Media Content Analysis

J-FLAG

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Introduction

J-FLAG is the leading human rights and social justice organization advocating for the rights and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Jamaicans. Through its twenty (20) years of work, the representation of LGBT issues in the media have either been a significant aide or hindrance to our work. Media plays a very important role in setting the agenda. This agenda setting function determines what issues are focused on by media organisations and subsequently what is published. This also means that the media plays a significant role in helping the public form views and opinions on respective issues. It is no different when it comes to LGBT-related issues. Over the years, the media's representation of the LGBT people has been less than favourable with stories being published which perpetuate stereotypes and reinforce the negative attitudes Jamaicans have towards the community. While tolerance towards the LGBT community have gradually improved and the media has improved on its reporting of issues, stories that portray the LGBT community in a negative light continued to be dominant up to 2019.

This media content analysis (MCA) will assess the headlines and content of articles published over the last five years to objectively determine how media coverage of LGBT-related issues have been covered over the period. Specifically, the MCA will look at how articles around issues affecting the LGBT community have been framed as well identify the dominant narratives and trends, shifts in the reportage of the stories and possible factors which have contributed to these trends. Consequently, the challenges in media reporting will be identified, so that efforts to sensitise the media in that regard can take place as well as to make clear the role LGBT people play in shaping their own narratives.

Methodology

The media content analysis utilised a quantitative approach to provide insight into trends in tone and narratives about the LGBT community within Jamaican print media over time. As such, a digital search for relevant articles published between January 1, 2015 – December 31, 2019 by the three main local newspapers was completed. A total of 204 articles pertaining to issues related to the LGBT community were sourced from three local newspapers. 38% (78) of the articles were sourced from the Jamaica Gleaner, 34% (69) were sourced from the Jamaica Star and 28% (57) were sourced from the Jamaica Observer. Articles across the publications fall into the following categories; news, columns, letters to the editor, business, Tell Me Pastor (confessional) and commentary. These categories were used in the MCA. The majority (64%) of articles analysed were news articles followed by columns (18%) and letters to the editor (14%). These three (online) newspapers were chosen because of the wide reach they have individually and collectively across the island and among the Jamaican Diaspora. All three newspapers enjoy the highest average readership and reach of all national publications (All Media Survey, 2014).

Articles considered for the research were analysed for their content and tone as well as that of their corresponding headline. The articles were found through a digital search for key words[1] on the respective newspaper websites. At least ten articles were collected per year from each media house. Notice was made of the section of the paper which the article was published, the dominant narrative present in the article's headline and main content, any stereotypes present in the article's headline or main content and article headline and content were recorded as being positive, negative or neutral. Headlines/articles were considered positive if they highlighted constructive narratives about the LGBT community, while those which reinforced narratives and stereotypes which perpetuate stigma and discrimination against the community were categorised as negative. Neutral headlines and articles did neither of those things and were noted mostly as those which presented issues in a balanced and objective way. Additionally, in an effort to make note of trends and narratives present in media representation of sub-

204 articles from local newspapers were analysed for trends in tone and narratives about the LGBT community

[1] LGBT, Pride, PrideJA, Dancehall+LGBT, The Church + LGBT, Bisexual, Javed, Maurice, JFLAG, WE-Change, TransWave, Buggery, Gays, Legal Challenge, Transgender, Gully Queens, Buggery Law, Homothugs, Homosexual, Homosexuality, Lesbians, Drag Queen , QCJ, Carolyn Cooper, Suelle Anglin, Glenroy Murray, Jaevion Nelson, Homeless Gays, Stop Murder Music, Alando Terrelonge

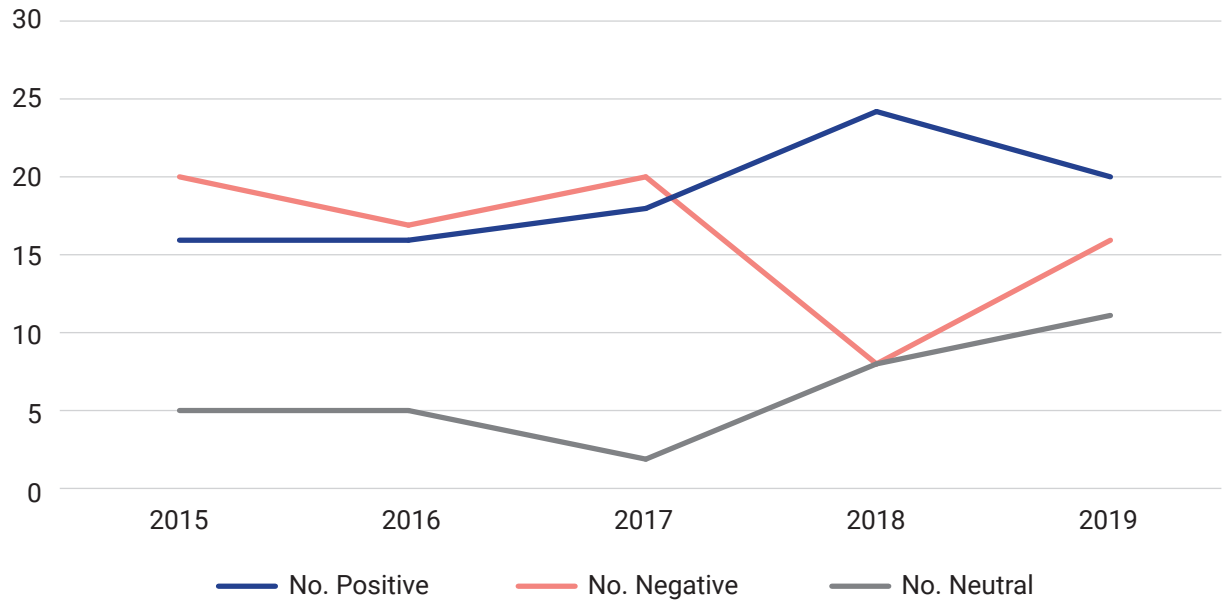
groups within the LGBT community, note was also made of which sub-group was most represented within each article. Articles that focused predominantly and explicitly on issues concerning gay cisgender men, lesbian cisgender women, bisexual cisgender people and transgender people were categorised separately. Articles that spoke about general issues concerning the entire LGBT community such as pride, bullying and human rights were labelled as 'entire community'. In cases where articles did not fall neatly into the thematic frames established, the researchers placed them under the theme that would have some relationship with those variables.

