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**UNDERSTANDING THE CHILD MARRIAGE PRACTICE:  
A RHETORICAL STUDY OF CHILD MARRIAGE FACEBOOK POSTS**

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## ABSTRACT

Various efforts advocating to end child marriage practice have been focused on finding evidence for its harmful effects and ways for development actors to fight against it. While the strategies include key messaging, there is a lack of focus on engaging communication as a social science (Calhoun, 2011). This dissertation utilized the Rhetorical Tradition in Communication Theory to answer this question: What are the rhetorical acts of the defenders and opposers of child marriage? By combined coding of themes and speech acts, and analysis of rhetorical appeals, devices and strategies performed in comments in Facebook posts on child marriage, it finds that the defenders of child marriage assert a collaborative and unified adherence to a belief in the superior form of religion. In contrast, opposers of child marriage vary in their acts, some with anti-religious rhetoric. Overall, combining the speech acts brought the study to the conclusion that the overarching rhetorical act of defenders is religious superiority in matters such as child protection and religious living. In contrast, the speech acts of opposers are scattered.

Advocates to end the child marriage practice have the rhetorical space of situatedness of child welfare as a common ground with defenders. As a precaution, advocates should consider politeness by being selective when calling child marriage a “practice.” For the defenders, the girl’s marriage is mainly a sacred act towards religious perfection under divine law, which is above any material, social, and other worldly concerns.

*Keywords: child marriage, speech act, rhetorical act, Facebook*

## CHAPTER I

### RATIONALE

#### **Child marriage as a communicational interest**

The global prevalence estimate for the occurrence in child marriage is 19 percent (Girlsnotbrdes.org, 2023) or one (1) in every five (5) girls being married before reaching 18 years old. A decade ago, the estimate was one (1) in four (4) girls or 25 percent (UNICEF, 2018). In some areas, however, the rate is estimated to be more than three (3) in five (5) (Bello Dawonaly, 2024) especially in areas where the social norm expects girls to be married by 16 years of age. Estimates since the COVID-19 observed an upward trend when the global pandemic exacerbated poverty and hunger, disrupted access to education, and, in turn, heightened the risk of girls being forced into early marriages (Yukich et. al., 2021; UNICEF, 2021; World Vision, 2021).

The practice of child marriage is considered a human rights violation under international human rights instruments to which almost all of the world's nations have ratified, namely:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR);
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); and
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

The United Nations' definition of Child Marriage:

“Child Marriage, or early marriage, is any marriage where at least one of the parties is under 18 years of age. Forced Marriages are marriages in which one and/or both parties have not personally expressed their full and free consent to the union. A child marriage is considered to be a form of forced marriage, given that one and/or both parties have not expressed full, free and informed consent.” (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights)

The UDHR was created by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948 (General Assembly resolution 217 A). The declaration sets a common standard of fundamental human rights to be universally protected. These rights are universal, indivisible and inalienable without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. The CEDAW, considered as the international bill on women’s rights, and the CRC have been domesticated in several countries.

While there have been anti-child marriage laws in various countries that set the minimum legal age at 18 and a whole lot more country without laws, (Statista, 2023; World Economic Forum, 2016) child marriage remains a hotly debated issue that divides people into those who defend it and those who oppose it (Kikuchi, 2024; Freedom United, 2024; Ali, 2024; Ideasdev.org, 2023; Olaborede & Rembe, 2018; Karthikeyan, 2021; Girlsnotbrides.org, 2016; Gupta, 2012; Bandial, 2014; Blackburn & Bessell, 1997). On one side, advocates condemn it as a harmful cultural practice based on human rights arguments. On the other side, defenders ground their position in cultural, historical and religious justifications.

Seeing the polarization, United Nations (UN) agencies have been referring to child marriage as a social problem that requires knowledge-based and well-crafted communication strategies (UNICEF, 2019) to change social norms. Changing societal norms and consequent behaviors requires ethical and culture-sensitive communication strategies (GirlsNotBrides.org, 2020) that can be accepted by communities that practice child marriage so that social and behavior change, and appropriate policy creation and implementation can begin (ICRW, 2017; World Bank, 2017).

Advocacy for child marriage prevention is mostly focused on strategies with key messages that see the importance of communication but lack a focus on communication as a social science (Calhoun, 2011). ICRW (2013) identified evidence-based strategies can be implemented to delay or prevent child marriage. These strategies include empowering girls with knowledge, skills, and support networks; providing economic support and incentives to girls and their families; educating and mobilizing parents and community members; improving girls' access to quality education; and promoting laws and policies that support these goals. Advocacy, which is generating "public support for or recommendation of a particular cause" (Google dictionary) is performed through communication.

What the ICRW strategies indicate reflects Calhoun call for a serious consideration for communication as social science:

"Communication as an academic discipline, sometimes called "communicology," relates to all the ways we communicate, so it embraces a

large body of study and knowledge. The communication discipline includes both verbal and nonverbal messages. A body of scholarship all about communication is presented and explained in textbooks, electronic publications, and academic journals. In the journals, researchers report the results of studies that are the basis for an ever-expanding understanding of how we all communicate. Communication happens at many levels (even for one single action), in many different ways, and for most beings, as well as certain machines. Several, if not all, fields of study.” (p.1)

Calhoun referred to communication as “widely heterogenous” (p.2) and called for communication researchers to engage in the “active pursuit of interdisciplinary connections around key social issues” (p.18).

The need for communicational interest in the advocacy to end child marriage has also been demonstrated to the researcher through her work in communities where marrying girls is considered a norm and where women’s groups have been advocating for the changing of such norm. When faced with local leaders who are experienced in public speaking and skilled in rhetoric, a.k.a. persuasive argumentation, women’s groups have not been able to talk back with counter-arguments. Bravery in advocating for change was not enough when debated by male officials experienced in public speaking. Not being able to study the rhetoric of the male officials, the women did not have anything to say for the listening public to hear and push for their cause.

Advocates working to end child marriage must do more than just organize

events and send messages derived from their own lived understanding. They must carefully plan and strategize, utilizing strong communication skills including persuasion techniques. Persuasive communication involves assessing their own messages and strategies, as well as understanding the persuasive arguments made by those who defend the practice. This requires a deep interest in understanding the issue of child marriage, which can be achieved through thorough research. Through insights gained from such research, advocates can develop persuasive messages and arguments to win over support for their cause. It is also important to engage in conversation with defenders to understand their perspectives and identify opportunities for persuasion. By opening communication with defenders and communities, advocates can explore solutions and alternatives with defenders and their communities so that paths to abandoning child marriage as a practice can begin.

### **Discourses in Communication Research**

The four types of Discourses in Communication Research offer a way to approach the problem of child marriage within communication scholarship. Saludadez (2020) discussed the Discourses in Communication Research based on Mumby's (1997) work. According to Saludadez (2020), Mumby who was inspired by Foucault outlined four discursive stances available to communication scholars: Discourse of Representation, Discourse of Understanding, Discourse of Suspicion, and Discourse of Vulnerability. In the Discourse of Representation, knowledge creation is seen as a process where the knower is distanced from what is known, viewing communication as a tool for conveying pre-existing ideas. The Discourse of Understanding portrays a more interactive relationship between the knower and the

known, that communication is constitutive of reality. The Discourse of Suspicion focuses on the relationship between the knower and the known but goes deeper into power structures. Lastly, the Discourse of Vulnerability challenges the idea of a privileged knower, emphasizing the alternative ways of knowing. From these four types, the researcher, knowing her own leaning towards the Discourse of Suspicion—child marriage being a symptom of patriarchal society leading to violation of the rights of women and children from the Feminist standpoint – chose to suspend this bias to pursue the Discourse of Understanding, hoping for a way to understand child marriage practice from the lived world of its practitioners who seemed fully convinced that child marriage is not harmful, culturally appropriate, and is for the good of girl-children. Understanding the perspective of child marriage defenders enables advocates to craft persuasive arguments and strategies that directly address the defenders’ rhetoric. In turn, this leads to fostering the development of communication strategies that encourage defenders and practicing communities to engage in dialogue and explore alternatives.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A keyword search on child marriage research in [academia.edu](https://www.academia.edu), one of the world's largest free-access databases on academic papers, turned up more than 758,000 full-text papers that can be downloaded or requested. Studies on child marriage are increasing in number. However, no literature appears when searching for papers that examine the rhetorical acts on child marriage, particularly the side of the defenders.

#### 2.1 Opposition to Child Marriage

The journal and special papers that appeared mostly present positions opposed to the child marriage practice through prevention strategies and solutions (Nugrahen, 2023; Nugroho, 2023; Hidayah, K. 2023; ICRW, 2013), international and national laws and legal reforms (UN et al., 2023), effects on education and well-being (Mughal, 2020), lived experiences of survivors (Ekobi, 2023), economic implications (Oluwaseyi, 2023), and drivers of child marriage (Women Refugee Commission, et al., 2021), among others.

Studies in developing countries also looked at norms and health concerns. A study commissioned by Oxfam (Valerio & Butt, 2020) looked at gender norms on masculinity and femininity to determine the gender roles and responsibilities in decision-making in marriage. While it included child, early, and forced marriages

(CEFM), its focus was on sexual and reproductive health factors that directly affect the implementation of laws.

Other studies focused on the indigenous communities and examined the effects of child marriages—examining the economic and socio-cultural push/pull factors and the effects of child marriages on families (Espesor, 2012) but was not able to go deeper into the indigenous worldview where the practice emanates from. There was a published study on communicative practices that sustain child marriages in indigenous communities (Bello Dawonlay, 2024) but was limited to the role of communication in maintaining the social order that keeps child marriage practice intact.

The global study released by UNICEF, UNFPA, and GirlsNotBrides.org presented evidence of research and interventions from 2020 to 2022. The study summarized thematic areas: education; livelihoods and economic rights; sexual and reproductive health and rights; voice, choice, and agency; shifting individual and collective norms; women's rights organizations and feminist movements; and, legal frameworks and gender-responsive budgeting (UNICEF et al., 2023). The desk review gathered information from South Asia, Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia. It is comprehensive but settles its knowledge within the political language of child marriage as a serious violation of human rights. In all these studies, the absence of consent – including the person under 18 years of age or anyone who is considered not to have the capacity to give their consent because of any mental or any condition – is a major underlying concern. Any occurrence of marriage below 18 is considered early and forced, a violation of human rights.

Further on the study conducted by the Women's Refugee Commission, which was conducted with Plan International and Transforming Fragilities and (2022), the emphasis was on examining child marriages in humanitarian settings. Using mixed methods, including a tool called (c)*Sensemaker*, the research presented the risk factors that drive child marriages, including the economic and socio-cultural structures and gaps in government and humanitarian services. It also presented social media and technology as "drivers of child marriages" and the "prized resources that contributed to the identity of an adolescent" adaptiveness (Women's Refugee Commission, 2021, p.53). Overall, despite its repetition of what previous studies have been able to illustrate such as structural, social, cultural, economic, and other dimensions that explain the drivers and effects of child marriage and the gaps in services that could be provided by government and development actors, it was also able to squeeze through the interviewed girls' statement that "posting about child marriage on Facebook is a way to increase awareness and validate the seriousness of the issue." The girls themselves look to communication and platform such as Facebook as a path that could lead to finding paths to ending child marriage practice.

Other studies (Bello Dawonlay, 2024) saw a strong correlation between child marriage and child labor, particularly affecting girls who are burdened with household responsibilities and caring for their families. Married girls often spend long hours conducting unpaid work, which can lead to dropping out of school and agreeing to early marriage. In some cases, child marriage is linked to armed conflict, where girls are married off to boys or older men secure alliances and seal loyalty as fighters.

This intertwining of child labor and marriage is prevalent in areas affected by poverty and conflict. The study's findings revealed the child marriage practice's deep embeddedness and interlinkages with other social issues such as child labor.

## **2.2 Religious writers**

Views relating to the historically established existence of the practice (Ramdani, 2023) presented the religious perspective of women's rights in marriage (whether early or not) under religious law. Ramdani emphasized respect for women's consent but did not call for the practice to end. Karim (2023), writing in reaction to the Western mindset of imposition without negotiation and set within the perspective of religious law and seeking to negotiate the ending of child marriage practice within religious communities, clarified that the girl reaching menstruation age, and the boy reaching 13 years old indicate readiness for marriage. He clarified that while religious law does not forbid it, it is not equivalent to saying it should not be avoided. For Karim, "the best method remains the education of the population about the harms and dangers associated with the practice for, in practice, mere law application is not effective" (p.10).

Baraie, Rezaei & Nadrian (2024) identified four factors, namely, 1) law including religious topics such age of marriage, 2) religious interpretation on child marriage, 3) government and religious institutions, and 4) religious view of families such as avoiding sin and religious duties of parents and children as determinants to marriage or non-marriage of children. According to them, working on these four mentioned factors can potentially discourage child marriage practice.

Sheik (2018) proposed studying child marriage within the complex religious law and jurisprudence invited a close “reflection of whether it is advisable to adopt a reform-orientated approach when assessing such an expansive topic” based on the “idea that puberty is the age when a child manifests prudence (rushd) and discernment (tamyiz)” (from Abstract). With this idea, child marriage only needs reform and not abolishment.

Ullah, Aziz & Idrees (2021) go directly to arguing on ending child marriage practice within the religious community by expressing concern for child marriage as a serious issue, harmful, a form of slavery, and violating children’s rights. They discussed efforts in international law and in religious law with the goal of restraining child marriage practice. The research found child marriage to be “practiced arbitrarily with married couples “not having opportunity to pursue their post marriage education” and “especially female, are not aware of the existence of legal assistance in the legal system to protect them from such early marriage” due to inadequacy of laws “in restraining of the practice” and religious law permitting “a guardian of a child to marry off his ward before she attains puberty but the marriage can only be consummated after she attained puberty” (from Abstract).

