for more progressive perspectives to gain acceptance.*

**R5:** *The fear of being ostracized or facing social backlash from the community pressures individuals to conform to heteronormative standards, resulting in widespread rejection of queer individuals.*

**R6:** *Economic dependence on conservative institutions, such as religious organizations or traditional leadership, do influence individuals to align with the rejection of queer identities to maintain their social and economic standing.*

In rural Nigerian communities, negative attitudes toward queer individuals are deeply influenced by religious doctrines, cultural norms, and socio-economic factors. Strong adherence to Christianity and Islam leads many religious leaders and followers to view queerness as morally wrong, fostering widespread rejection. Cultural values that emphasize traditional gender roles and heterosexual relationships further entrench these attitudes, with deviations

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seen as threats to social order. Elders and traditional leaders, who hold significant authority, reinforce conservative views, making it difficult for progressive perspectives to gain acceptance. Additionally, the fear of social backlash and economic dependence on conservative institutions compel individuals to conform to anti-queer sentiments, maintaining the status quo and hindering acceptance of queer identities

### **9-3. Religious Dynamics Influencing the Acceptance or Rejection of Queer Individuals in Rural Nigeria**

**R2:** *Christianity and Islam are the predominant religions, and both hold traditional views on gender and sexuality. Religious texts are often interpreted in ways that condemn queer identities, labeling them as sinful or immoral. These interpretations are deeply ingrained in the community's moral framework, making it challenging for alternative perspectives on queerness to be accepted.*

**R3:** *Religious leaders, such as pastors, imams, and priests, wield significant influence in rural communities. Their teachings and sermons often reflect a conservative stance on sexuality, reinforcing negative attitudes towards queer individuals. Given their respected status, these leaders' views are rarely questioned, and their opposition to queerness is typically adopted by their followers.*

**R6:** *Religion is often intertwined with cultural identity. Religious beliefs are not just a matter of personal faith but are also seen as integral to the community's cultural heritage and way of life. As such, any challenge to religious norms, including the acceptance of queer individuals, is perceived as a threat to both religious and cultural identity, leading to rejection.*

**R7:** *The fear of divine punishment or spiritual consequences for accepting or associating with queer individuals is prevalent. Many people believe that tolerating queerness could bring misfortune or divine wrath upon the community, reinforcing rejection. This fear is often stoked by religious leaders who emphasize the need to adhere strictly to religious teachings.*

**R8:** *Religion fosters a strong sense of group identity and solidarity among community members. This collective identity is often maintained by adhering to shared beliefs and practices, including the rejection of behaviors seen as incompatible with religious teachings. Accepting queer individuals could be viewed as a betrayal of this group identity, leading to social ostracism.*

**R10:** *Despite the prevailing negative attitudes, there is potential for change through religious dialogue. Some progressive religious leaders and scholars are beginning to reinterpret religious texts in ways that are*

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*more inclusive of queer identities. However, these efforts are often met with resistance in rural areas, where traditional interpretations hold more sway.*

In rural Nigerian communities, Christianity and Islam play pivotal roles in shaping negative attitudes towards queer identities. Religious texts, often interpreted as condemning queerness, are deeply woven into the community's moral and cultural fabric, making it difficult for alternative views to gain acceptance. Religious leaders, such as pastors and imams, wield considerable influence, and their conservative teachings on sexuality are seldom questioned, leading to widespread adoption of anti-queer sentiments. This rejection is further reinforced by the fear of divine punishment, with many believing that tolerating queerness could invite misfortune upon the community. The strong connection between religion and cultural identity makes acceptance of queer individuals not just a challenge to religious norms but also a perceived threat to the community's collective identity. While there are emerging efforts by progressive religious leaders to reinterpret texts in a more inclusive manner, such initiatives face significant resistance, particularly in rural areas where traditional views remain dominant.