Article collection was completed by three researchers. To ensure reliability and validity of data, a pilot study which considered variables such as article type, year published and the article source was completed among team members. This allowed researchers an opportunity to refine the research tool created for data collation to ensure categories were mutually exclusive, exhaustive and independent. This also increased the likelihood of intercoder reliability. Preliminary analysis of data collected was completed using a research instrument informed by the overarching research purpose as well as preliminary findings. Secondary analysis of data within the research instrument focused on quantifying the overall framing of media articles around issues affecting the LGBT community over the five-year period and the dominant narratives and stereotypes which have surrounded the discourse on the community. This allowed researchers to identify the overall trends and shifts in media articles about the LGBT community from 2015 – 2016 and theorize on possible factors which may have contributed to same.

Findings & Discussion

Articles

TREND IN ARTICLES



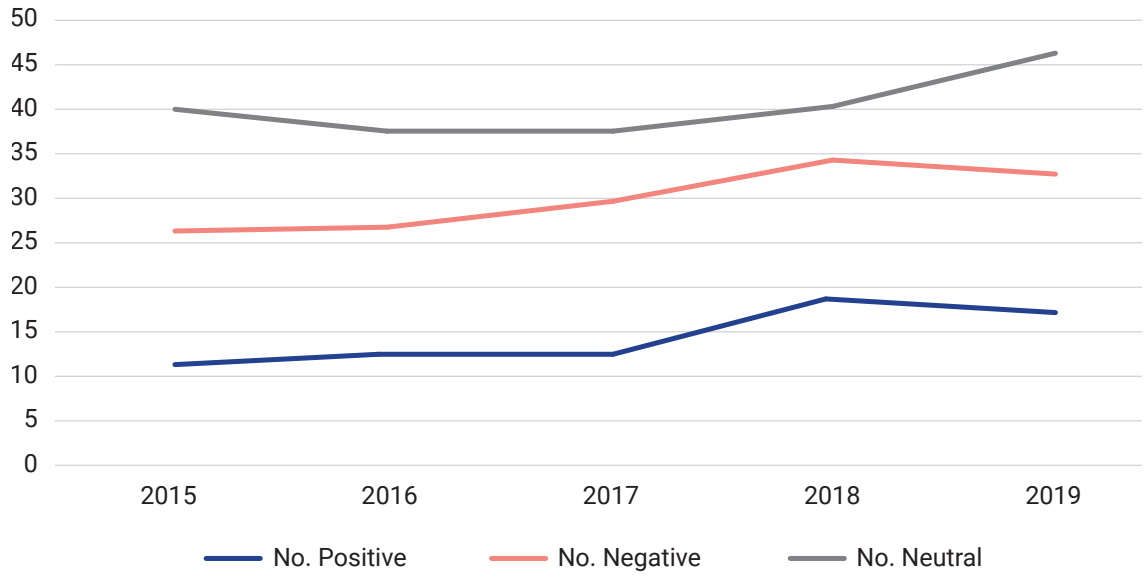
Overall, 45% of articles between 2015 - 2019 of articles were positive, 40% were negative and the remaining 15% were recorded as neutral. The number of positive articles written remained mostly steady between 2015-2017. A 25% increase was recorded between 2017 and 2018 which was followed by a small decrease in 2019.

The number of negative articles written remained mostly steady between 2015-2017; however, a 60% decrease was recorded between 2017 and 2018. During 2018, articles on Prime Minister Andrew Holness's statement on being open to having LGBT people in his Cabinet and pride celebrations were present in all publications. The Gleaner published 4 articles focused on pride, while The Star and Jamaica Observer published 3 and 1 respectively. In 2019, negative articles increased by a 50%.

The number of neutral articles remained mostly steady between 2015-2017. A 75% increase was recorded between 2017 and 2018 which remained steady in 2019.

Headlines

TREND IN HEADLINES



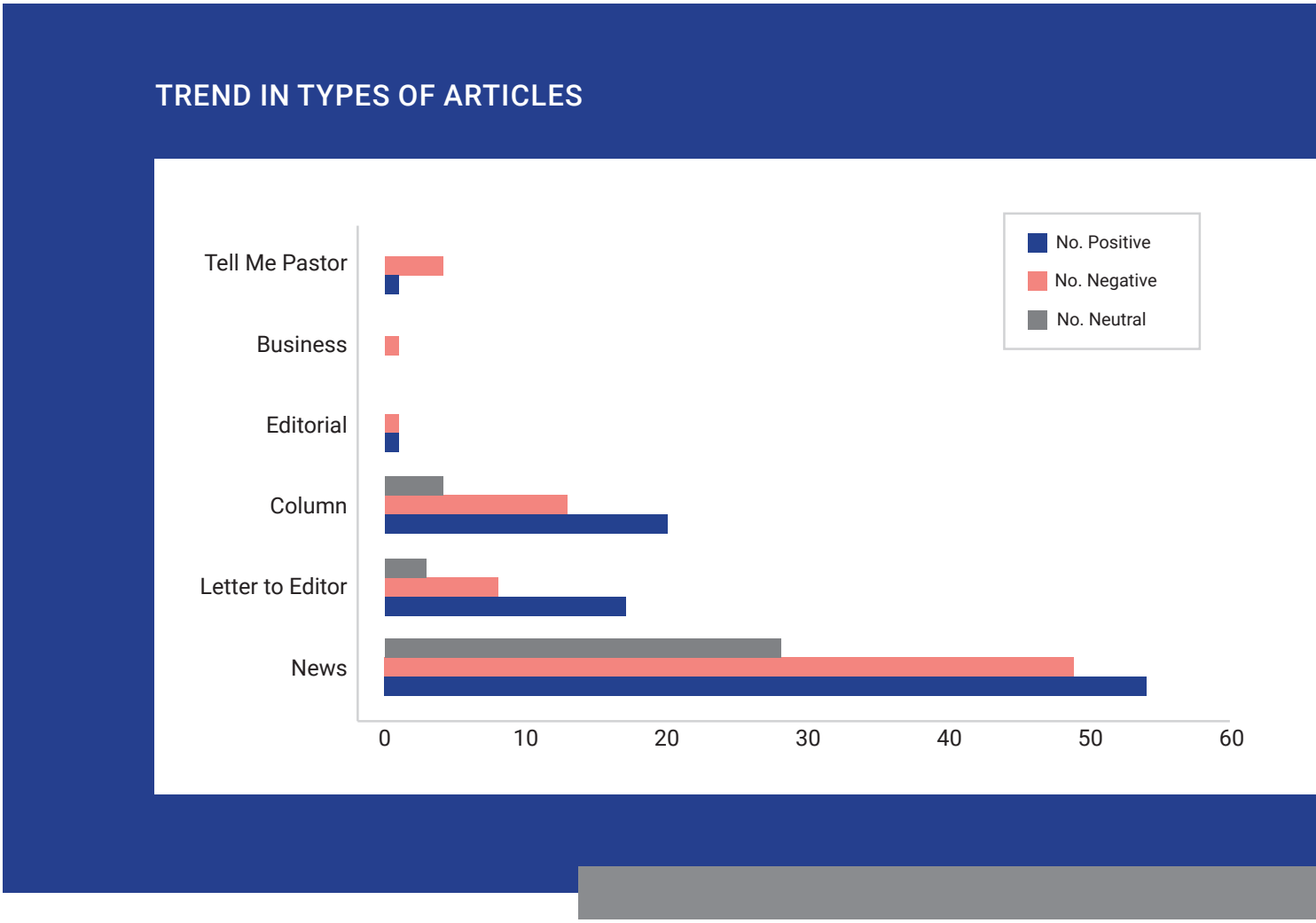
The number of positive headlines remained steady between 2015-2017. A 37% increase was recorded between 2017 and 2018 which remained mostly steady in 2019.