Hasan (2023) wrote about the implementation gap in ending child marriage in countries where religious law is followed alongside government law. Looking at religious culture as a barrier to the implementation of international commitments on child rights and ending child marriage, Hasan provided argument within the tenets of religious law. The arguments include the requirement of maturity through capacity to

make sound judgment, the necessity of the woman's consent, and the invalidity of marriage if performed without the woman's consent. The consummated marriage of a religious icon to a young girl was the only exception, an act that cannot be repeated by any other person. However, Karim wrote that there could have been fabrication on the real age of the girl (Karim, p.5). Quoting another scholar, Hasan writes that "No Command is available" approving child marriage. The religion "rather promotes compulsory education and health care for all."

Walker (2015) spoke about the effort to promote intra-religious dialogues within religious communities. The approach of engaging Religion A believer religious leaders through leadership training on public health was effective in reaching communities for behavior change and reforming unhelpful practices such as child marriage.

However, despite the availability of religious scholarship that leans toward discouraging child marriages, the prevailing approach by advocates as reflected in reviewed literature on advocacies by the UN agencies and other civil society organizations to end child marriage is direct from the human rights perspective.

### **2.3 Before Human Rights**

In pre-colonial times, the union of individuals before reaching 18 years of age was already a practice prior to the creation of the concept of human rights . It was only when the United Nations and the concept of human rights came that the practice came up as a violation of human rights, including the rights of the child as

articulated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Found in the literature are descriptions of the practice of child marriage prior to the advent of United Nations concept of human rights.

The practice of early marriage has been part of the social order in pre-colonial times across diverse customs, traditions, and belief systems of different ethnic groups (Junker, 1999), including religious communities (Majul, 1999). In many parts of the world, the concept of free choice in marriage as a right did not come until after the creation of the UN when national laws began to be patterned within the concept of human rights (Ebertuk, 2020).

Child marriage as a concept did not yet exist and was within the practice of arranged marriages where families, clans and communities as part of collectivism, group loyalty, economic survival, community cohesion, strengthening of the ethnic identity and existence, and alliance-building between families and communities, among others (Bello, 2024). Through indigenous communicative practices, the marriage of girls are being facilitated by parents to “put into order the lives of the vulnerable girls, secure the provisions for the children and family, and keep the safety of the girls, family, and community from want and harm” (Bello, 2024, p.425). According to tribal elders who were informants of the study, this was derived from indigenous practice since before the government came into being. Child marriage has been one of the ways the communities do social order such that it is deeply rooted in the socio-cultural, economic, and political fabric of indigenous communities. According to Bello, “Child marriages are knitted into the social order, and uncalculated attempts to stop it will involve re-ordering or disordering that social

order. Stomping down on child marriages without recognizing their integral part in a society could be taken by practicing communities as disturbing the order and the way the community has been living.” (p. 425).

For instance, in Hindu societies, it was considered a sacred duty (dharma) essential for maintaining social order. The *Manusmriti*, an ancient legal text, prescribed early marriage for girls, often before puberty, to ensure their purity and adherence to societal norms. In other religious communities, the practice of early marriage was sanctioned by religious teachings, with some interpretations of the holy scriptures supporting the marriage of girls at a young age. (Tahir, 2021)

In China, Confucian ideals emphasized filial piety and the continuation of the family line, often leading to the practice of early marriage to ensure that offspring were produced at a young age. The marriage of young girls, sometimes as early as 13 or 14, was also seen as a way to strengthen family alliances and social status (Tran, [n.d.]; Dong, 2016).

## **2.4 Communication and Rhetorical Analysis**

One paper that looked at child marriage and rhetoric was Eisler (2018), who focused on feminist analysis of the roots of child marriage and proposed strategies to end the practice. Eisler provides a good background to the context from which the defenders and opposers of child marriage emanates:

*During the 1700s, the “rights of man” movement that emerged during the European Enlightenment challenged the “divinely ordained” right of*

*despotic kings to rule their “subjects.” This was followed by the feminist movement, which challenged the “divinely ordained” right of men to rule the women and children in the “castles” of their homes. The abolitionist, civil rights, and anticolonial movements challenged the “divinely ordained” right of one race or nation to rule over another. The pacifist and then peace movements challenged the use of force to impose rankings of domination.*

*The movement for social and economic justice, and later the human rights movement, challenged traditions of violence and injustice.*

*The environmental movement challenged man’s “divinely ordained” right to dominate and conquer nature. (Eisler, p. 14)*

As Eisler states, human rights emerged only around 300 years ago while the religion and social order from which child marriage emerged has been for thousands. The rhetoric of child marriage comes from social order of the “divinely ordained” men who rule over women and children, set in stone until the feminist movement challenged this order with rights and justice. This was also the point made by the study on communicative practices that maintain the order of child marriages in indigenous communities (Bello, 2024).

While Eisler's study was on rhetoric, its feminist critical stance already positioned itself as a challenger and not meant to persuade the defenders of the practice to jump over to the feminist side. From the researcher's personal experience, taking on a feminist critical stance was like speaking to blank walls in actual settings where advocacy meets face-to-face with the keepers of the social order that have

existed way longer than the concept of human rights and child marriage practice was part of that divine order.

## **2.5 Social Media**

One notable study that involved social media was by Kasimoglu and Tekin (2022), who tried to understand the situation of child marriage as portrayed in social media. Through selected interviews with early-married girls and local media employees, factors that facilitate child marriages and the effects of child marriage on girls were presented. While the study focused on social media, it did not explore communication strategies to advocate for the end of child marriage.

There is no study that tried to understand the rhetoric of child marriage through the perspective of its defenders. No rhetorical research attempts to examine child marriage within the domain of social media such as Facebook or YouTube. Analysis of Facebook posts is a relatively new method (Farina, 2018), and the focus on child marriage as a topic for research in social media seems to have not yet been done by anyone. There seems to be no published research that examines child marriage via Facebook comments' rhetoric. All studies mentioned comprehensively see the problem from the perspective of rights and development. There seems to be no focus on communication as a force to form and integrate societies (Ong, 1982) or do social order, particularly communities, through rhetoric. The specific approach of the study was to look at the rhetoric of Facebook comments on child marriage to help understand the persistence of child marriage practice from the communication perspective.

## 2.6 Summary

Various studies and reports opposed child marriage through strategies like prevention, legal reforms, and exploring its impacts on education, well-being, and economics. The studies highlighted the need for interventions to address the structural, social, and cultural dimensions perpetuating child marriage globally.

Various religious writers have discussed child marriage within religious law and the religious community. Ramdani emphasized respecting women's consent but did not call for an end to the practice. Karim clarified that although religious law does not forbid child marriage, education about its harms is crucial evidence that argues for the practice to end. Baraie, Rezaei & Nadrian identified factors that can discourage child marriage, while Ullah and Hasan argued for ending the practice due to its harmful nature and violation of children's rights. Efforts for reforming practices like child marriage within religious communities have been made through intra-religious dialogues and leadership training. Despite the presence of some religious scholars discouraging child marriage, the predominant and central approach to end it has been from a human rights perspective, as advocated by UN agencies and civil society organizations.

Child marriage is a difficult practice to end as it was already common practice before the establishment of human rights frameworks, and so deeply embedded in various cultures worldwide, Hindu societies, Islamic traditions, and Confucian ideals. Since its creation, the United Nations and human rights conventions have since highlighted child marriage as a violation of human rights, particularly children's rights. The practice was historically justified for reasons such as social order, economic

survival, and alliance-building, but is now recognized as detrimental to children's well-being and rights. Various cultures have upheld early marriage for reasons like purity, societal norms, family alliances, and filial piety, but global efforts under the purview of international human rights emphasize the importance of free choice and protection of children's rights in marriage practices.

Eisler's feminist analysis delved into the historical roots of child marriage, proposing strategies to combat the practice and highlighting the challenge of advocating for change in entrenched social orders, where defenders of child marriage hold steadfast. Other studies, like Kasimoglu and Tekin's exploration of child marriage on social media, shed light on the factors and effects of the practice but lack a focus on communication strategies for advocacy.

This research is unique because previous studies have not explored the rhetorical strategies used by defenders of child marriage, more so their rhetorical act. Additionally, this study used a new approach in child marriage research by analyzing Facebook comments to understand child marriage defenders' rhetoric, a method not previously employed by scholars. It further distinguishes itself by examining the rhetoric of those opposed to child marriage practice.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND QUESTIONS

#### 3.1 Rhetorical Tradition in Communication Theory

This study took off from the Rhetorical Tradition that has continually evolved through scholars over the past hundreds of years (Aristotle; Craig; Burke, Ramage, Bean & Johnson; Toulmin; Ferretti and Adornetti, and many others). The Rhetorical Tradition was used to analyze the rhetorical acts that sustain child marriage practice with Facebook comments on posts on child marriages as the research schema.

#### **Figure 1:** *Rhetorical Tradition Scholars*

Craig (1999) described the Rhetorical Tradition as one of seven distinct traditions in communication theory. He outlined the Rhetorical Tradition as focusing on the practical art of discourse and the ways in which communication can be used to influence, persuade, and inform an audience. Immersing in the

- Collaborative art guiding judgment (Farrell in Craig)
- Persuasion Appeals for a specific audience (Aristotle in Bartlett)
- Identification, Common Ground (Burke)
- Argumentation (Ramage, Bean & Johnson; Toulmin)
- Rhetorical Pragmatics (Ferretti & Adornetti)
- Understanding, natural settings between real people (speakers and audience), contextually situated (Hoey & Kendrick)
- Speech act under persuasive communication (Austin, Searle)
- plus social media influencing society (Li) and shaping opinion (Park and Tsou, Ausat)

world of Facebook posts on child marriage, the rhetorical context was the exchanges of comments between the defenders and opposers of child marriage, which were posted as news but with a bias to end the practice. In Facebook comments,

speakers, who are also audiences themselves, engage in rhetorical non-sequential turn-taking comments to defend or oppose the practice with the goal of persuasion.

Much more focused on persuasion, the Rhetorical Tradition looks at how communication can be crafted to influence attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. It involves the study of various rhetorical strategies. Rhetorical communication is also context-dependent, with persuasion operating within specific audiences.

Aristotle's "Rhetoric" (in Bartlett, 2019) explores the elements of persuasive communication, particularly ethos (credibility of the speaker), pathos (emotional appeal), and logos (logical reasoning). Burke (1950) highlighted "identification" as important to finding common ground between the speaker and the audience to create persuasive messages. Burke is famous for his definitions of rhetoric as "the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents" (Burke, 1950; p. 41).

Ramage, Bean & Johnson (1992) highlighted rhetoric's persuasive argumentation through justification (e.g., reasons, grounds, warrants), involvement of two or more people searching for a solution by giving of opinion or information, and truth-seeking. The Toulmin method is an argumentative approach that divides arguments into six main components: claim, grounds, warrant, qualifier, rebuttal, and backing. The claim is a statement or assertion that the arguer aims to demonstrate. Grounds refer to the evidence or reasons supporting the claim, while the warrant is the logical connection that ties the grounds to the claim. Qualifier clarifies the extent and limitations of the claim by acknowledging exceptions or conditions that could impact its validity. Rebuttals are opposing arguments that challenge the claim, addressing objections and enhancing the

argument's strength. Backing offers additional support for the warrant, strengthening the link between the grounds and the claim with supplementary reasoning or data to bolster credibility and authority.

Ferretti's and Adornetti's rhetorical pragmatics emphasize how speakers shape their communication to persuade within a conversation that has a context, speaker (commenter) intentions, and a particular reader or audience who have their own ways of being convinced. In rhetorical pragmatics, communication or comments exchange are crafted to suit the persuasion contexts.

Craig (1999), citing Farrell (1993, p.1), explains that "rhetoric is the collaborative art of addressing and guiding decisions and judgment - usually public judgment that cannot be decided by force or expertise" (p. 135). The Facebook comment is one place for rich rhetoric. Being a virtual space deprived of physicality, speakers may talk directly to each other, trying to persuade one another through rhetorical acts.

Speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) is a linguistic theory that emphasizes how utterances not only convey information but also perform actions. This theory suggests that when people speak or write, they are not only expressing ideas but also engaging in various types of actions. In this study, speech act theory is used in the context of the Rhetorical Tradition. Comments are considered persuasive communication in different types of speech acts: locutionary or literal meaning of themes derived from comments, illocutionary or function of themes and

how they were communicated, and perlocutionary or effect on the audience of themes and how they were communicated.

### 3.2 Facebook as a Site of Knowledge Production

A rhetorical act refers to a form of communication designed to persuade, influence, or involve an audience using language, symbols, and persuasive methods. These acts incorporate various verbal and nonverbal tactics with the aim of achieving specific objectives, like persuading an audience to adopt a certain perspective, motivating action, or molding attitudes and beliefs. Bitzer (1968) describes rhetorical acts as situations that demand utterance (p. 4) carrying persuasive significance and influenced by the demands of the rhetorical context.

## Rhetorical Act

Some authors have pointed to the importance of social media in shaping public discourse. As social media occupies the daily lives of people, it has been able to influence people's knowledge, opinions and interactions. Importantly for this research, social media enables people to express their views to shape opinions on public issues (Park and Tsou, 2020; Ausat, 2023). Studying rhetoric, Li (2016) supported the idea that social media has been influencing society broadly. Eliciting emotional responses, establishing credibility and logical persuasion attract attention and engagement.

According to Campbell (2003), rhetorical acts are accomplished upon successful persuasion. For this research, the comments that contain topics, themes and speech acts painting mental images in the reader's mind were the performances

of the speakers. Combined with persuasion appeals, strategies and devices, these composed the rhetorical act that sustains child marriage.

The continuation of child marriage practice is a rhetorical problem (Craig, 1999, p.133). Communication through comments in Facebook reveal how child marriage is sustained by defenders. Facebook comments is a rhetorical situation where speakers attempt to persuade one another on the much-discussed social issue of child marriage. It is where speakers address the reading/listening/watching public through various appeals to logic, emotion, and communicator qualities and through devices and methods of persuasion and way of doing conversation. Facebook is a virtual place rich in rhetoric with naturally occurring conversations (Button et al., 2022) with a particular natural "organization in FB comment threads" (Farina, 2018, p. 189). This means Facebook comments can provide rich data for rhetorical analysis where natural conversations occur, audiences persuading one another on the exigent social issue of child marriage.