#### **9-4. the Role of Community Leaders, Religious Institutions, and Local Governance in Shaping Public Perceptions of the Queer Community**

**R2:** *Community leaders, including traditional rulers and elders, are often seen as custodians of cultural and moral values. They uphold traditional norms and do exert considerable influence in maintaining societal expectations regarding gender and sexuality. Their endorsement of conservative views reinforces rejection of queer identities.*

**R4:** *Public statements and actions by community leaders can either challenge or reinforce societal attitudes. Leaders who speak out against queer identities contribute to societal stigmatization, while those who advocate for inclusivity do help shift perceptions.*

**R7:** *Sermons and religious teachings delivered by clergy reinforce societal norms and values. Negative portrayals of queer individuals in religious discourse contribute to widespread stigma and discrimination.*

**R9:** *Local governments are responsible for creating and enforcing policies that affect social services, public health, and community welfare. Their policies either protect queer individuals from discrimination or perpetuate exclusion based on prevailing social attitudes.*

Community leaders, including traditional rulers and elders, play a crucial role in shaping societal attitudes towards gender and sexuality in rural Nigerian settings. As custodians of cultural and moral values, their endorsement of

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conservative views often leads to the reinforcement of societal rejection of queer identities. Public statements and actions by these leaders are significant; when they denounce queer identities, they contribute to stigmatization, whereas those advocating for inclusivity can help shift perceptions. Religious teachings, particularly sermons delivered by clergy, further entrench negative attitudes, as they often portray queer individuals in a negative light, reinforcing stigma and discrimination. Additionally, local governments influence these dynamics through the creation and enforcement of policies. Depending on the stance of these policies, they can either protect queer individuals from discrimination or perpetuate exclusion, reflecting and reinforcing prevailing social attitudes.

### **9-5. Impact of Education and Awareness on Changing Attitudes Towards Queer Community Acceptance in Rural Nigerian Communities.**

**R5:** *Education programs that provide accurate information about queer identities help dispel myths and correct misconceptions. By educating individuals about the diversity of human sexuality and gender, these programs challenge harmful stereotypes and reduce stigma.*

**R8:** *Increased education and awareness can lead to advocacy efforts aimed at policy changes. As community members become more informed, they may support or push for policies that protect LGBTQ+ rights and promote equality.*

**R9:** *Awareness initiatives can increase the visibility of queer issues, leading to greater public discourse and support. As queer individuals and advocates become more visible, societal acceptance can grow.*

**R10:** *Educating the broader community on the benefits of inclusivity and diversity can encourage collective support for queer individuals. Engagement activities that involve various stakeholders can build a culture of acceptance.*

Education and awareness initiatives play a pivotal role in transforming attitudes towards queer identities in rural Nigerian communities. Educational programs that provide accurate information about queer identities are crucial in dispelling myths and correcting misconceptions, thereby challenging harmful stereotypes and reducing stigma. As individuals become more informed, this increased awareness often leads to advocacy efforts aimed at policy changes that protect LGBTQ+ rights and promote equality. Additionally, awareness initiatives can boost the visibility of queer issues, fostering public discourse and gradually increasing societal acceptance. By educating the broader community on the benefits of inclusivity and diversity, these programs can encourage collective support for queer individuals and help build a culture of acceptance, involving various stakeholders in the process.

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### **9-6. Barriers to the Acceptance of the Queer Community in Rural Areas, Considering the Perspectives of Different Stakeholder Groups**

**R3:** Community leaders often uphold traditional values and cultural norms that emphasize heterosexuality and gender conformity. Their resistance to change reinforces prevailing negative attitudes towards queer individuals.

**R5:** *Leaders do perceive the acceptance of queer individuals as a threat to social cohesion and order, fearing it could lead to conflicts or challenges to their leadership.*

**R6:** *Many religious institutions promote conservative interpretations of religious texts that condemn queer identities. These doctrines shape the beliefs and practices of their followers, creating significant barriers to acceptance.*

**R6:** *Inadequate legal protections for LGBTQ+ individuals contribute to their marginalization. Local governance do not prioritize or support policies that promote queer rights or protections.*

**R3:** *Social norms and peer pressure in rural areas often discourage acceptance of queer individuals. The desire to conform to community expectations do lead to exclusion and rejection of queer individuals.*