The number of negative headlines remained steady between 2015-2016. A small increase was recorded between 2016-2017 which remained mostly steady until 2019.

The number of neutral headlines decreased in 2017 and continued so in 2018. This was followed by a 64% increase between 2018 and 2019.

In 2015, there were 11 articles categorized as having positive headlines, while the content of 16 articles were categorized as being positive. In the same year, 15 articles had negative headlines, however, 20 articles analyzed from that year were negative. There was also 14 headlines that were identified as neutral, but only five articles turned out to be neutral based on their content. Clickbait is a sensationalized headline or piece of text on the internet designed to entice people to follow a link to an article on another web page. The Star had a number of clickbait articles, which is expected from the publication as a tabloid. One example is ***"No gay leaders in Jamaica's church"*** published on May 30, 2016, with the juxtaposition of gay and church, suggesting that they are incompatible, perpetuating the stereotype that one cannot be gay and Christian. The article ***"Jamaicans aren't killing gays"***, published on March 2016, had a neutral headline, however, the article itself was deemed negative as the article itself gave the impression that there was only gay-on-gay crime and that Jamaica has a very tolerant society. This did and still does not reflect the experience of many LGBT Jamaicans.

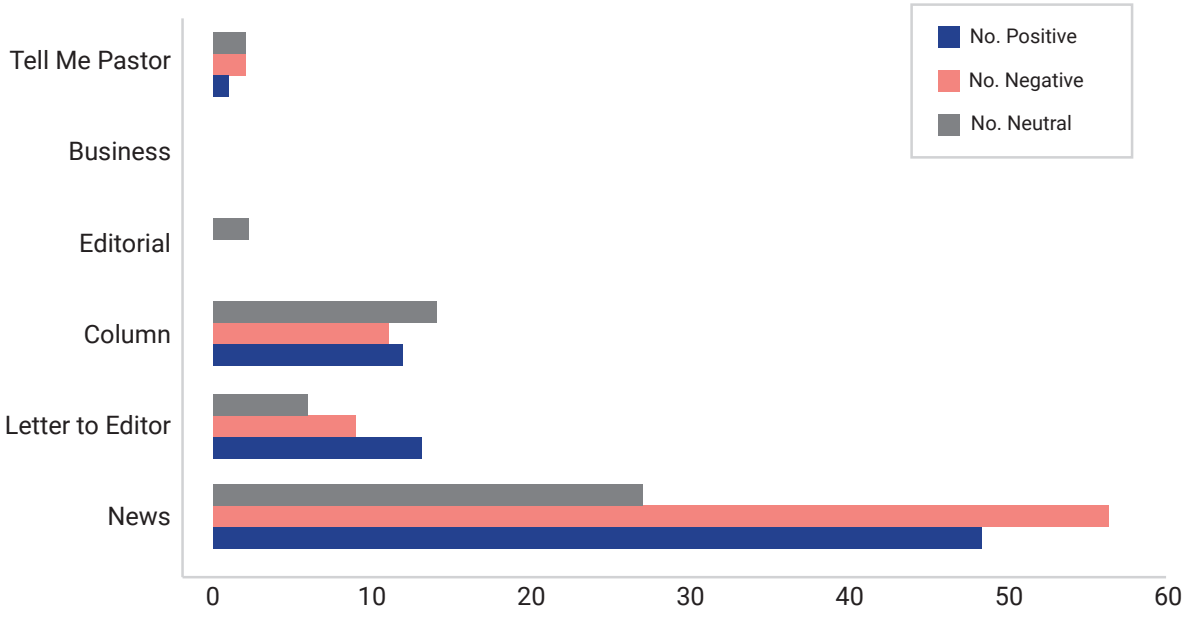
Trends in Types of Articles



As follows the overall findings, news, letters to the editor and columns were more likely to be positive than negative. Notably though, there is only a 4% difference in the number of positive versus negative news articles recorded. This is significantly less than the percentage difference found in letters to editor (32%) and columns (19%). Of the two editorials within the research, one was recorded as positive while the other was found to be negative. The only business article was recorded as negative. The story focused on the improved position of Jamaica in a gay travel ranking, however, pointing out that Jamaica is still the worst in the Americas in that regard. The majority (90%) of advice ***Tell Me Pastor*** articles were recorded as negative with three of them perpetuating the narrative that people can stop being gay.