In the Facebook comments' rhetorical situation, the purpose is to defend or oppose child marriage to assert who is right and persuade for approval. The audience are the speakers and the reading public. The topic is the Facebook post on child marriage. The writers are the Facebook users who post their comments. The context is the virtual exchange of comments pertaining to a real situation presented by the Facebook post while also deriving comments from the lived contexts of the speakers. There is exigency in the topic of child marriage as it is concerned with child welfare with protective and punitive laws in place. The genre is the virtual space where speakers can be anonymous, making the discussion rich in

expressions of logic, emotions and character assertions and attacks.

Facebook comments form logical discussions alongside public speaking, which are two general areas mentioned by Aristotle (Berger, citing Mckweon, 1941, p.1329). Facebook's public comments section contains talk-in-interactions occurring in natural settings between real people and are contextually situated (Hoey & Kendrick, n.d.). It is a place to study the wisdom and skills of communicators and learn from them.

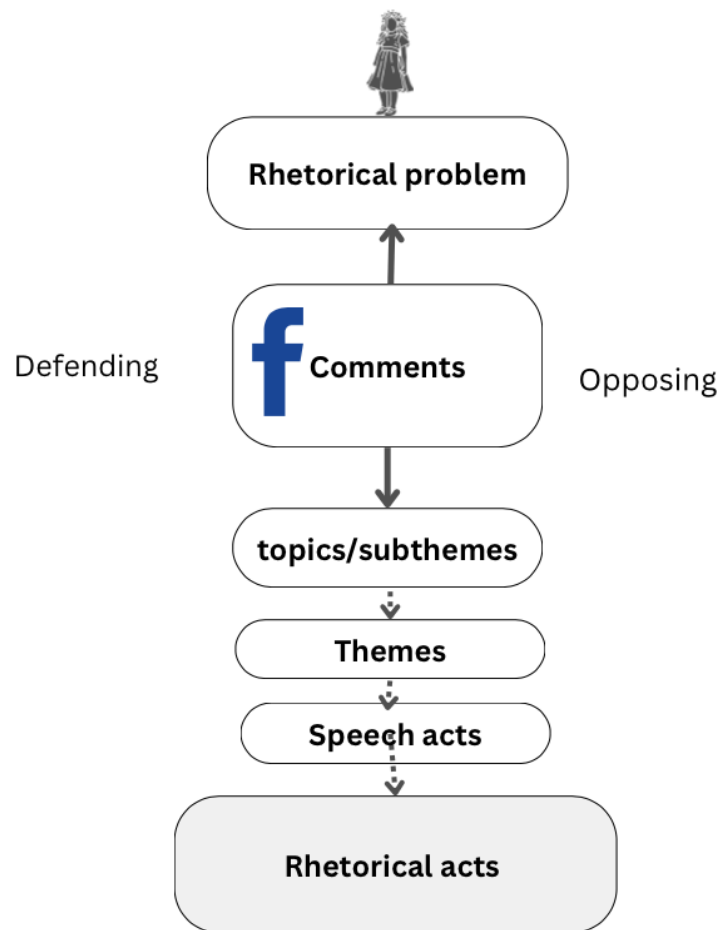
Facebook as the medium of focus also allows speakers (commenters) to engage in quasi-synchronous and asynchronous conversations (Farina, 2018, p. 46). While speakers may carry their Facebook profile name and photo, the virtuality of the conversation provides a safe space for speakers with opposing views for turn-taking talk. Facebook allows profile information control for the owners to set privacy settings according to their preferences. So, even for delicate topics such as child marriage, speakers may freely express themselves in a safe online space (Company, 2019). In Facebook comments, the speakers engage in discussions that have an equalizing effect as any speaker may post comments, react, and reply in comment threads.<sup>1</sup>

Hopefully, the findings can make advocates become better persuasive communicators. As Craig puts it, "People can become better communicators by learning and practicing methods of communication that can be invented or discovered through research and systematically taught" (Craig, 1999, p.135).

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<sup>1</sup> Any Facebook account holder may post comments in public posts on Facebook. A comment may be blocked or hidden by any Facebook account holder, but the commenter and comment can still be seen, reacted, and replied to by those who have not blocked the commenter.

Figure 2: *Flow of Rhetorical Analysis*



### 3.3 Research Questions

What are the rhetorical acts of defenders and opposers of the practice of child marriage?

Sub Questions:

What are the speech acts of the defenders of child marriage? What are the themes that demonstrate these acts?

What are the speech acts of the opposers of child marriage? What are the themes that demonstrate these acts?

What are the common appeals and devices used by defenders and opposers?

## CHAPTER IV

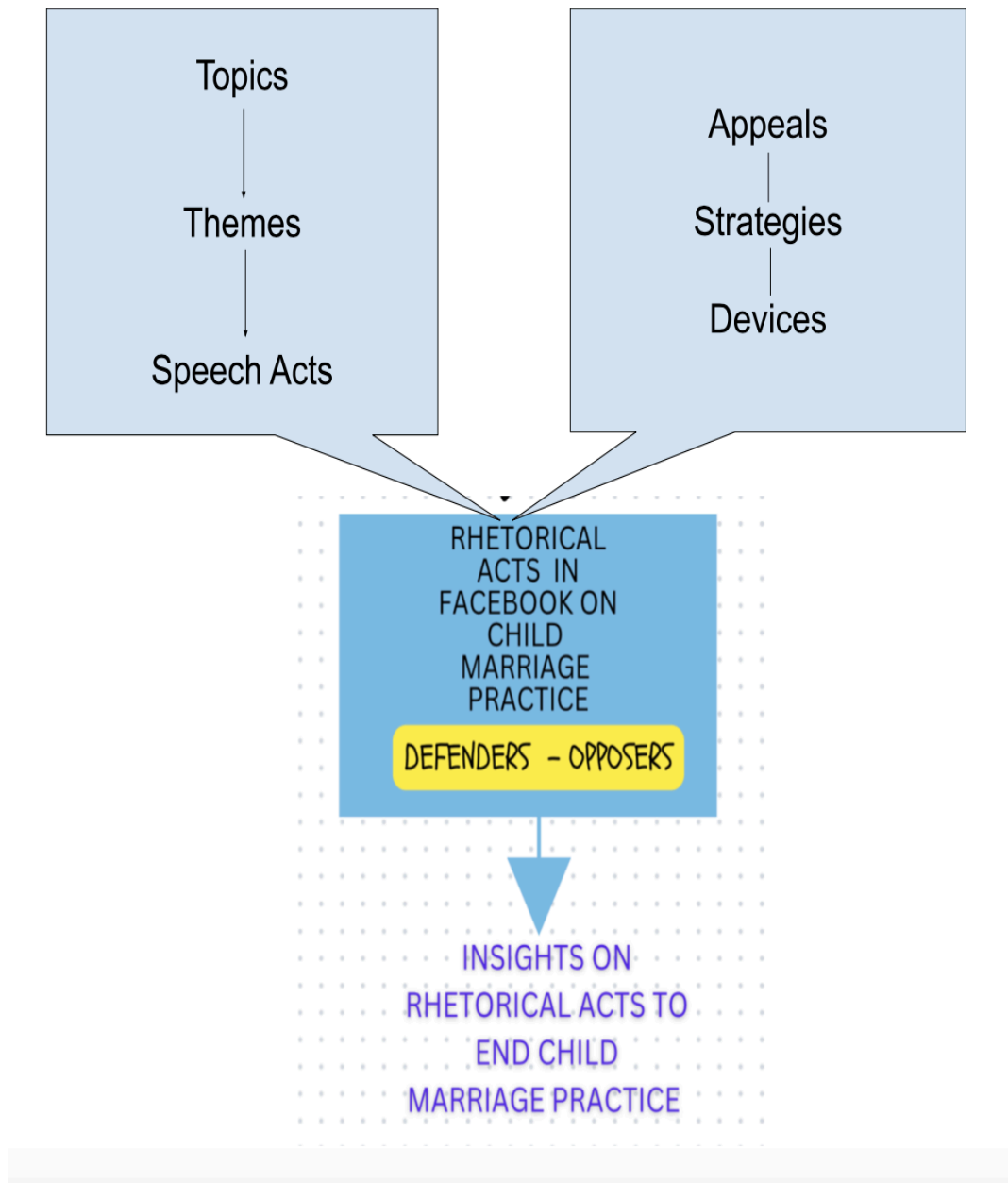
### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 4.1 Rhetorical analysis

Rhetorical analysis took off from thematic analysis leading to identifying the speech acts that are communicated to persuade and influence audiences. The discussion of themes and speech acts were intertwined with discussion on rhetorical appeals, devices, strategies, contextual understanding, and audience. The diagram below shows the analytical process that was followed.

Persuasion appeals, devices and strategies were identified alongside thematic analysis to uncover the recurring topics or sub-themes within a text. Groups of topics formed the theme, and the themes gathered revealed the speech acts. Speech act theory examines the performative aspects of language—how words do not merely convey information but also perform actions (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Integrating these approaches enhances the depth of rhetorical studies by allowing researchers to explore not only what is said (themes) but also how it is said to persuade (appeals, strategies) and what it does (speech acts).

**Figure 3:** *Operationalizing the Rhetorical Analysis*



Thematic analysis is crucial in rhetorical studies as it allows researchers to systematically identify and interpret key patterns within texts that altogether compose the speech act. By focusing on themes, researchers can explore how rhetoric contributes to larger messages and ideologies within a text.

Themes can unveil underlying ideologies in the comments, help understand the ways to engage and influence readers using emotional, ethical, and logical appeals (Aristotle), argumentation (Ramage, Bean & Johnson; Toulmin), rhetorical pragmatics (Adornetti and Ferneti), collaboration (Craig), context (Burke), among others . Through themes, comments can also reveal contexts of the messages put forward by commenters.

Speech act theory, initially proposed by Austin in 1962 and further developed by Searle in 1969, suggests that language, including written text, serves not only to convey information but also to perform actions. This perspective enhances rhetorical analysis by offering insights into how texts function. Speech acts are typically classified into three categories: Locutionary Acts (the actual words spoken and their literal meaning); Illocutionary Acts (the intended purpose behind the utterance, like promising, commanding, or questioning); and Perlocutionary Acts (the impact the speech has on the listener or audience, such as persuading, frightening, or inspiring). This study examines how commenters use language to defend or oppose the practice of child marriage by analyzing the literal meanings, functions, and effects of their statements within the context of persuasive communication.

## **4.2 Tools**

The rhetorical analysis involved bringing out themes and speech acts that lead to understanding the rhetorical acts of opposers and defenders. The diagram below shows the table used for coding topics and themes of comments of defenders and opposers of child marriage in reaction to Facebook posts, and derive speech acts. Put all together, the rhetorical acts of speakers were revealed (Interpreted). The

comments gathered did not reveal identities and links to the posts where the comments were gathered were also hidden. After collecting the comments and categorizing them as defenders or opposers, thematic analysis followed. Once themes were identified, speech acts supported by the themes were identified (interpreted). The analysis relied on the knowledge of the researcher of both the issue and the contexts from which the comments emanated from.

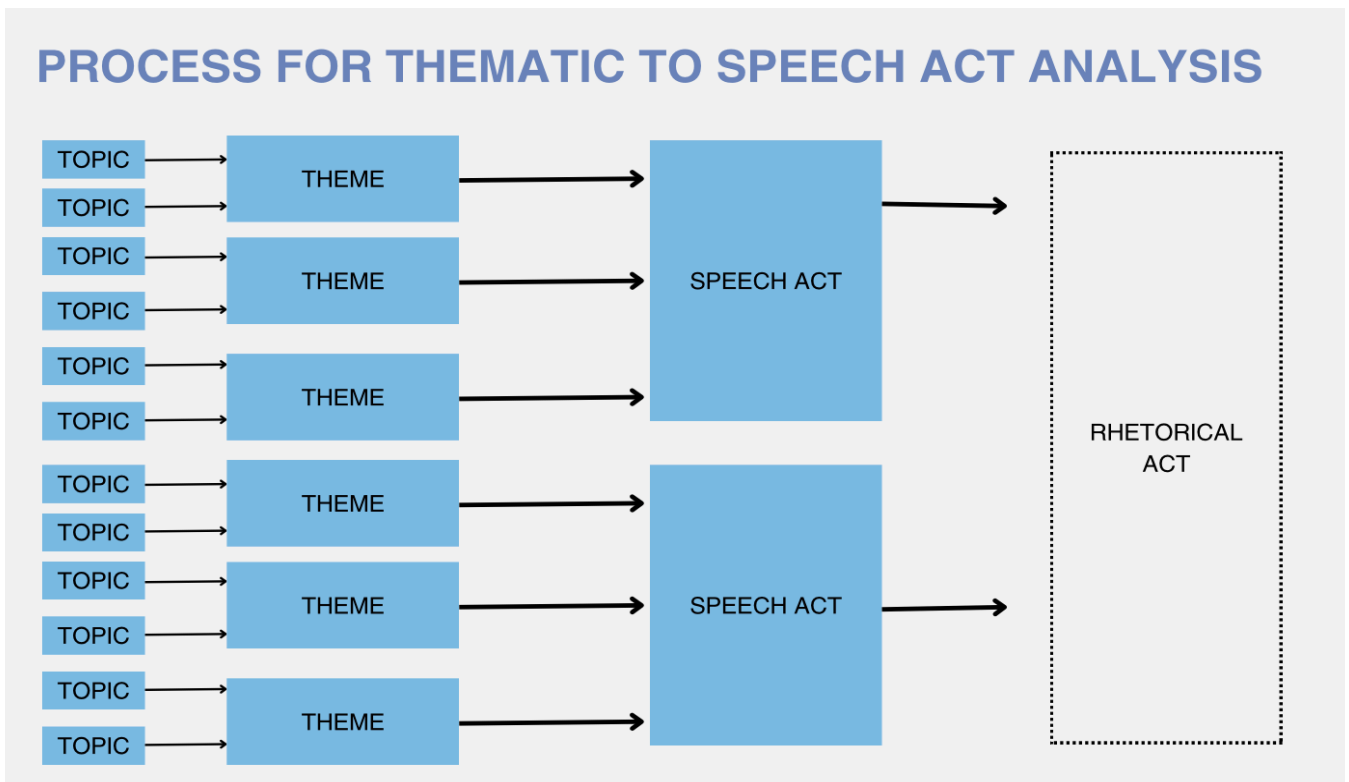
**Figure 4: Coding Table**

**TABLE USED FOR CODING**

Comment	Translation	Topics/Sub-themes	Themes	Speech Act

The diagram below shows the build up to identifying rhetorical acts by identifying topics, themes and speech acts in the Facebook comments. Having some knowledge on the rhetorical acts helped understand how child marriage practice is being sustained. Understanding the rhetorical acts that sustain child marriage can illuminate the ways to end child marriage practice.