**R4:** *Queer individuals do experience internalized stigma and fear of being ostracized, which can discourage them from seeking acceptance or advocating for their rights.*

**R9:** *NGOs and activists often face challenges in reaching rural areas due to limited resources and infrastructure. This limitation hinders their ability to conduct awareness campaigns and support queer individuals.*

In rural Nigerian communities, community leaders and religious institutions significantly influence attitudes toward queer individuals by upholding traditional values that emphasize heterosexuality and gender conformity. Their resistance to change is driven by a fear that accepting queer identities could disrupt social cohesion and challenge their authority. Conservative religious interpretations, which condemn queer identities, shape the beliefs and practices of followers, creating substantial barriers to acceptance. Additionally, inadequate legal protections for LGBTQ+ individuals exacerbate their marginalization, as local governance often fails to prioritize policies that support queer rights. Social norms and peer pressure further discourage acceptance, leading to the exclusion of queer individuals who also face internalized stigma and fear of ostracization. NGOs and activists struggle to reach rural areas due to limited resources and infrastructure, hindering their efforts to conduct awareness campaigns and support queer individuals.

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## 10. Discussion

The finding reveals that there's a tension between conservative resistance and emerging acceptance influenced by education and broader societal views, with local NGOs pushing for change amidst significant opposition. The finding highlights a complex tension between conservative resistance and emerging acceptance of queer identities in rural Nigerian communities, shaped by cultural, religious, and socio-economic factors. Traditional and religious leaders often uphold conservative values that reject queer identities, a view supported by Gibson (2019) and Connell (2014), who note the deep intertwining of religious teachings with cultural norms. This resistance is also driven by fears of disrupting social cohesion, as Meyer (2016) suggests. Conversely, education plays a pivotal role in shifting attitudes, with Herek (2009) showing that accurate information can reduce stigma, and broader societal views influenced by media and migration contribute to gradual acceptance, as Reddy and Singh (2020) highlight. Local NGOs face significant challenges in advocating for change, including resistance from entrenched institutions and limited resources, as Raj (2021) and Lloyd et al. (2018) discuss.

Religious doctrines, traditional cultural values, authoritative figures, social fear, and economic dependencies collectively reinforce the rejection of queer identities in rural Nigeria. Religious teachings, deeply rooted in Christianity and Islam, often condemn queer identities, as noted by Westwood (2022). Traditional cultural values, emphasizing heterosexual norms, further entrench these beliefs (Connell, 2005). Authority figures, including religious leaders and traditional elders, perpetuate conservative views and influence public perceptions, reinforcing resistance (Meyer, 2015). Social fear of disrupting social cohesion and stability contributes to widespread rejection, while economic dependencies on conservative institutions pressure individuals to conform to anti-queer norms (Raj, 2021).

The finding reveals that religion's influence, through traditional views and fear of divine consequences, creates strong barriers to acceptance, despite some emerging progressive efforts. Religion is intricately woven into cultural norms and societal values, reinforcing conservative attitudes that deem queer identities morally unacceptable. This aligns with Gibson's (2019) work, which argues that religious teachings in conservative contexts often portray queer identities as sinful and contrary to divine will. Such beliefs foster strong resistance to acceptance, as many fear divine retribution or social backlash for supporting LGBTQ+ rights. Even as progressive efforts emerge, driven by education, NGOs, or exposure to broader societal views, they often struggle to overcome these deep-seated religious beliefs. Herek (2009) notes that while education can influence attitudes, the pervasive role of religion can diminish the effectiveness of these efforts, especially when religious leaders and community authorities reinforce conservative interpretations. The fear of divine punishment or societal

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ostracization for challenging religious norms further entrenches these barriers, making acceptance particularly difficult.

The study's findings reveal the significant role of community leaders and religious institutions in reinforcing traditional views on queer identities in rural Nigerian communities, where their authority shapes public opinion and resistance to acceptance. Religious teachings often depict queer identities as incompatible with cultural and moral values, creating a hostile environment toward LGBTQ+ rights. The literature supports this, with Gibson (2019) noting how religious teachings, intertwined with cultural norms, contribute to strong resistance against queer acceptance. Local governance also plays a crucial role, either reinforcing these conservative attitudes through policies or, when progressive, facing resistance from traditional power structures. Raj (2021) highlights how policies reflect and reinforce societal attitudes, making change challenging when opposed by deeply rooted religious and cultural beliefs.