Trends in Types of Headlines

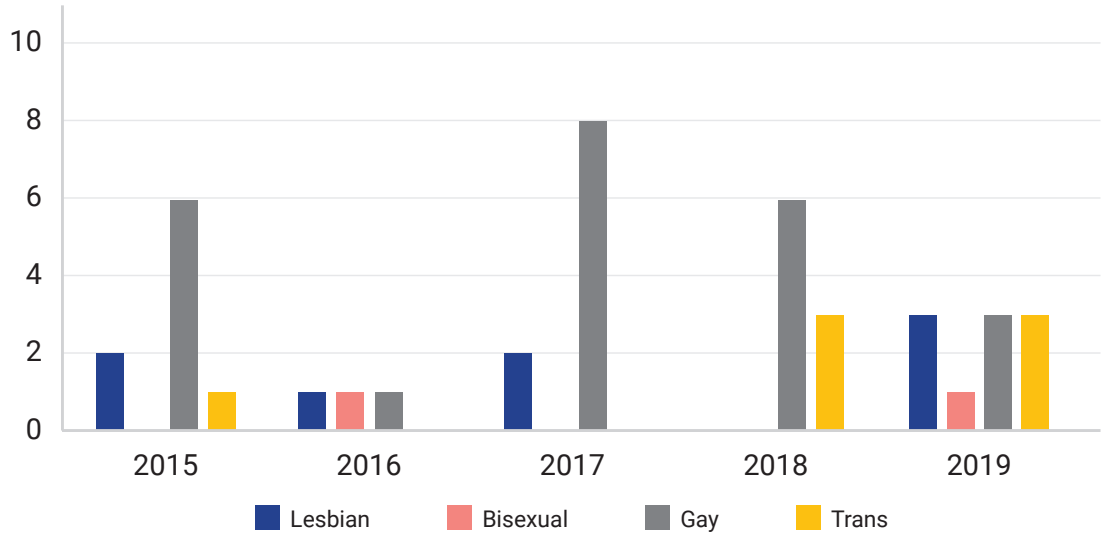
TREND IN TYPES OF HEADLINES



While there are small disparities among the tone of an article's headline when compared to its content, this disparity differed according to the type of article. For news articles, these disparities indicate that positive articles may be accompanied by negative headlines and vice versa. The article 'Cruel Options', published in January 2016, was identified as a neutral, but the accompanying article was negative with the narrative of "negative consequences will come from accepting LGBT people." This was the case of the story published in The Star on September 20, 2019, titled 'Landlord wants gay tenants out of her house' where the headline is negative for click bait, but the article itself was categorised as neutral.

For other types of articles, patterns indicate that regardless of the tone of many articles, headlines veer toward neutrality. For example, more than half (54%) of columns were recorded as positive but only 32% of column headlines were recorded as positive. Further, while only 11% of articles are neutral, 38% of column headlines are recorded as such. This indicates that editors are likely to use neutral headlines regardless of the tone of article's content. This pattern of neutrality in headlines is also evident in letters to the editor, editorials and advice Tell me Pastor columns. While the two editorials were recorded as having positive and negative tones respectively, both headlines were recorded as neutral. Similarly, while the majority (90%) of advice column articles were recorded as negative, 40% of headlines were recorded as neutral. Additionally, while 61% of letters to the editor were positive, only 46% had positive headlines.

Groups Represented



The majority of articles (79%) focused on the entire LGBT community. The largest sub-group represented within articles are gay men with 13% of articles focusing exclusively on issues concerning this group. Of the 13%, most were written in 2017 and the majority (73%) were negative which indicates that the representation of gay men in the media tends to be negative. These articles often portrayed gay men as violent. The Star, for example, had several articles which portrayed gay men as violent. Articles such as 'Gay Man Jailed for Acid Attack', 'Vehicle damaged in gay love triangle' both published in 2015 portray gay men as violent. The lesbian and trans community represented the second and third most represented sub group with 4% and 3% of articles respectively focusing on issues relevant to these groups. In both cases, the majority of articles were positive. The number of articles recorded on lesbians averaged 1.6 per year with 63% of articles being positive. Lesbian representation has fluctuated over time but is more likely to be positive than negative.

The number of articles recorded on the trans community averages 1.5 a year with 86% being positive. Further, 86% of articles about trans people were written between 2018-2019. The only negative article recorded on exclusively trans people was written in 2015 which indicates that over time, trans representation in the media has been more positive.

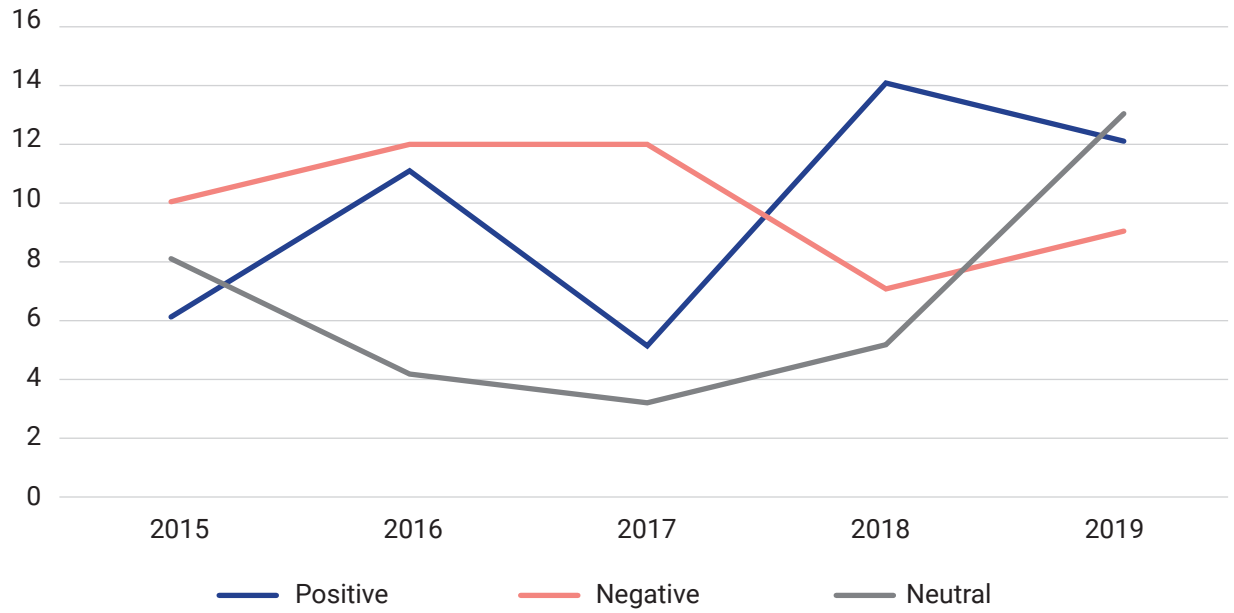
Only two articles (1%) were written on bisexual people, one was recorded as positive and the other was recorded as negative.

Trends in tone of different types of articles over time

This section examines the trends captured in news, columns and letters to the editor articles from 2015 to 2019.

NEWS

TRENDS IN NEWS ARTICLES OVER TIME



The findings show that news articles have become more positive and neutral over time. As the graphs show, the number of positive news articles on LGBT issues fluctuated between 2015-2017 with a significant increase recorded in 2018 which remained steady in 2019.