Figure 5: Process for Rhetorical Analysis



Comments topics were identified, and themes were derived from the combination of topics. The themes combined with rhetorical appeals, devices or strategies pointed to the speech acts. The speech acts combined revealed the rhetorical acts.

As a basic definition, defenders pertain to commenters defending the marriage of girls in reaction to Facebook posts. Opposers pertain to commenters who urge readers to stop acts of marrying off young girls.

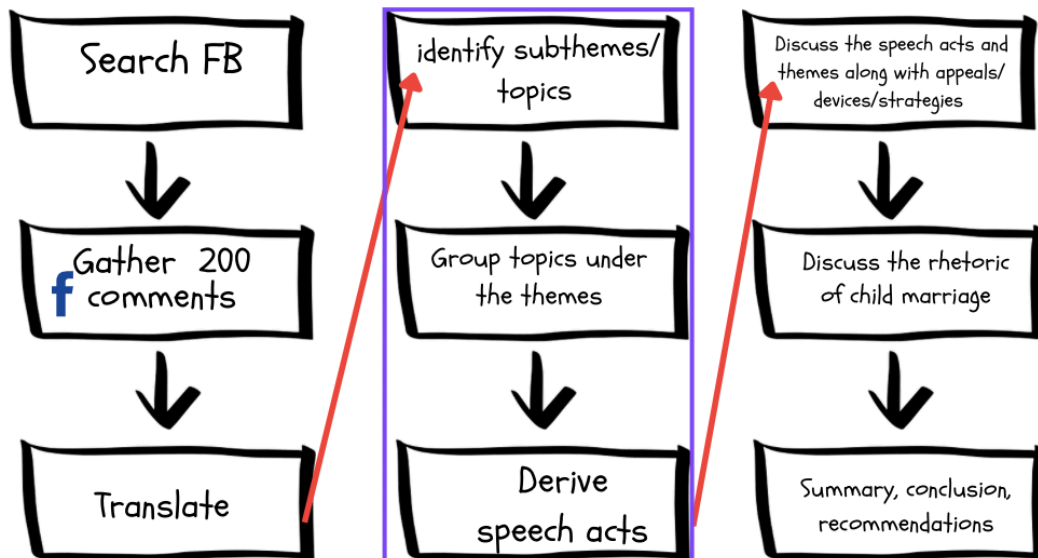
For the research process, the initial stage involved the researcher immersing in the various arguments defending and opposing child marriage by collecting Facebook comments. Tagalog language comments were then translated to English,

placed in a matrix that included a column to indicate sub-themes, themes and speech acts.

The next step was identifying the sub-themes and themes, which was the process of coding. For definition, a theme is like a big idea that shows up in different parts of the data as recurring, while a subtheme is a smaller idea that fits within or supports the larger main idea of the theme (Cambridge Dictionary, Merriam-Webster Dictionary.) With this method, the basic limitation of the research was being confined within the own understanding of the researcher who has been immersed in anti-GBV work since the early 1990s, whose family roots are areas where child marriage is practiced and development work in those areas first began in 1997.

After coding, identified themes were grouped to arrive at their speech acts. A speech act refers to the act of communication in which the speaker conveys meaning, expresses intentions, and performs actions through speech. It involves not only the words spoken but also the intention behind them and the effect they have on the listener. Speech acts are commonly categorized into different types, such as assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations, based on the intended effect of the speech. (Austin and Searle). The named themes and derived speech acts comprised the rhetorical acts of opposers and defenders. In the process of analysis, various supporting appeals and devices were also described.

Figure 6: Step-by-Step Analysis



Research process followed:

1. Collection/Translation of 200 Facebook comments

2. The rhetorical acts of defenders:

Codes/subthemes > Themes > Speech Acts ]- Rhetorical Act

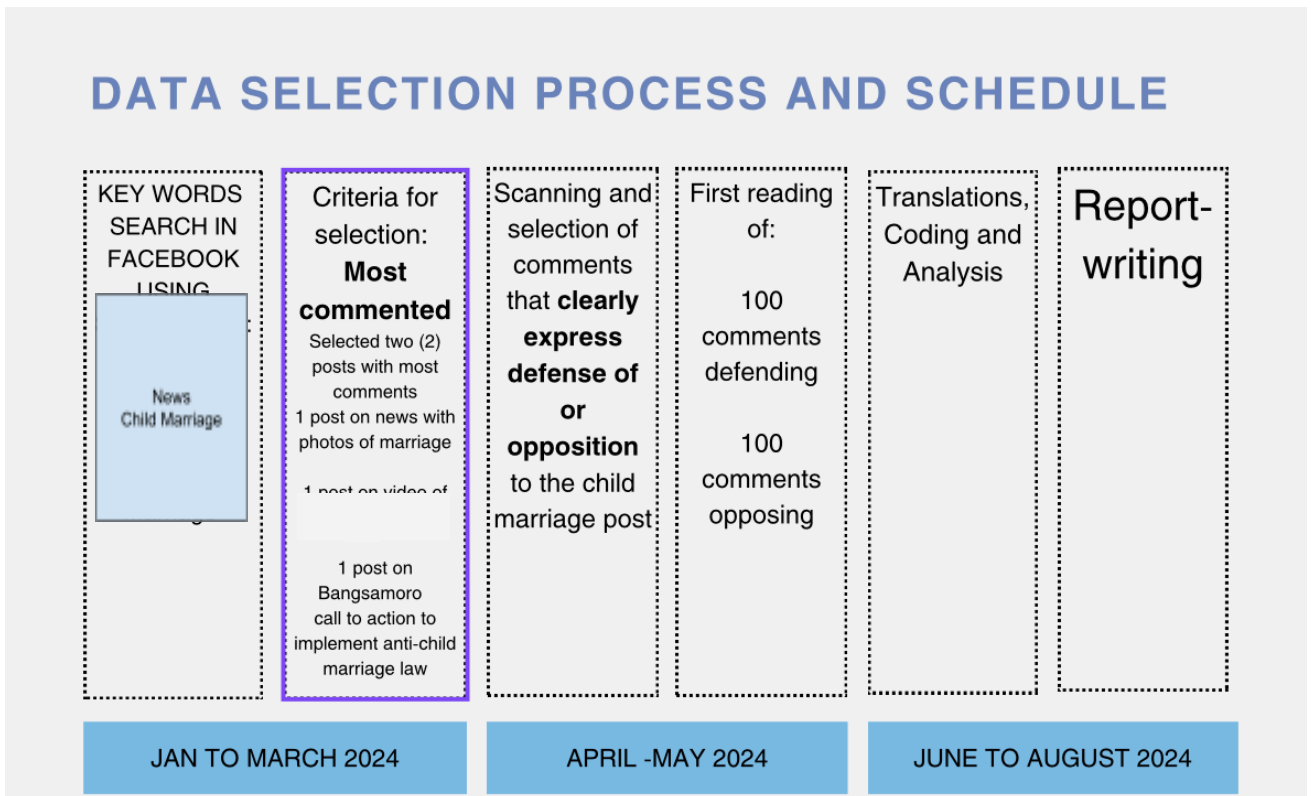
3. The rhetorical acts of opposers:

Codes/subthemes > Themes > Speech Acts ]- Rhetorical Act

4. Comparisons

5. Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations, including learnings

Figure 7: Research Process and Schedule



This shows the schedule followed. Data gathering began in January 2024, with selection and translations to English and first reading of comments happening in April and May. The writing phase began in June and lasted until August 2024.

## CHAPTER V

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 5.1 Results- Thematic Analysis

Note: While the topics and themes may vary and sometimes overlap, the identification of speech acts within this study was based on the researcher's thorough analysis. The speech acts highlighted in this research lacked prior studies for reference and so derive from the analysis of assertions made within the discussed topics and themes. The identification of speech acts in these tables is achieved by elucidating the literal meanings, functions, or effects of the statements in the context of persuasive communication. Notably, all comments have been translated into English, thereby original language comments are omitted within these coding tables.

The original coding table used contains all comments and particularities. For the purpose of concealing specific religious details, the terms Religion and Religion B were utilized to refer to religion and its followers. Some comments have been shortened to hide particularities, while other comments that cannot be detached from their particularities have completely been excluded in these coding tables but with their themes still identified.

**5.1.1 Table 1: Thematic Analysis of Defenders' Comments**

Translation	Topics>	Themes	Speech Act
"In Religion A, marriage is not based on age. As soon as a girl starts having her monthly period, she can be married."	The girl with monthly period can be married	Difference in readiness for marriage	Child protection
"Just because it's culture doesn't mean it should be allowed if it's harmful, so think about it!!!"	Child marriage will not be allowed if it is harmful	Religion B ignorance	
"Okay, it's like this... Unlike others who have had several children without marriage, with different fathers... For them, it is not allowed, especially if they are seen together in a room or if something happens, they must get married immediately. It is a big sin or a shame if something happens without marriage."	Some children in Religion B have children before marriage  It is shameful have sexual relations outside of marriage	Religion B failure  Religion A protects children	
"They are those rebellious young people who refuse to listen to their parents' advice, so they have no choice but to get married. It's better than living a life of dishonesty, as it's forbidden in Religion A to engage in intimate relationships outside of marriage."	Young people are rebellious  Sex outside of marriage is forbidden	Respect for difference  Religion A protects children	
"The dowry is not a payment to the woman's family, and it is especially prohibited for the woman's family to take it, because the dowry is intended as capital or investment for	Dowry is not payment  Dowry is investment	Parental responsibility	

their future. Do some research...	Facebook owner is ignorant		
"Is there something wrong for a pregnant woman to get married? It's embarrassing for the community if your daughter gets pregnant without being married. That's why before she gives birth, she should get married first, even if she is very young or a minor."	Embarrassment in the community Marriage before giving birth saves child from shame	Religion B ignorance Religion A protects children	
"It's better to get married than to get pregnant and then just abandon the baby anywhere. Nowadays, many young women get pregnant early and are scared of their parents, so some choose to have an abortion. Others abandon their babies."	Abandonment of babies Pregnant girls are scared of parents Some abort their babies	Avoiding sin Religion A protects children from sins	
"The dowry or .... that a man gives to his future wife is not considered a payment. The article you used is incorrect. ... is an .... word meaning dower. Besides ..... are other ....terms used in the ....and .....to mean dower or bridal due. Dower is a benefit given by a man to a woman when they marry."	Wrong interpretation Wrong understanding of dowry	Religion B ignorance Religion A ensures the future of children	
"Good thing they got married, here in .... teenage pregnancy is severe and widespread."	Marriage is better than teen pregnancy Religion B has many teen	Religion A protects girls	

	pregnancies		
"She's already pregnant, so they really need to get married."	Pregnant girl should be married	Religion A protects girls	
"Well, it turns out she's already pregnant; it's good that they got married. That's why you shouldn't sleep together if you don't want to get married early... they were already sharing a bed."	Pregnant girl should get married  Do not sleep together if you do not want to be married early	Religion A protects girls	
"Here we go again, we .... meddling in their culture... Even though we are not from... let's admit that there are more of our young people getting pregnant at 13 to 17 years old... whereas they are married."	People of Religion B meddle in Religion A culture  Young people in Religion B communities become pregnant early  Girls in Religion A areas are married before getting pregnant	Religion B ignorance  Religion A protects children	
"Ehhh? Other women are already pregnant at the age of 12 and the guys don't even take responsibility."	Girls get pregnant early  Males do not take responsibility	Religion B ignorance  Religion A protects girls	

<p>"In some places, if someone's daughter gets raped, it's treated as nothing. In their culture, if something like that happens, the perpetrator is immediately executed. Men there have great respect for women because doing something bad to women can cost you your life."</p>	<p>Other cultures are sexually violent against women</p> <p>Religion A puts heavy penalties for men who violate women</p>	<p>Religion A protection of women from sexual violence</p> <p>Religion B hypocrisy</p>	
<p>"So that's why they got married, because she got pregnant early. Also, that's how it is in their religion; they arrange marriages while they're still young."</p>	<p>Girls get pregnant early so it is better to marry them</p> <p>It is what they do in their religion</p>	<p>Religion B ignorance</p> <p>Religion A protects children</p>	
<p>"Forced marriages are prohibited, but it's also forbidden in religion for unmarried people to share a bed because it's considered sinful. I'm still young, but I know our teachings."</p>	<p>Forced marriages are prohibited</p> <p>Unmarried people cannot share beds</p> <p>Even children know this</p>	<p>Religion A ignorance</p>	
<p>"They are not being harmed; it's better that way than getting pregnant repeatedly without knowing who the father is or having to abort the child. That's one reason it's being avoided. The parents are still there to guide them. It doesn't mean that once they are married, they will be neglected."</p>	<p>Not harmful to children</p> <p>The better option</p> <p>Preventing sin</p>	<p>Parental responsibility</p> <p>Religion A protects children</p>	
<p>"What do you want to happen that's more horrific? Why</p>	<p>Men should be held</p>	<p>Religion B ignorance</p>	

shouldn't the man be held accountable for the woman? Why is there still something he can do? Because that's not enough, there should be more punishment for that."	accountable	Practicality of Religion A in protecting children	
"Wow, it's incredible how judgmental the self-righteous are. Hey, let me tell you, that's our ....tradition. Why do you care? Did you contribute anything to their wedding? These ... are abnormal too."	Religion B judging Religion A  Religion B interference	Religion B failure, envy  Respect for difference	
"That's better than the children here who get pregnant without knowing who the real father is or who got them pregnant, and are not married. Sometimes, even their own fathers impregnate them. Which should you follow: human laws or God's laws?"	Religion B abuse their own daughters  God's law is above human law	Religion B hypocrisy	