The study reveals that education and awareness efforts are essential in transforming attitudes towards queer individuals by addressing misconceptions, advocating for inclusive policies, increasing visibility, and fostering collective support. These efforts are vital in challenging the entrenched traditional and religious beliefs that often drive resistance to LGBTQ+ rights. Educational programs that provide accurate information about queer identities can dispel myths and challenge harmful stereotypes, leading to more informed and accepting attitudes. Policy advocacy, supported by increased awareness, plays a key role in pushing for legal protections and rights for queer individuals, as seen in Herek's (2009) research, which emphasizes the importance of education in shifting social attitudes and promoting acceptance. Visibility of queer individuals, bolstered by media representation and community engagement, further helps to humanize and normalize their experiences, making it harder for discriminatory attitudes to persist.

The study reveals several significant barriers that impede the acceptance and support of queer individuals in rural Nigerian communities. Traditional values, staunchly upheld by community leaders, form a strong resistance to change, as these leaders are viewed as guardians of social and moral order. There is a widespread fear that accepting queer identities could disrupt established social structures, leading to resistance driven by a desire to maintain social cohesion. Conservative religious doctrines further entrench these barriers, portraying queer identities as incompatible with religious teachings and moral codes. The absence of legal protections for LGBTQ+ individuals exacerbates their vulnerability, exposing them to discrimination and violence without legal recourse. Social norms that stigmatize queer identities contribute to internalized homophobia within the LGBTQ+ community, further hindering their ability to seek support and advocate for their rights. Activists working to address these issues face significant logistical challenges, including limited resources and

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opposition from both the community and religious institutions, making it difficult to sustain advocacy efforts. These findings are consistent with literature that highlights how deeply ingrained traditional and religious values can act as formidable barriers to social change. For instance, Raj (2021) notes that conservative religious doctrines often depict queer identities as morally unacceptable, leading to widespread social stigma. Additionally, the lack of legal protections, as discussed by Herek (2009), leaves queer individuals in a precarious position, further entrenching their marginalization.

### **11. Conclusion**

The study reveals factors affecting the acceptance of queer identities in rural Nigerian communities. Traditional values, reinforced by community leaders and religious institutions, create significant barriers to change, deeply entrenched in cultural and religious norms. The fear of disrupting social order, coupled with conservative religious doctrines and the absence of legal protections, further entrenches resistance to the acceptance of queer individuals. Despite these challenges, education and awareness efforts, often spearheaded by NGOs and influenced by broader societal views, offer pathways to change, though these initiatives face considerable opposition from entrenched institutions and limited resources. The tension between conservative resistance and emerging acceptance reflects a broader societal struggle to reconcile traditional values with progressive efforts for inclusivity and LGBTQ+ rights.

### **12. Recommendations**

To promote the acceptance of queer identities in rural Nigerian communities, several strategic actions are recommended. Enhanced educational programs should be developed to provide accurate information about queer identities, aiming to dispel myths and challenge harmful stereotypes through schools, community centers, and local media. Strengthening advocacy efforts by supporting local NGOs with additional resources and funding is crucial, as these organizations play a pivotal role in raising awareness and pushing for change. Policy reform is needed to advocate for legal protections and inclusive policies that safeguard LGBTQ+ rights. Engaging community leaders in dialogue can help address traditional views and integrate more inclusive perspectives into cultural and religious practices. Promoting visibility and positive representation of queer individuals in media can normalize their experiences and challenge stigma. Addressing socio-economic barriers by improving economic opportunities and reducing reliance on conservative institutions can mitigate pressures to conform to traditional norms. Finally, building coalitions of diverse stakeholders including activists, educators, religious leaders, and policymakers can collaboratively address acceptance barriers and foster a more inclusive society.

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