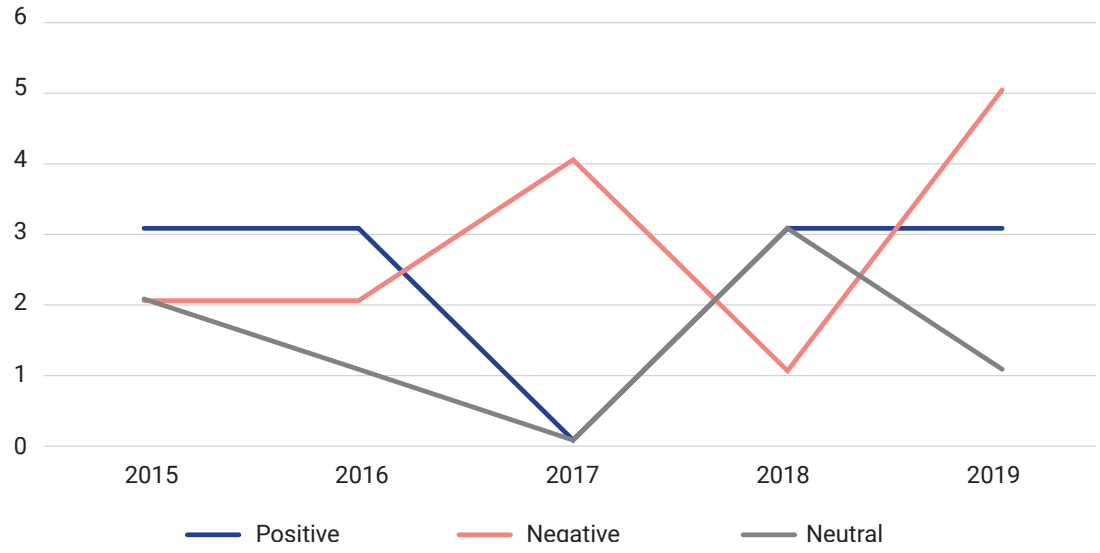
Similarly, the number of negative articles remained mostly steady, with a decrease (42%) being recorded in 2018 which remained steady in 2019. The number of neutral articles generally decreased between 2015-2018 with a significant increase (160%) being recorded in 2019.

In an effort to compare trends in the tone of articles produced directly from the media houses over time, the researchers analysed the overall trends in the news articles collected across the three media houses. Findings show that while the number of positive news articles in the Jamaica Observer and the Jamaica Star increased over time, positive news articles in the Jamaica Gleaner decreased steadily. While the recorded number of negative news articles fluctuated across media houses, both the Jamaica Observer and Jamaica Star experienced a decrease of 5 and 7 respectively in negative news articles in 2018. This was followed by an increase of 7 in negative articles for the Jamaica Observer in 2019 and a increase by 2 for the Jamaica Star. On the other hand, the Jamaica Gleaner had 7 more negative articles in 2018 than it did in 2017, followed by a decrease of 3 in 2019. While there were also fluctuations in the number of neutral articles recorded, a significant increase of 4 was recorded in 2018 in the Jamaica Observer reducing to just 1 in 2019, while the number in the Jamaica Star has increased steadily over time. A significant increase of 3 was recorded in the Jamaica Gleaner in 2019.

Overall, trends in news articles in the Jamaica Observer indicate significant variants in tone in articles over the years, while trends in news articles in the Jamaica Star indicate an increase in positive and neutral articles and a decrease in negative articles. Trends in news articles in the Jamaica Gleaner indicate a decrease in positive articles, fluctuation in negative articles and a notable increase in neutral articles.