Translation	Topics>	Themes	Speech Act
"In your religion, it's stated that in ...., it's not allowed to have children without being married, but they are still people; not everyone among you is saintly. It's the same with ....—many of us live together before marriage, but we have freedoms as women. Do you have freedom when you get married? Here in the Middle East, even .... single moms work. And isn't it true that when a ... woman marries, it's the man who has to provide	Religion B forbids sex without marriage but fails to implement it  Religion A women have freedom  Difference in situations	Religion B imposition  Avoiding sin through marriage with consent	Woman's consent in Religion A

for the family? The rules are just different in the ....."			
"If both families agreed and the woman wasn't forced, there's nothing wrong with it. It was a marriage, not rape like what happens with many ....." There are even cases where a mother and daughter are both abused. Instead of fixing things because of the belief that marriage is not allowed for minors, think about what is right."	<p>Woman was not forced</p> <p>Parental agreement</p> <p>Sins in Religion B</p> <p>Rape in households</p> <p>Finding solutions</p>	<p>Avoiding sin through marriage with consent</p>	
"Haha, there's nothing wrong with that in our religion. When a woman has her period, she can still get married. Before the marriage, it's first asked if she agrees; she's not forced. Unlike in your cases, sometimes even your own children are abused."	<p>Menstruation means readiness for motherhood</p> <p>Religious teaching on motherhood</p>	<p>Woman was not forced</p> <p>Difference in age of readiness for marriage</p>	
"Excuse me to those who commented, but in religion, when a woman gets her period, she is considered a mature adult. And such occurrences are rare, only a few can be counted on one's fingers. I apologize for any offense."	<p>Menstruation means adulthood</p> <p>Only a few get married</p> <p>Religion A generalizing early marriage</p>	<p>Religious wisdom</p>	

Translation	Topics>	Themes	Speech Act
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<p>"Good for them if something happens right away; they get married immediately. But for us..., oh my God, all we know is how to flirt."</p>	<p>Religion B people flirt outside marriage</p> <p>Religion A people are practical</p>	<p>Religion A only solves problems</p> <p>Religion B failure in solving problems</p>	<p>Do not blame the religion</p>
<p>"We can't do anything about that, we can't stop it. That's their law. That's why I don't oppose it."</p>	<p>Respect their Religion A law</p>	<p>Non-interference</p>	
<p>"Please don't make comments like that because in the ....., early marriage is allowed. It's allowed in our religion."</p>	<p>Allowed in religion</p>	<p>Respect for difference</p> <p>Nothing wrong with the religion</p>	
<p>"Excuse me to those who commented, but in religious law, when a woman gets her period, she is considered a mature adult. And such occurrences are rare, only a few can be counted on one's fingers. I apologize for any offense."</p>	<p>Menstruation means adulthood</p> <p>Only a few get married</p> <p>Others are generalizing early marriage</p>	<p>Respect for difference</p>	
<p>"To those who are judgmental and lack knowledge about religion, it is not a culture where older men must be the husbands of our women. It depends on the parents and the individuals getting married. Religion has nothing to do with it."</p>	<p>Respect for culture</p> <p>Wrong understanding towards Religion A marriage,</p> <p>Misconception that young women are</p>	<p>Religion B interference based on ignorance</p>	

	intentionally married to older men		
"If they're happy, let them be. It's their life after all. And they know what they're getting into. We have no right to judge them because we're not the ones providing for them."	Do not judge if you do not know the situation  They know what they are doing	Religion B imposition	
That's their culture; it's not just here, it's the same with Religion A believers in the Middle East.	Shared cultural practice among Religion A cultures	Respect for difference  Global community of Religion A	
.....	Woman in the Religion B teaching was too young for marriage also	Religion B hypocrisy	
"Oh, that's already their tradition, even if the person is really a minor. Unlike here in ..., that's not allowed."	Tradition is different from one place to another	Respect for difference	
"It's nonsense that you can only get married at the age of 25. In the past, many people got married at younger ages. For example, my mother was only 16 when she had us; there were seven of us, and we all were able to study and become professionals. If someone gets married at 25 and has seven or more children, by the time they have to support and educate all the children, they might be	Not true that 25 and above is marrying age  This is an old practice  Impractical to have children at old age	Respect for difference  Practicality of Religion A	

too old and find it difficult. The youngest child will suffer the most."	The youngest child will suffer because parents are already old		
"But in religion, even underage individuals can get married."	Practicality of Religion A	Respect for difference	
.....	Practicality of Religion A	Respect for difference	
Just respect each other's culture and traditions."	Respect each other's culture and tradition	Respect for difference	
"Religion nor age has nothing to do with all these. You know it's forbidden but you opted to do it, and now you're scared because you're getting married. May this be a lesson to everyone that yes, we can flirt, but we should consider the consequences of our actions. The number one consequence is getting pregnant, especially getting pregnant early while still in school. Who will support the child? Of course, the parents. Another burden. What if the parents are also poor? Then there's nothing left. What if, in our flirting, we end up with a criminal, and we get killed? That would actually be better because it would be just one problem."	It is not because of religion  It is about the consequence of sexual acts  Parents bear the burden  It is better to save the child from danger	Respect for difference  Practical solution	
"Hays, why do some people here immediately compare ... and ...? They say that ... have many children without being married; well, that's their choice. And they say that ....do it differently, that they should be married first. That's their tradition. Haizt, it's	People compare Religion B and Religion A  Many people in Religion B communities	Respect for difference  Practical solution by Religion A	

<p>stressful. Let's just respect each side and remove this comparison from our minds. The issue here is that they are both still children and should focus on studying. At their age, they are not yet mature enough to work and provide for a family. They don't yet understand the reality of how difficult life can be. Why is it so hard for others to understand? Why does it need to be debated? We could just try to understand each other. You're just hurting both sides."</p>	<p>have children outside of marriage</p> <p>Stop comparing traditions</p> <p>The issue is about children getting married early but better not to interfere</p>		
<p>Ehy... Culture is culture, we can't deny the fact there is something wrong, but that's their belief, we can't just say "Hey that's not good, how if you stop doing that" nahhhhh, otherwise remember they won't mind what is culture is, so let them, I do not have side but as I said culture is culture. They won't mind so don't mind them</p>	<p>It is cultural</p> <p>Each culture is different</p> <p>Do not interfere with one another</p>	<p>Respect difference</p>	
<p>"Hey, can you please find out the whole story before you judge? Instead of just talking and talking without knowing anything."</p>	<p>Do not judge without knowing</p>	<p>Respect difference</p>	
<p>"To those who are judgmental and lack knowledge about religion, it is not a culture where older men must be the husbands of our women. It depends on the parents and the individuals getting married. Religion has nothing to do with it."</p>	<p>Respect for culture</p> <p>Wrong understanding towards Religion A marriage tradition</p> <p>Misconception that young women are</p>	<p>Religion B interference based on ignorance</p>	

	intentionally married to older men		
"I am... but if they can support themselves, it's none of your business. At least they are legally married, unlike others who get pregnant before marriage." "Getting married and then having sex before marriage—that's what's forbidden."	Respect for difference  Wrong information towards Religion A marriage Sex outside marriage is forbidden	Religion B interference  Religion B hypocrisy  Misunderstanding Religion A	
"Good for them if something happens right away; they get married immediately. But for us ..., oh my God, all we know is how to flirt."	Religion B people flirt outside marriage  Religion A followers are practical	Admission of Religion B failure	
"We can't do anything about that, we can't stop it. That's their law. That's why I don't oppose it."	Respect Religion A law	Non-interference	

Translation	Topics>	Themes	Speech Act
That's their culture; it's not just here, it's the same with .... in the .....	Shared cultural practice among Religion A	Respect for difference  Global community of Religion A	Religious oppression
"Please don't make comments like that because in the..., early marriage is allowed. ."	Allowed in religion	Respect for different religious practice	

<p>"You're right that if you don't know anything about..... just stay out of it and don't interfere with the religion. We also don't interfere with other religions."</p>	<p>Not understanding the religion</p>	<p>Religious interference, ignorance</p>	
<p>"You are so judgmental. We are not being sold; the money that the men give to our parents is to help us. It doesn't mean that our parents are selling us."</p>	<p>Religion B judgmental, Misinformation against Religion A  Early marriage is not selling children</p>	<p>Religion B imposition</p>	
<p>"Hey, brother, I didn't say that I'm a lord. I just feel like something is wrong, and why did you say that? We don't interfere with any woman, even if she's married, but you still flirt with other women. You're crazy, brother."</p>	<p>Misinformation against Religion A  Religion B interference  Religion B people commit sexual sins</p>	<p>Respect for difference  Religion B hypocrisy</p>	

<p>What do you care about religious law? Why do ... interfere with us ....? That young girl was not forced to marry that man, she chose to love him, so her parents arranged the marriage to prevent them from sinning. It's better for them to get married than commit sin. Better than living together but not married. It's probably more disgusting when people make comments without knowing anything!</p>	<p>Religion B imposing on Religion A believers</p> <p>Woman's choice</p> <p>Parental responsibility</p> <p>Prevent committing sin</p> <p>Sexual relations outside of marriage is disgusting</p> <p>Religion A religious-cultural reference for early marriage practice</p>	<p>Religion A values uprightness while</p> <p>Religion B fails</p>	
<p>"Sand Ammie, are you insecure about us? Is that why you have so much anger towards....? Are you jealous? Acting foolish, like an idiot."</p>	<p>Religion B people jealous of Religion A people</p>	<p>Religion B failure</p>	
<p>"You have no right to dictate our tradition. Did we interfere with your tradition? If you want us to respect you, please respect us as well."</p>	<p>Disrespect for religion</p> <p>Religion B interference</p>	<p>Respect for difference</p>	

<p>Why, though? Is it deadly? And, in our tradition as ..., before a woman gets married to any man, she needs to have consent. She cannot get married if her parents or the woman herself does not agree. You do not have the right to judge our traditions. It is better than yours, where people get pregnant first, have a child before marriage, or where same-sex marriages occur. Our belief is that women are meant for men, and it is better to be married before engaging in any kind of physical contact. Oh! You .... are so arrogant, whereas your traditions are inhumane, like animals, prioritizing s*xual desire before considering marriage. Just saying.</p>	<p>Life-saving solution Women's consent</p> <p>Religion B arrogance</p> <p>Religion B people having sex before marriage is animalistic.</p>	<p>Religion B failure, hypocrisy</p> <p>Religion A only finds solution</p>	
<p>If you were put in their position or in their culture, would you agree to have it taken away?! Think about it! Respect their upbringing... Don't be too advanced...</p>	<p>Respect culture</p> <p>Commenter is acting smart but dumb</p> <p>Religion B imposition</p>	<p>Religion B hypocrisy, ignorance</p> <p>Religion A only finds solution</p>	
<p>Yes, it may be wrong in your perspective, but that is their culture, so it should be respected. You can't do anything about it except cry as if you know everything. I am a ..., but you should respect them because that is what they are accustomed to. Think about it, my friend, we grew up in the city, but they consider their situation. Cultures of each individual should be respected.</p>	<p>Cultural sensitivity and understanding</p> <p>Tolerance and acceptance of different beliefs and customs</p>	<p>Respect for difference</p> <p>Religion A only finds solution</p>	

It is religion.... Leave them with their own cultural traditions and ancient customs.. We are not seeking war with religion.	Do not seek religious war  Religious difference	Respect for difference  Religion A only finds solution	
"There's no need to insult religions. Let's just separate .... from the .... if you don't want to respect the traditions of ...."	Do not insult  Separation for religions	Respect for difference	
"Those are the people from .... They have a different culture. Don't underestimate them. You can stay quiet because you don't know anything and have no right to interfere."	Difference in culture from one place to another  Lack of knowledge of opposer	Respect for difference	
"There are so many gossips here; it's not surprising, as ... are full of gossip."	Gossip as basis for accusation against another religion	Religion B ignorance	
"There are so many people interfering with .... culture. Do we interfere with yours? Don't be like that. Please respect our religion."	Religion B interfering with Religion A  Respect for religion	Respect for difference	
"They want to stop such beliefs because they want minors to get pregnant without a father. They want by the time they are 18 years old, ten men have already had them. That's why they don't want them to get married first."	Sexual immorality because underage girls get pregnant without knowing who the father is, after having sexual relations with many men without marriage	Respect for difference  Religion A only finds solution	

"You are so judgmental. We are not being sold; the money that the men give to our parents is to help us. It doesn't mean that our parents are selling us."	Do not be judgmental Misinformation Early marriage is not selling children	Respect for difference Religion A only finds solution	
"Hey, kuya, I didn't say that I'm a lord. I just feel like something is wrong, and why did you say that? We don't interfere with any woman, even if she's married, but you still flirt with other women. You're crazy, kuya."	Misinformation Non-interference Religion B people commit sexual sins	Respect for difference Religion A only finds solution Religion B hypocrisy	
"There are so many people interfering with .... culture. Do we interfere with yours? Don't be like that. Please respect our religion."	Interfering with religion while	Respect for difference	
"They want to stop such beliefs because they want minors to get pregnant without a father. They want by the time they are 18 years old, ten men have already had them. That's why they don't want them to get married first."	Sexual immorality Underage girls get pregnant without knowing who the father is Sexual relations with many men without marriage	Religion B interference, hypocrisy Respect for difference	

Translation	Topics>	Themes	Speech Act
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<p>"It's their choice; it's better than in .... where a 9-year-old is already flirting with boys and by 13, she is already ruined. That's why for ....., it's better to get married early."          "To avoid committing sins, because flirting with someone who is not your spouse is a sin."</p>	<p>Religion B girls have multiple sexual relations very early early           Religion A prevents believers from sinning</p>	<p>Religion B failure, interference, hypocrisy           Religion A is effective in preventing/avoiding sin</p>	<p>True religion</p>
<p>"In Religion B, even if someone is already pregnant or has five children, they still have not yet gotten married, and it's okay on both sides, hahaha (I'm not generalizing). But in religion, ....they get married right away, awwww, hahaha."</p>	<p>Religion A is practical and efficient           Religion B people commit sexual immorality</p>	<p>Religion B failure, interference, hypocrisy           Religion A is effective in preventing/avoiding sin</p>	
<p>"It's up to you if you get pregnant, but you don't get married, just live together without being married, have many children, and still not married."</p>	<p>Religion A is practical and efficient           Religion B people commit sexual immorality</p>	<p>Religion B failure, interference, hypocrisy           Religion A is effective in preventing/avoiding sin</p>	
<p>"You are right... Also, nowadays, you see so many 13, 14, 15 -year-olds getting pregnant without any support from the father... it's better in [religion], where at least there is marriage."</p>	<p>Religion A is practical and efficient           Religion B people commit sexual immorality</p>	<p>Religion B failure, interference, hypocrisy           Religion A is effective in preventing/avoiding sin</p>	
<p>"You saw how extravagant the wedding was, right? So, they have the means and they were</p>	<p>Well-prepared marriage</p>	<p>Religion A is effective in preventing/av</p>	

not forced. You probably read that they [were found to have] stayed together, which is forbidden in religion."	They can afford to get married	avoiding sin	
"You don't know anything about religion. [It] is really beautiful, but you don't want to study it."	Lack of knowledge about religion  Religion is beautiful  Hard-headedness of others	Religion B believers ignorance  Religion A is effective in preventing/avoiding sin	
"You're all so full of complaints, kids. Nowadays, you're already messed up at just 12 years old. Let's not pretend to be innocent."	Religion B people are full of complaints  12 year-old girls are already messed up  Religion B people trying to be innocent	Religion B hypocrisy  Religion A is effective in preventing/avoiding sin	
Correct, you are ....., we are .... we worship differently and so our beliefs differ as well. In your culture, it's possible to get pregnant out of wedlock; in ours, it's forbidden. That's why there are many cases now of babies being abandoned because they were conceived out of wedlock and without a father since underage marriage is prohibited in your society. So don't say that... Just focus on your own religion; leave us alone.	Pregnancy out of wedlock is prohibited.  Religion protects babies from being fatherless  Other religions fail in their own affairs  Others should not interfere	Respect for difference  Pursuit of religious ideals  Religion A failure  Religion A is effective in preventing/avoiding sin	

<p>Have you seen any mistakes in our traditions like getting pregnant before marriage? None, right?"</p>	<p>No mistakes in cultural traditions</p> <p>Ability to address pregnancy before marriage</p>	<p>Religious tolerance</p> <p>Efficiency of religion in avoiding sin</p>	
<p>"Hi, Salam to you, brother. They won't be punished anymore because they got married. If they hadn't married, the man would have had to pay a fine to the woman's family. According to us Religion A believers, it is strictly forbidden for a man and woman to be together, especially if they are not married. And if a man and woman are seen together or talking in a dark place, and they are alone, if someone sees them, they will automatically be married."</p>	<p>There is no punishment for married lovers</p> <p>Man and woman seen together in a secluded place are married right away</p>	<p>Religion A is effective in preventing/avoiding sin</p>	
<p>"In religious law, it is strictly forbidden to have relations with someone who is not your spouse. In their case, something happened between them, which led to their marriage. On the other hand, one was caught together with someone, and there might have been something going on</p>	<p>Forbidden to have sexual relations outside of marriage</p> <p>It is also holy</p> <p>Sexual act</p>	<p>Religion B ignorance</p> <p>Religion A is effective in preventing/avoiding sin</p>	

as well, which is why they ended up getting married. Even in the Bible, it is forbidden to have relations with someone who is not your spouse or to live together without being married, as this is considered adultery."	outside of marriage i forbidden		
"Of course, if you don't want child marriage, control your lust."	Controlling libido	Religion B failure	
"It's not just because it's a tradition that they are obligated to do it, it is also a decision of the parents. Perhaps they are just trying to prevent their child from straying off the right path, for example, getting involved with a man or having a boyfriend. ....having a boyfriend or girlfriend is considered prohibited because this religion is conservative. I hope that everyone can understand and respect each other's beliefs."	Decision of parents  Forbidden acts  Religion is conservative	Religion B failure  Religion A is effective in preventing/avoiding sin	
"It's good that there is marriage first before *uck. It's worse when it's just casual sexual encounters without marriage. This is a subtle reminder to those who might be affected."	Sexual purity through sex within marriage	Religion B failure  Religion A is effective in preventing/avoiding sin	
"We do these things because our laws prohibit the irresponsible spreading of semen, as it is considered a great sin for us to engage in sexual relations between a man and a woman who are not married. Such actions are deemed as adultery and	Prevention of sexual immorality and sin  Religious law  Social values and morality as	Respect for difference  Religion A is effective in preventing/avoiding sin	

<p>fornication, which are highly frowned upon in our culture."</p>	<p>part of the culture within the religion</p> <p>Controlling the spread of semen</p>		
<p>You're just jealous because you do not have that in your culture</p>	<p>One culture is better because it has the practice of CM</p> <p>Religious jealousy</p>	<p>Religious hypocrisy</p> <p>Religion A is effective in preventing/avoiding sin</p>	
<p>"Nonsense comment. Are you aware that there are 1.7 billion ... in the world? And when you talk about.... traditions, are those the same as the traditions of people from Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, and other ....? Religion also requires believers to obey the laws of the country they reside in, and most countries have a minimum legal age for marriage with parental consent. It is important to mention the tribe and culture of a place rather than solely focusing on religion."</p>	<p>Global community that is diverse</p> <p>Difference in practices and laws across countries</p> <p>Culture prevails over religion</p>	<p>Religion cannot be blamed for flaws</p> <p>Religion A is effective in preventing/avoiding sin</p>	
<p>I respectfully apologize to everyone commenting here who are not .... and are not familiar with the religion. First of all, I am a .... and I want to inform everyone, especially non-..., that early marriage is not a tradition in the religion. It is rather allowed ... as a way for us to avoid doing things that are against the teachings. It is better to get married early</p>	<p>Early Marriage in religion</p> <p>Premarital sex as prohibited</p> <p>Misconceptions about religion</p> <p>Religious Differences and Respect for</p>	<p>Religion A is effective in preventing/avoiding sin</p>	

<p>rather than imitating others who engage in premarital sex. Sexual intercourse is only permitted among married couples and not among boyfriends/girlfriends. This is one of the reasons why.....has allowed early marriage among .....</p> <p>Like our beloved Prophet....., who married ..... at the age of 15, early marriage is permitted in religion. If you don't have enough knowledge about our .... laws, it would be better to remain silent. We,....respect your beliefs, so you should also respect ours.</p> <p>PS: Our religion promotes early marriage, which is better compared to other non-.... religions that allow same-sex relationships, living together, premarital sex, and other things that are abominable in the eyes of God. ...The truth is that our religion is the most real religion in the world, and our religion is perfect.</p>	<p>Beliefs</p> <p>Early marriage is allowed</p> <p>Example of the religious icon</p> <p>Religion is perfect</p> <p>Early Marriage as a way to avoid sin</p>		
<p>You just marry them instead of raping them. Consider the elderly man who frequently discusses raping a minor. Which faith does someone who loves rape adhere to, even if their priests sexually abused a child? Before making a criticism against our tradition, Jeje think about it first.</p>	<p>Prevention of sexual violence</p> <p>Religion B tolerates rape by religious authorities</p>	<p>Religion B failure preventing sin</p>	
<p>"What about those who get pregnant by you and then have an abortion? They throw it</p>	<p>Commit sins of abortion and throwing of</p>	<p>Religion B failure preventing sin</p>	

away here and there. You should also post about that."	babies  Pregnancy out of wedlock		
"What I can say to you .... is that it's even worse when a man has sex with ten or more of your daughters before marriage. According to God's law, it's even more forbidden to have repeated sexual relations."	Other religion tolerating sin  Sexual acts outside of marriage  Other religion's followers' sexual immorality	Religion B failure preventing sin	
"It's their choice; it's better than in the other religion where a 9-year-old is already flirting with boys and by 13, she is already ruined. That's why for us, it's better to get married early." "To avoid committing sins, because flirting with someone who is not your spouse is a sin."	Religion B girls have multiple sexual relations very early early  Religion A prevents believers from sinning	Religion B failure preventing sin  Religion A is effective in preventing/avoiding sin	
"In the other religion, even if someone is already pregnant or has five children, they still have not yet gotten married, and it's okay on both sides, hahaha (I'm not generalizing). But in our religion... they get married right away, awwww, hahaha."	Religion A is practical  Religion B followers commit sexual immorality	Religion B failure preventing sin  Religion A is effective in preventing/avoiding sin	
"It's up to you if you get pregnant, but you don't get married, just live together without being married, have many children, and still not	Religion A is practical  Religion B followers	Religion B failure preventing sin	

married."	commit sexual immorality		
"You are right... Also, nowadays, you see so many 13, 14, 15 -year-olds getting pregnant without any support from the father... it's better in [religion], where at least there is marriage."	Religion A is practical Religion B followers commit sexual immorality	Religion B failure preventing sin	
"Adultery is forbidden... including relationships like boyfriend and girlfriend, especially if they are having sex without marriage. According to religious law, it must be legal. If a man can afford to give a dowry and support a family, he should get married."	Adultery is a sin Sexual relations outside of marriage is sin Male responsibility to prevent himself from sinning	Religious law protect believers from sinning	
"You see it in the .... religion, but you don't know anything. In your religion, .... isn't it also forbidden to live together without being married?" "Watch Dyesebel; it's mentioned in the movie."	Religion B live-in arrangement Lack of knowledge of Religion A	Religious wisdom Religious law protect believers from sinning	
"What's better: getting married or being killed?"	Getting married is better	Religious wisdom	
"You speak so harshly, yet you don't know anything about our tradition. Why don't you also stop your 'pleasures before marriage'? Gosh!"	Harsh interference Sinners have sex before marriage	Path to holiness Religion B hypocrisy	
"I am ..... but if they can support themselves, it's none of your business. At least they are legally married, unlike others	Respect for difference Wrong information towards	Religion B interference, hypocrisy	

who get pregnant before marriage." "Getting married and then having sex before marriage—that's what's forbidden."	religious marriage, Sex outside marriage is forbidden	Religious law protect believers from sinning	
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Translation	Topics>	Themes	Speech Act
In [religion], the love story of Prophet (peace be upon him) and ..... is eternal.	Story of holy people  Example of the religious icon	Holy living	Holy act
"In [religion], it is forbidden for a man to touch a woman who is not his wife. It is a great sin in the eyes of our Creator; that is the law of God. This is to prevent having children out of wedlock and to ensure that women are not treated casually or disrespected [within the religion]."	Forbidden acts in religious law  Law of God  Prevention of having children outside of marriage	Religion B ignorance  Practicality of religion in solving human problems	
The Marriage of .... Many things have been said about ...these days regarding his marriage to.... Some of the accusations are so demeaning and almost frightening that it's hard to believe someone would say or do such slander and defamation. Let us consider some questions and what really is the truth about these matters. Let's set the record straight for everyone's sake.	Respect for young women  Like the young girl in Religion B who was very young at marriage  Love and happiness in marriage  Historical	Holy living  Religion B people ignorant of their own tradition	

<p>Just look at the ... which states that ...[the peace be upon her] was married to ..., and that her age was one or two years older than the young girl in Religion A</p>	<p>practice of religious people</p> <p>Early marriage as a holy act because it prevents sin</p> <p>One holy person in the religion is the girl who married early</p> <p>Age does not matter when pursuing holiness</p> <p>Religion B resonance -woman considered holy was also young</p>		
<p>Child marriage is Decree of [God]</p>	<p>God's will</p>	<p>Divine authority</p>	
<p>Haha, it's true. They may speak strongly about our tradition, but they are unable to rescue the child. They only keep talking without actually being able to help.</p>	<p>Rescues children</p> <p>Opposers only talk</p> <p>Discrediting Religion B commenters</p>	<p>Religion ensures path to holiness</p>	
<p>That's what they fight for because here, it's prohibited for minors to get married because it's considered child abuse. But they fail to consider that the actions of many among them are even more heinous, with minors getting</p>	<p>Early pregnancy out of wedlock is worse</p> <p>Abandoned babies because of pregnancies outside of</p>	<p>Religion protects children from heinous crimes</p>	

<p>pregnant and then abandoning their babies in trash bins. They should apply their words about child abuse to those situations.</p>	<p>marriage is heinous</p>		
<p>"You are disgusting!! The way you make comments, it's as if your religion has no flaws, huh!?"</p>	<p>Commenter is disgusting</p> <p>Religion is flawed</p>	<p>Religion B hypocrisy</p> <p>Religion A ensures path to holiness</p>	
<p>In the [religious law], once a woman reaches puberty, she can marry or be married off to avoid sinning, which is referred to as temptation among ..., to prevent committing ...sin. As for the dowry, it is not a payment to the woman or her family; if you were to buy the woman, you could not afford even a single hair of hers. The dowry is one of the rights of the woman, and the person marrying her is obligated to give her a dowry. There is no limit to the dowry; it depends on the woman's parents. However, a smaller dowry is preferable.</p>	<p>Women of puberty age can get married</p> <p>Prevention of sin</p> <p>Dowry is not payment</p>	<p>Practicality of religion in solving human problems leading to holiness in living and secure future</p>	
<p>It is not just a tradition for us to marry early, it is a holy example (practice of the Prophet). There is nothing wrong for us believers to marry at an early age; in fact, it can be beneficial for us to avoid engaging in undesirable activities that are prohibited.</p>	<p>Example of the Prophet</p> <p>Moral benefits</p> <p>Widely accepted practice</p> <p>Avoiding sin</p>	<p>Holiness in living</p> <p>Religious path to holiness</p>	

	Early marriage is OK		
For those who do not know, this tradition... Early marriage is a way to avoid adultery. And this tradition is not intended to exploit children or deprive them of their freedom to be happy while they are young. However, we are here in this world to worship the Almighty Creator and not just to enjoy ourselves. It is hoped that our non-believer brothers and sisters and even our fellow believers will understand this. And we should not rush to judge the parents of the child and the man because we do not know their true intentions. ...And hopefully, we will not judge traditions or other cultures immediately. Thank you.	Importance of following the tradition under religion  Preventing adultery  Difference in cultures and traditions  Parental responsibility  Early marriage avoids sin	Path to religious perfection (without sin)	
Excuse me, sir, early marriage is not a tradition; rather, it is a law of our religion to prevent adultery because it is one of the greatest sins against God	Adultery  Early marriage as a law, not just a tradition	Path to holiness	
In our tradition, it is not forbidden to marry early. Rather, it is a holy example... to avoid things that are forbidden in our religion. Let's just respect each other.	Marriage prevents sinning  Respect for difference	Marriage is holy	
In our tradition, it is not forbidden to marry early. Rather, it is [holy]... to avoid things that are forbidden in our religion. Let's just respect each other.	Marriage prevents sinning Respect for difference	Marriage is holy	

Defenders overall rhetorical act: Religion A superiority of religion through superior religious living, pursuit of holiness, truthfulness, protection of followers

Superiority in:

-Child protection	]	Religious
-Holiness/holy act	]	superiority
-Women's consent	]	human and spiritual
-True religion -truthfulness to religious living	]	affairs; rhetoric draws
Reason that they are being oppressed.	]	from deep faith

Defenders used a variety of appeals that complement one another:

Rhetorical questions to divert the issue on the character and credibility of the opposer, who they clearly identify as Religion B, is used frequently. After diverted self-reflection is initiated, emotional images of Religion B society's failure in addressing social issues, particularly the failures and hypocrisies of Religion B followers who impose on the Religion A believers, are presented through logical arguments and descriptions of situations that are common in communities. Combining ethos, pathos and logos, defenders, even if not intentional, sound like a chorus of rhetoricians, virtually collectively guiding the readers' judgment to point out the inferiority of Religion B in ensuring a holy path for its followers, including the efficiency of religion in avoiding sin among its people.