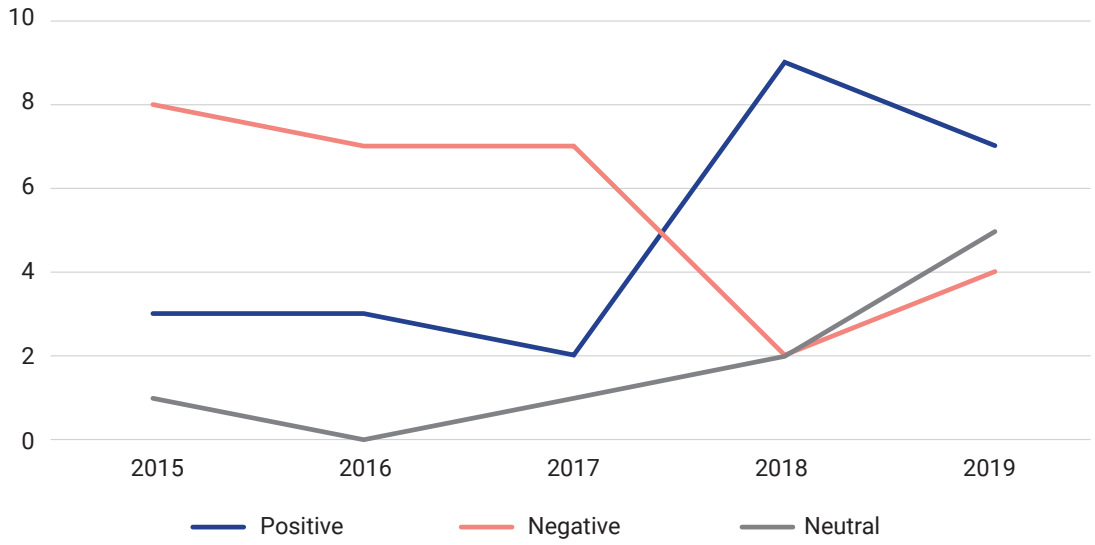
THE JAMAICA OBSERVER

TRENDS IN JAMAICA OBSERVER NEWS ARTICLES



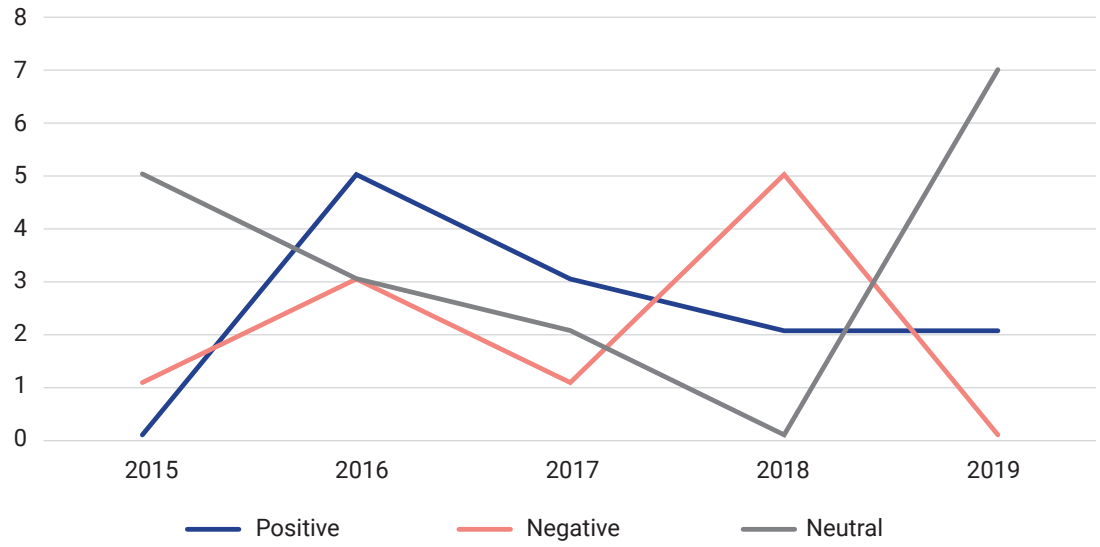
THE JAMAICA STAR

TRENDS IN JAMAICA STAR NEWS ARTICLES



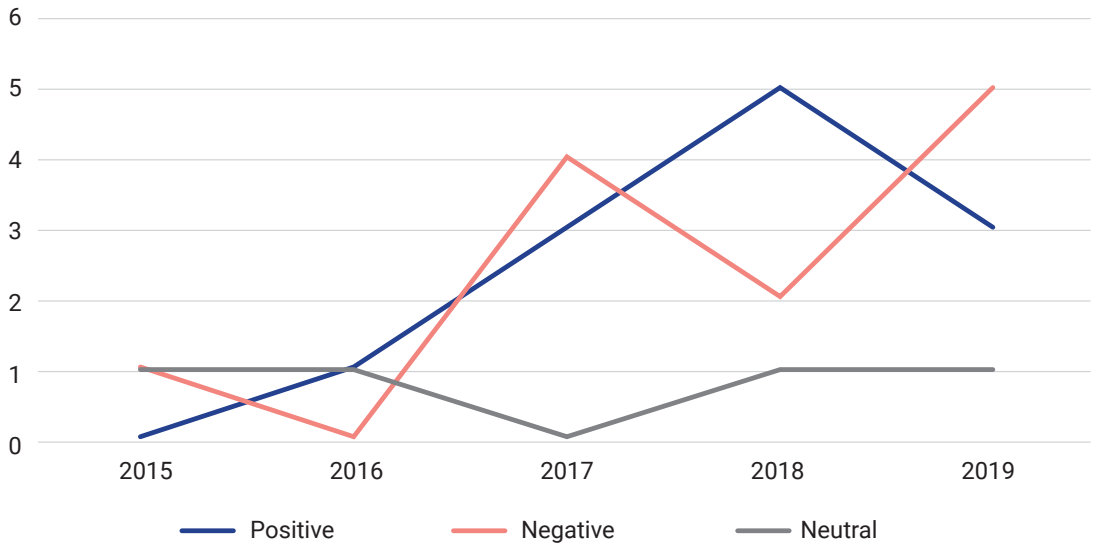
THE JAMAICA GLEANER

TRENDS IN GLEANER NEWS ARTICLES



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

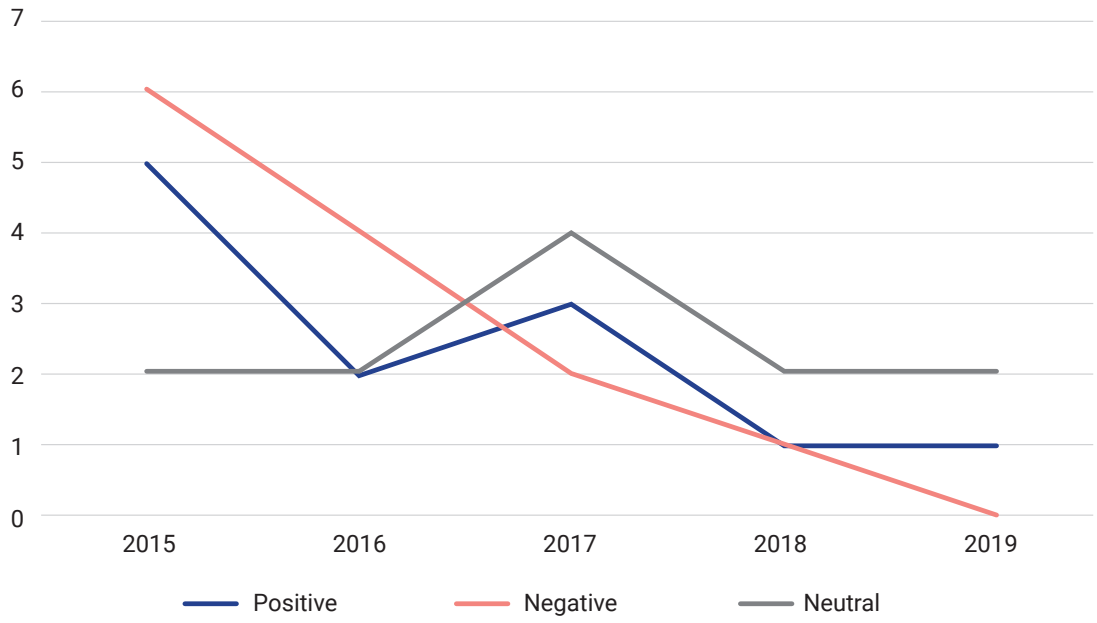
TRENDS IN LETTERS TO THE EDITOR OVER TIME



Findings indicate that the number of letters to the editor on LGBT issues have increased exponentially over time with two articles recorded in 2015 compared to nine articles in 2019. The number of positive letters has increased steadily over time with a decrease of 2 noted in 2019. The number of negative letters has fluctuated over time with a notable increase of 3 in 2019. Letters to the editor are more likely to have a positive or negative tone. The number of neutral letters has remained low and steady over time. **Overall while the majority (61%) of letters have been positive, 32% of letters have been negative with an increase noted in 2019.**