The claim of superiority of efficiency and practicality of religion is presented by the defenders' comments as if echoing in unison their belief in religion as a superior and true religion. Character attacks, backed descriptions of common situations such

as the problem of unwanted pregnancies, abandonment of babies, sexual immorality and other human sins.

Defenders face opposers with rebuttals, use politeness and express cooperation to illuminate the minds of opposers on real problematic scenarios that religious decree and living is only able to solve. In essence, the defenders are fully convinced that the practice is sacred and assures a life safe from sexual sins, and an after-life assured of a holy place in eternity. Justifications, claim, grounds, warrant, qualifier, rebuttal, and backing strategies of argumentation strengthen the rhetorics of the virtual community of defenders of child marriage practice.

**5.1.2 Table 2: Thematic Analysis of Opposers' Comments**

Translation	Topics> Themes >Speech Act		
<p>Before social media became popular, that kind of thing already existed even in other countries; it's almost like a festival where weddings happen all at once... Sometimes, young girls even die because their private parts are abused on their first night since they're so young, around 12 or 13 years old, and the men are 40 to 50 years old. Those poor children really deserve pity.</p>	<p>Danger of sexual act for young children</p> <p>CM as child abuse</p>	<p>Concern for child welfare</p>	<p>Religious abuse,</p> <p>Children/women are victims</p> <p>Rights are for all</p>
<p>I was thinking, why do they need to get married even if they're still young? In the [country], it's illegal to marry before 18, but in [their religion], even if the</p>	<p>Concern for child</p> <p>Illegal acts under the law</p>	<p>Tradition is wrong</p>	

children don't want to, the parents might insist because they saw them together in a room, even though the boy insists nothing happened.			
It's right to be at the right age and to have already achieved your dreams.	Concern for child's future	Child rights Right age for consent	
Education should be a priority for the government.	Concern for child's education	Child rights	
According to the laws, the age limit for getting married is up to 25 years old, regardless of the person's religion."	Concern for child welfare	Tradition is wrong Child rights	
It's just sad that at a young age, you experience married life... it's difficult.	Concern for the child	Child welfare	
"I am half ... and half ..., but I am bisexual. I know about the practice of child marriage, but I cannot support it just for money. It's not good to see them married at a young age. It's disgusting if they are married off early; instead, they should be allowed to finish their studies to see what their future holds. It's so sad, but this is part of the rules in religion.	Concern for child Parents are concerned with money	Tradition is abusive	
They haven't yet achieved their dreams to help their parents, yet they're getting	Concern for child	Child rights	

married early. What kind of religion is that... I wonder if it will reach the Senate hahaha."			
OMG, poor 13-year-old boy. Nothing happened, so why was he forced to get married? Tsk tsk.	Concern for child Child rights	Tradition is abusive	
Forced marriage should be condemned because it is a human rights violation. Every woman should be given the opportunity to choose and make decisions about her own life. Stop supporting practices that make women more vulnerable to violence!"	Human rights violation Rights of women/girls over own life Violence against women	Religious tradition violates women	
This is really horrible. The children have no freedom.	Concern for child welfare	Denial of rights	
Why is it like that? It's not wrong for parents to choose a man for their daughter to marry, but the girl is still too young. She doesn't even know what marriage is called and hasn't experienced living as a single woman. That's what's wrong.	Abuse of children	Religious tradition is abusive	
Why is it like that? It's not wrong for parents to choose a man for their daughter to marry, but the girl is still too young. She doesn't even know what marriage is called and hasn't experienced living	Child is too young for marriage Child is innocent about marriage Parents are	Tradition is wrong	

as a single woman. That's what's wrong.	responsible		
First of all, apologies. We respect your traditions and culture, especially if that's what has been practiced and accepted in your place. However, a 13-year-old girl does not yet have the maturity to...	Child too young for marriage	Abuse of children because of religious tradition	
Why is it like that? It's not wrong for parents to choose a man for their daughter to marry, but the girl is still too young. She doesn't even know what marriage is called and hasn't experienced living as a single woman. That's what's wrong.	Young girls are not emotionally and mentally prepared for marriage  Potential negative consequences of the practice  Wellbeing and rights of young girls.	Children cannot give consent	
That 13-year-old is pitiful. They really don't want it.	Concern for child's situation	Religious tradition is abusive	
Yes, it's really sad; what would they know about married life at just 13 years old?"	Concern for child's readiness	Religious tradition is abusive	
"It's their tradition; I just hope that the children continue their education and that the parents continue to guide them since they are still minors."	Concern for child's education	Parental accountability	
The tradition is so harsh, it shows no mercy towards children.	Child cruelty	Religious tradition is cruel	
My understanding of the	Parents should	Importance	

religion is that it also depends on the woman. Even at a young age, if a girl doesn't want to get married, she cannot be forced by her parents or anyone else who wishes to marry her.	respect daughter's decision	of consent in marriage	
Who told you that? There are cases wherein a mother vehemently refuses to let her 9-year-old child get married. Despite the tight bond between mother and child, the mother loses her rights over her own child.	Against the will of the mother  Right of mother over her daughter	Depriving women of their rights	
They should be apprehended. It's like legalizing pedophilia.	Those who practice it are pedophiles	They are criminals	
Many girls die because they have vulnerable bodies. Men can be like demons, craving for it.	Harm on vulnerable women  Evil capacity of men	Men's sexual violence against women	
That's too much. At 13 years old, instead of playing and studying, they already got married. That really should be stopped because it's completely wrong. That guy looks almost like her father. Instead of enjoying her youth, she got caught up in that reality. It's just sad.	Too young for marriage  Child should enjoy childhood	Child welfare	
...disgusting...i totally agree w/ you.	Disgusting practice	Religious tolerance for sexual violence	
Such a tradition benefits	Child marriage is	Child	

men with pedophilic tendencies, but it disadvantages underage girls, especially with early pregnancies which are dangerous to their health at a young age.	pedophilia  Dangerous for the health of girls	welfare/protection	
.....	Concern for child rights	Tradition is wrong  Child rights	
They won't be able to get a marriage certificate...	Law forbids it	Tradition is wrong  Child rights	
How pitiful you are, Oi. Oh my God, Rudy, is there no one older than the woman; poor girl. She was married at an inappropriate age, and maybe wealth is the trade-off. Oh my God, I am the one who feels sorry for the child.	Girl too young for marriage  Pitiful situation for a child	Child abuse	
Whether they are Religion A believer, Religion B believers, or of any religion, we should not let young people have girlfriends or boyfriends. Rice and other necessities are expensive now. They should focus on studying first. It's sad that young people are already thinking about their future when they should be focusing on their	Concern for child	Tradition is abusive	

education.			
Could their minds change when they reach the right age?	Concern for children when they grow up		
Yes sis, the same place. It's even more regrettable about the second one; the girl is 16, the boy is 13. The boy is still a baby.	Concern for girls and boys		
How could that be, they didn't even get to enjoy their youth.	Concern for child's enjoyment of life		
If a tribe's culture involves killing their own people, should we not care? The government should do something about it.	Government should intervene		
Early pregnancy is okay if the parents will arrange the marriage, but one of them is unfortunate because they are younger and just friends. As a result, they weren't able to continue their education.	Concern for children's education		
That's right, let's leave them be; it's their life. Maybe they think life is better with a spouse. What will happen is they'll age quickly while still young, which is unfortunate. But as they say, let's leave them be; it's their life."	Concern for children when they grow up		
Poor mindset. Don't focus on your love life for now;	Concern for child's future	Child rights	

prioritize success.			
The law still can't do anything. The law needs to be enforced with real consequences; parents should be prosecuted and imprisoned. There should be no exemptions, no matter who you are.	Concern for child	Child marriage is a crime	
Forced marriage should be condemned because this is a human rights violation. Every woman should be given an opportunity to choose and make decisions about their lives. Stop supporting practices which could make every woman more vulnerable to violence!	Human rights violation Right of woman to choose Violence against women	Forced marriage makes women vulnerable to violence	
There is that kind of situation. However, the outcome of their relationship does not end well. Their relationship will just be filled with constant arguments.	CM results in failure	Wrong solution	Religion A Backwardness Religion B sense of supremacy
"Wrong... those are the girl's parents! Educate your child first. It's your responsibility to care for a child at a young age. We're from different cultures, but in my opinion, it's a BIG WRONG."	Parents are to blame Education should come first before marriage	Tradition is wrong	
Such beliefs should be eliminated here... it's	Concern for the child	Backwardness of belief	

unfortunate for the young children.			
[The religion] is truly shameless. How can they improve their lives if they are married off while still children and playing around? You must have something wrong with your mind—it's unbelievable! You have such low standards with your religious teachings. Instead of focusing on your marriages, you should be patient with your lives and pursue your dreams. Marrying off young people is insane... You should see a psychologist. This is prohibited in the country, even if you are ....!"	Concern for child welfare  Child abuse	Religion is wrong	
That's why many convert to [the other religion] because of such traditions in [your religion]—you're still young but already burdened with responsibilities. This is what we Visayans say: 'Small but already big.'	Concern for the child	Tradition is wrong	
If you don't want people to judge and make suggestions about your culture, then don't post it so that we can't comment and feel pity. We can't do anything anyway; even	Social media as public,  Human rights,  The "Other" culture	CM Violates children but Religion B cannot do anything but comment	

Neneng has no human rights, what more for us who are just commenting, gossiping, and feeling sorry? I hope that's the last of it.			
It's unavoidable to mention .... because that's part of his teachings, right? And he also did that, didn't he? He married a 6-year-old and consummated the marriage when she was 9 years old. Well, [religious icon] is a good example.	Prophet married a young girl and had sexual relations with the girl very early	The religious icon's example is to blame	
That's why these ancient traditions should no longer be followed today. Are we in the Digital Age still stuck with caveman thinking? This kind of deplorable practice should be condemned and forbidden altogether.	CM practice as uncivilized practice and should be condemned	Modernity and civilization	
No wonder that place has no progress. It is inhabited by armed individuals and bandits.	Lawlessness and lack of progress  Armed individuals and bandits who disrupt peace and order	CM exists in lawless society	
Hey, fool. Did I mention any religion?... Stop pretending to be smart. Idiot. Direct your opinion to the post, not to the comment. Fool.	Defenders being stupid  Defensive stance of defenders	Wrong argument	
Culture is one of the treasures of our ancestors and continues to be propagated by the modern	Old wrong culture should be discarded	Discarding old cultural practices	

generation. However, as time goes by, some cultures may not be suitable for different concepts of life and can become suffocating. It is not wrong to break away from the customary practices if the well-being of each individual is being discussed.	Individual well-being more important than customs	from backward religion	
The tradition is so harsh, it shows no mercy towards children.	Abuse of children	Tradition is abusive	
In God's law, that is truly forbidden.	Forbidden by God	Religion violates God's law	
Oh, that's your belief. No one is opposing your beliefs. I definitely don't have the time to study that.	Belief is stupid	Tradition is backward	
That's why we suffer even more because of these mindsets.	Tradition brings suffering	Backward mindset	
Honestly, it's forbidden; the holy book says it's wrong to marry children... God will be mad."	God forbids it	Tradition violates God's law	
I understand the culture and traditions of each community. However, from the very beginning, I requested an apology. What I am expressing is not judgment but rather an opinion and a question, as I am aware of the mentioned	Respect for tradition Freedom of speech Right to oppose	Religion B seeing what is wrong	

<p>culture and tradition. I have also watched a story about this on .... I am trying to understand the content of the story to better grasp their culture and traditions. You are right; we are here in this world to worship the Creator. Every community and religion has its own beliefs and traditions, just like us .... However, in this modern world, we cannot avoid sharing our opinions, as expressed here.</p>			
<p>This is the reason why traditions ought to be challenged. If ethics and science tell us that something is actually wrong with a tradition, we should change it!</p>	<p>Ethics and science over tradition</p> <p>Change wrong traditions</p>	<p>Backward tradition</p>	
<p>Sorry, but not everyone called a ...is truly a.... Those who violate God's laws are not believers. True believers are also forbidden from having sex with the same sex or with someone who is not married. God said that those who break His commands are not with Him. And true believers would not...</p> <p>Marrying someone who is younger or a minor is not acceptable. Everything should be prepared—emotionally, physically, spiritually,</p>	<p>There are fake believers</p> <p>True believers follow God's laws</p> <p>Marrying children is forbidden</p> <p>Women are meant for men</p>	<p>Holiness of true Religion B believers</p>	