COLUMNS

TRENDS IN COLUMNS OVER TIME

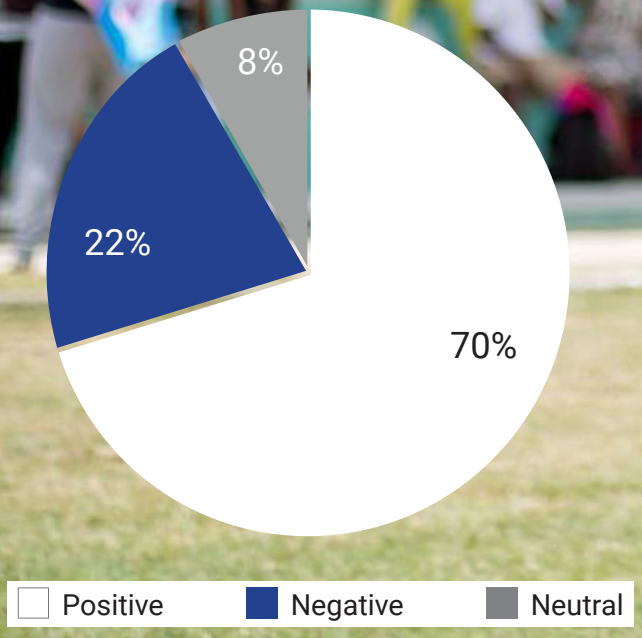


Overall columns seem to be heading toward a tone of neutrality rather than positivity or negativity. Findings indicate that the number of positive and negative columns recorded generally decreased steadily over time with significant decreases between 2017-2019. The number of neutral columns has remained generally steady with a 50% increase noted in 2017 followed by a 50% decrease in 2018, which remained steady in 2019

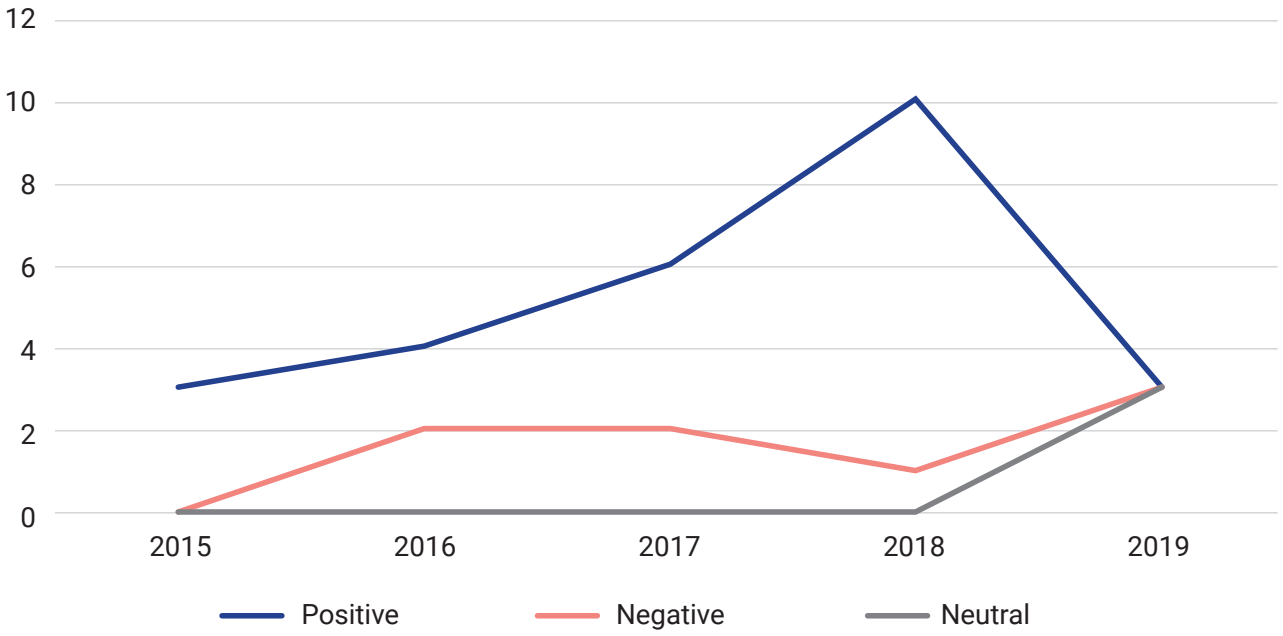
ARTICLES ABOUT PRIDE JAMAICA CELEBRATIONS

Since the first hosting of the now annual local pride celebrations dubbed PrideJA in 2015, much has been written about the local celebration of Pride. Overall, 13% (37) of the total number of articles analysed were about pride celebrations. Of these articles, the majority (70%) were recorded as positive, 22% were recorded as negative and 8% as neutral.

TONE OF ARTICLES WRITTEN ABOUT PRIDE JAMAICA CELEBRATIONS



TREND IN TONE OF ARTICLES WRITTEN ABOUT PRIDE JAMAICA CELEBRATIONS



Findings indicate that the number of positive articles written about local pride celebrations have grown significantly over time with an increase of 7 between 2016-2018. Interestingly, the number of positive articles written about pride decreased from 10 in 2018 to just 3 in 2019, matching the total number initially recorded in 2015. Many of these articles are letters to the editor written by community members speaking to the importance of pride in Jamaica for visibility, as well as a safe space for LGBT Jamaicans to celebrate themselves, and news articles providing general information about pride celebrations. The number of negative articles has remained steady over time with a small increase noted in 2019. Most of these articles questioned the reasoning behind hosting pride celebrations during the local emancipation and independence period and argued that allowing LGBT people to host pride celebrations in Jamaica was immoral. The only neutral articles written about pride were recorded in 2019 and covered dissenting opinions on the second staging of Out for Jesus, a praise and worship service created as a safe space for LGBT Jamaicans who identify as Christian, and varied opinions on whether LGBT people have the right to use public spaces to celebrate pride.

Article Stereotypes & Dominant Narratives

Due to the impact that media framing has on people's knowledge, beliefs and perceptions, it is important to note the potential impact that publishing articles containing erroneous and harmful stereotypes and narratives may have on the way LGBT Jamaicans are perceived and treated by fellow Jamaicans.

STEREOTYPES

While stereotypes weren't found in article headlines, many were found within articles. Stereotypes which arose more than twice in articles across media houses were recorded. The following five main stereotypes were found within articles published from 2015 – 2019: *Jamaicans do not like LGBT people, LGBT people do not have a space within the church, LGBT people are confused, gay men are violent and exposure to LGBT people will negatively impact children.*

The first of these perpetuated that Jamaicans do not like LGBT people as seen in a 2016 news article which perpetuated that there is no space within Jamaica for LGBT people as the 'lifestyle' is not supported by Jamaicans regardless of religion or belief. This was also seen in a **2019 letter to the editor** which stated that LGBT people are deviants and the people of Jamaica will never support them. Another stereotype found was that LGBT people do not have a space in the church or support from Christians as seen in a **2016 column** which suggested that no conservative and Christian school guidance counsellor would support LGBT students who came to them to seek help as Christians cannot support LGBT people. This stereotype was also seen in **2017 column** which suggested that the church could not be a safe space for LGBT people and that church leaders should not speak favourably about LGBT Jamaicans, as well as a **2016 news article** which concluded that individuals could not identify as LGBT and Christian. Additionally, the stereotype that LGBT people are confused was seen in a commentary article written in 2015 which accused transgender people of being confused and a **2018 letter to the editor** which said that LGBT people cannot make up their mind about gender. Further, there were many instances where the stereotype that gay men are violent was perpetuated in the media.

Three **news articles in 2015** from the Jamaica Star detailed incidents of violence among or perpetrated by gay men. In many cases, the frame of the articles solidified the stereotype. Lastly, the stereotype that exposure to LGBT people will negatively impact children was seen in many instances such as a **2017 article** which stated that Jamaicans were angry that international media is 'pushing a gay agenda' in shows which target children and **two 2016 news articles** which were based on research conducted by JFLAG that suggested that people believe that associating with gay people may influence children to think it is acceptable to be LGBT.

DOMINANT NARRATIVES

HEADLINES

A small number of both negative and positive dominant narratives were recorded in article headlines across media houses. These included narratives about local pride celebrations as a safe space for celebration and citizenship, the idea that discrimination against LGBT people significantly impacts the lives and livelihood of LGBT Jamaicans as well as many instances of conflation of individual's sexual orientation and gender identity. Other narratives found in article headlines were that LGBT people are immoral, the US and other Western nations are using LGBT rights as a way to impose their views on the Caribbean and that buggery should be criminalised or decriminalised. The image below gives examples of the article headlines which formed the dominant narratives about LGBT Jamaicans.

Why Jamaica Pride 2015 matters
PRiDE Jamaica – celebrating resilience and triumph
Centring LGBT in Jamaica's future
News
Holness gets support - British PM promises to help reform anti-gay laws
Are straight transgender men lesbian?
Obama's Gay Play
Pastor questions gay agenda
US LGBT groups want Obama to tackle Jamaica on human rights concerns

ARTICLES

Narratives which were either recorded in over three articles per media house across media houses and/or recorded over five times in a single media house were noted as dominant. The most dominant narratives recorded across media houses surrounded a number of issues including local pride celebrations, as a space where LGBT Jamaicans can be free from oppression as seen in this 2016 letter to the editor which outlined the importance of holding pride in the Emancipendence period and this 2017 letter which argued that hosting pride in this period is presumptuous.

Another narrative recorded examined the lived experiences of LGBT Jamaicans and indications that any call for LGBT rights from international bodies was a form of pressure on the Jamaican government to bend to imperialism by the Western nations due to economic dependence. Two examples of this narrative was a 2015 letter to the editor which opined that Jamaica has a strong human rights record which is not being defended by the government who is bending to pressure from the United Stated due to economic dependence and a 2016 article which accused the United States Embassy of having a gay agenda. Other narratives included the negative impacts of discrimination on LGBT Jamaican's lives and livelihood and that government and civil society organisations should do more to protect LGBT people from discrimination as seen in this 2016 news article on tackling homelessness in the LGBT community and a 2015 article which spoke to the many other ways the government should provide support to LGBT people outside of decriminalising the buggery law.

Another narrative recorded was that LGBT people are immoral or confused as seen in this 2016 news article which carried the story of a former government minister who believes that homosexuality is a sin but should not be criminalised and a 2015 column which spoke to the morality of same sex behaviour.

A further narrative which was recorded was the hypocrisy of church leaders and people who often speak against LGBT Jamaicans but ignore other social issues. A 2016 article about a social media post by a Jamaican artiste who accused Jamaicans of ignoring child abuse and incest but speaking out against homosexuality and a 2015 column dealing with similar issues are examples of articles which aligned with this type of narrative. The final dominant narrative surrounded the issue of buggery and whether it should be decriminalised as seen in this 2015 article which examines a legal challenge to the buggery law.

MAIN ARTICLE DOMINANT NARRATIVES

	JAMAICA OBSERVER	JAMAICA GLEANER	STAR
Pride as a space where LGBT Jamaicans can be free from oppression/ Pride as a space where LGBT Jamaicans can change the narrative about Jamaica	5	11	4
LGBT people in Jamaica are entitled to rights and to be free from legal discrimination	0	9	1
Discrimination affects LGBT people's lives and/or livelihood	0	14	0
LGBT people as immoral or confused	6	5	0
Gov't/CSOs need to do more for LGBT people/spaces need to more friendly	0	6	0
Church not a safe space/hypocritical	7	2	2
Buggery should or should not be decriminalised	3	4	3

Conclusion

NEWS
MONDAY
November 26, 2012
Daily informational digest
BUSINESS • POLITICS • ECONOMICS • SCIENCE • ENGINEERING • MEDICINE • INDUSTRY • ECOLOGY • TECHNOLOGY
ANALYTICS
TOP NEWS
FINANCIAL REPORTING NEWS
GLOBAL ECOLOGY: IT'S NOT TIME TO FALL BACK
MOVE YOUR BUSINESS TO CLOUD
Best healthy eating advices
Which one is effective?
Medical research aspects
Sensational discovery
New technologies are coming soon
Expectations uncovered
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The media's coverage of LGBT-related issues has shifted positively over the last five years. While, the number of positive articles published barely exceeds the number of negatives ones, trends observed in articles indicate that the representation of LGBT has improved. What is also evident is the dominance of stories about gay men compared to any other subsection of the LGBT community. Unfortunately, representation of LGBT people, especially gay men, as violent and the retention of the buggery law on moral grounds still dominate print media. Common, too, is the narrative that LGBT people are immoral and confused.

Many of the positive articles in the print media were contributed by JFLAG members or affiliates and were in many instances focused on pride celebrations. This illustrates the importance of LGBT persons themselves in helping to shape the narratives and stories about their lives and experiences. Clickbait headlines containing stereotypes or reductive language were used on some articles, while the content of the articles were positive or neutral. The hypocrisy of the church in dealing with LGBT-related issues was a also a dominant narrative.

While the media's coverage of LGBT-related issues has improved slightly over the last five years, it is important that they do more to promote respect for members of the community in exercising their role in helping to shape perception.

Notes

Notes

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