<p>financially, and at the right age. That's how true believers should act because that's also what God commands for true believers.</p>			
<p>"If I were a man, I would be ashamed to marry a 13-year-old child. This is a very young age, in fact, she could be my grandchild. I hope this kind of culture stops; it is not pleasing in the eyes of God and people."</p>	<p>Abuse of children</p>	<p>Cultural practice is shameful</p>	
<p>This is very hard to understand for a child; it's troubling. Except for those who are good, your culture seems rebellious. It feels like the basis of your culture is almost animalistic.</p>	<p>Child abuse is animalistic.</p>	<p>Religion A culture is animalistic</p>	
<p>"How pitiful for this young girl. I respect their beliefs and traditions, but this one, my God... she might still be growing pubic hair and yet she's being married off."</p> <p>"I'll just sing 'Stupid Love,' especially the part where it goes '_____'s private part is completely wrecked."</p>	<p>Sexual abuse of children</p>	<p>Belief/tradition is stupid</p>	
<p>"Marriage is not the solution for someone to escape poverty. Educate your children, especially</p>	<p>Wrong solution</p> <p>Parents only want money</p>	<p>Religion A tradition allows parents to</p>	

the girls. It feels like you're selling them at a young age. Instead of letting them enjoy their youth, you confine them."		sell their children	
Haha, that's why the country isn't developing—because superstitions and beliefs take precedence.	Beliefs that prevent progress	Religion A beliefs are regressive	
Sorry, sister, even though we don't know much about your traditions, I still think it's wrong. Even if they're not living together, from what I've seen, if the parents of the child seem to be money-driven, then that's how they are.	Wrong tradition  Parents only want money	Religion A tradition allows parents to sell their children	
I said that getting married early is to avoid adultery. However, I don't believe in that because when a person who has no mercy destroys a family, they cannot be stopped. A ... woman destroyed our family by taking my children's father. I yielded because, when I spoke to him, he showed no mercy despite having children with me; his response was that he would rather kill ... So, I don't believe that marrying young prevents adultery. I apologize for my views.	Religion A woman destroyed their family  Does not believe in what Religion A believers say	Religion A hypocrisy	
That's why many suffer and don't finish their studies	Children who marry early do not finish	Helpless situation	

because their parents arrange marriages at a young age. Let's not judge them.	education Parents arrange the marriage Religion A children are pitiful		
Hey sis, what if there's no water for washing? What will you use to wash your urine?	Insinuating stupidity of Religion A believers	Religion A does not make sense	
What kind of religion is this, full of lust hahaha	Concern for child	Religion A does not make sense	
That's why there are more and more poor people in the country; their numbers keep increasing, and then they blame the government. Haha, asking for help through social welfare."	Concern for child People are poor because Religion A tradition	Religious tradition is backward	
I hope that such situations can be changed because the children still have futures ahead of them.	Concern for child's future	Religious tradition needs change	
Even if they are married, they shouldn't live together right away because they are still young. At age 18, they can live together. It is especially difficult to avoid doing things they shouldn't when living under one roof. Well, let's just respect their religious law	Concern for child welfare Tolerance for law that does not make sense	Tradition is backward	

and what is stated there.			
Read [holy book]; it's prohibited, not just in [your religion]. So, don't [praise your God]' with, haha	Religion B forbids it also  Stop being hypocritical	Religious ignorance, hypocrisy	
They exploit their tradition and religion to justify their greed, wickedness, and worldly desires. And then, we who oppose and criticize them are accused of being disrespectful and evil towards their religion. Goodness gracious...	Belief/tradition destroys the life of the child	Greedy, wicked religion	
Twisted beliefs that ..... are fed.	Concern for child	Religious twistedness	
.....	Criminal act as basis of religious practice	Religious lawlessness	
If they have their own laws, they might as well have their own government, too. Sigh.	Concern for child welfare	Religion is hopeless	
They are not ..., their beliefs are different.	Difference in beliefs	Religion A is backward	
That's why they and the government or other religions don't understand each other; they adhere to false beliefs.	Practice is based on false beliefs	Religious tradition is wrong	
The prohibited acts here in	Act is crime	Religious	

the country can result in charges.	Religion A believers do not belong	tradition is wrong	
"You're right, and it's just sad that everything is being normalized nowadays, even [wrong] marriage in the eyes of God."	What is wrong is normalized	Tradition is backward	

<p>I am a ...., and according to my research, while religion does not specify a minimum age for marriage, reaching puberty, having sound judgment, and comprehensive maturity before entering into a marital contract—as well as having the capacity to understand and fulfill the rights and responsibilities of a spouse after marriage—are clear prerequisites in [the religion].</p> <p>So my question is, can a 13-year-old really handle the responsibilities of caring for babies as a spouse? Yes, it is our culture, but every cultural practice should be considered carefully.</p>	<p>Readiness is important in Religion A marriage</p> <p>There are different cultures in the religion</p> <p>True religion does not violate children</p>	<p>Matter of cultural difference</p>	<p>Do not blame religion</p> <p>Wrong practice of faith, wrong interpretation of religious text</p>
If you are a true believer, you know that it is prohibited to get married against the will of the woman.	Against the will of the mother	Wrong belief of others	

That tradition is so wrong and infuriating. Those idiots and useless people, I really want to curse them.	Those who practice it are ignorant	Tradition is based on ignorance, not religion	
I am also a...., but [praise God] none of our family members are rushing into early marriages. We get married around the ages of 20+ to 30+. It is important to prioritize education and enjoy our youth. Let's not rush into marriage. We should also consider the future of our children.	Right age of marriage for women  Importance of education first	Religion is not practiced right	
There are also many branches of religion. There are [different groups]. My spouse is a.... Not all ... behave in that way.	Diversity among believers	Wrong belief of others	
It's not up to them because the parents are the ones who really talk and come to an agreement, even if the young girl is not aware of it, regarding the arrangement between the parents of the girl and the parents of the boy.	Against the will of the girl  Accountability of parents	Blame on parents	
That's why it's important to educate people to become aware. However, these are traditions and cultures that cannot be easily removed due to primary socialization factors. It is indeed challenging.	Education can help change tradition and culture  Hard to change	Tradition and culture as the culprits	
Early marriage is not only among.... My grandmother also got married at 13, so	Exists in other religions	Problem is cultural	

<p>her grandchildren are all 76 years old, hahaha.</p>			
<p>I am a ..., but I would never tolerate such practices. An older man can surely find a woman of his own age, not a child. I know the child is being forced into it and doesn't know anything about life. Young people should enjoy their childhood. Because of money, the parents of the child allow it? No matter what the reason, such practices are still wrong. This kind of culture must be prohibited.</p>	<p>Religion A will not tolerate forcing children into marriage</p> <p>Parents are to blame</p>	<p>Marrying children is cultural</p>	
<p>I am a .... and I am against this tradition. It's pitiful for the child who has no understanding of the responsibilities she will face as a wife. Fortunately for us, our parents are okay with our choice of partner as long as he is the right man.</p>	<p>Religion A will not tolerate forcing children into marriage</p> <p>Parents should respect the freedom of choice</p>	<p>Marrying children is cultural</p>	
<p>I am also a ... but I am always against this practice. It is not a good practice for our young generations. In areas where poverty is severe and education is lacking, sometimes girls themselves believe that marriage will secure their future, which is a very wrong decision. Marrying off a daughter allows families to reduce their expenses by having</p>	<p>Religion A will not tolerate forcing children into marriage</p> <p>Parents are sometimes poor</p> <p>Marriage to secure the child's future</p>	<p>Marrying children is cultural</p>	

one less person to feed.			
I am a ... but in our family, no one has ever married at such a young age or to an older man! It's pitiful for the child; it depends on the parents of the girl. If they accept the older man, they can challenge it if they have aspirations for their child.	Religion A will not tolerate forcing children into marriage  Parents can challenge the proposed marriage	Marrying children is cultural	
For the knowledge of many, that is not culture. Some families may agree to such practices, but not all of them do that. If I were to choose, I wouldn't want to marry someone with such a significant age gap.	Parents are to blame	Practice is isolated	
I am a ...., and if there's something I'd like to change, it would be this tradition. Most of the youth in our community are not very aware of this issue; it feels like you have to follow what your parents want because it's what they desire. As a result, many get married early in our community.	Parents are to blame  Children should be made aware	Practice is isolated	
I am a ...too, but I do not agree with this tradition. I don't know how it can be stopped. It's pitiful to see young girls married off to older men, with some taking advantage due to their parents' poverty.	Parents are poor	Practice is isolated	

It's painful for parents to see their children getting married early because they have dreams for their children's well-being.	Parents are helpless	Concerned parents are not to blame  They are not acting based on religion	
Religion was made dirty. You were already told before, you are truly evil. After that, they polluted the religion. That's why stop it!	Concern for child	Wrong interpretation	

Opposer speech acts vary— mostly pertaining to accusations of religious abuse of children, violations of rights, women as victims, backwardness of the religion/culture and grounding in the sense of Religion B supremacy with anti-Religion A rhetoric. Most are appeals to emotions with concern for the child's welfare.

There is limited logical argumentation but more on attacks on the character of the defender's character. Evidence or references to real-life scenarios are not really used. There occasional contextualization, but there is more investment on emotional barrage of words to express disdain toward Religion A and their child marriage practice from the standpoint of insinuated Religion B righteousness.

## 5.2 Discussion

### 5.2.1 Speech acts of the defenders of child marriage

Overall, defenders asserted **religious superiority** in protecting children and women, curing the sinful human nature, pursuit of holiness, and obedience to Divine Law. The religious tradition of marriage of girls is a solution to a sinfully disorderly world, which Religion B fails to solve.

#### 5.2.1.1 Child Protection

Child welfare starts off as the prime emotional concern based on an established norm. When responding to comments opposing child abuse, defenders acknowledge the prohibition for minors to get married because it is “considered child abuse.” After recognizing this, defenders launch an attack on the character of the opposers by pointing to their failings in focusing on actions that are “more heinous,” painting imagery of “minors getting pregnant,” and young mothers “abandoning their babies in trash bins.” The opposers are shamed for failing to “apply their words about child abuse” in their own situations.

When pertaining to opposers whose own minors are getting pregnant and “abandoning their babies” and thus committing what is “considered child abuse,” defenders emphasize the gravity of sin in the moral realm, which translates to a form of child exploitation in the legal sense. Mothers “abandoning their babies” implies a wide-spread problem of pregnancies outside of wedlock, a serious problem that the Religion A believer community addresses with practical logical fairness. A girl who is

married so she can avoid being pregnant outside of marriage also saves the coming baby from abandonment and shields the pregnant girl from shame.

The comment that opposers "should apply their words about child abuse to those situations" draws from irony, pointing an oversight of Religion B believers. Defenders imply that the commitment of opposers to preventing child abuse is inconsistent with their argument for prevention of child abuse and so merits no credibility.

The comment "You just marry them instead of raping them" pits two extreme options against each other. Although it limits readers to only two choices, rape of minors happen in communities where the perpetrator escape criminal accountability because of the context where government laws are implemented weakly. Marrying the male to the girl he likes is a way to prevent rape and make males accountable for their actions and think twice before forcing themselves onto the girls. "The elderly man who frequently discusses raping a minor" is used to shock opposers with a situational dilemma. Marriage is presented as the lesser of two evils. Marriage is a preventative measure against rape.

Questions provoke self-reflection for the opposers who focus on the Religion A believer faith and not their own. "Which faith does someone who loves rape adhere to, even if their priests sexually abused a child?" challenges the opposing Religion B believers to examine their own moral inconsistency, implying their inability to protect their own children from abuse by their own religious leaders. It is an attack on the integrity of opposers as they being associated with people who tolerate

or overlook rape within their own religious community. They throw criticism back at the opposers who do not show respect for “tradition” they do not understand.

Defenders command opposers to “think first,” stop being ignorant about what really happens to girls and the effective ways to save them before criticizing. Opposers should show “respect for tradition and cultural practices.” Defenders fight back with questions to show the ill-informed opinions of opposers.

Respect and effective protection for women and girls are emphasized: “If both families agreed and the woman wasn't forced, there's nothing wrong with it. It was a marriage, not rape like what happens” with many Religion B believers. “There are even cases where a mother and daughter are both abused. Instead of fixing things because of the belief that marriage is not allowed for minors, think about what is right.”

Protection emanating from the strong is projected when there is mention of “people from” conflict affected areas known to be the place where government soldiers who are Religion B believers were “massacred” (DTIC, 2016). Emphasizing the “different culture,” there is an insinuated strength of character of defenders and the threat of retaliation just like in the conflicted areas whenever the opposers are directed not to “underestimate them” and “stay quiet” about the girl’s marriage because they “don't know anything and have no right to interfere.”

“They may speak strongly about our tradition,” goes one comment, “but they are unable to rescue the child. They only keep talking without actually being able to

help.” Religion A believers’ tradition has been solving world problems such as protecting children and keeping young people from being violated and committing the sin of giving in to sexual desires. The imposing Religion B believers are inferiors who allow sexual sins to be committed against and by young people within their own communities.

Cultural relativism is the soft entry point to demand respect for autonomy of a culture that is capable of making its own decisions for child welfare matters that outsiders will not be able to fully comprehend. With a commanding tone, being asked to stay quiet indicates an unchangeable stance and establishes a boundary that should not be trespassed by outsiders. That opposers "don't know anything and have no right to interfere," authoritatively expresses the idea that the uninformed outsider-opposers are not welcomed and should not pass judgment on a different culture.

Defenders directly oppose the law prohibiting child marriage based on the logic of its impracticality, which does not make men accountable for their actions: "That anti-child marriage law has shortcomings in its rules. Even in Religion B, there should be exceptions if there is a good reason. For me, the law prohibiting marriage for minors is wrong. There should be an exemption; if the girl is pregnant, they should be allowed to marry because there is another law that says if a girl gives birth without showing a marriage contract, the father's surname cannot be registered on the birth certificate. This is the problem with our laws: the man who got someone pregnant, regardless of his age, has no legal responsibility for the child born and can simply escape responsibility. Therefore, even if a 10-year-old impregnates a

6-year-old or a 30-year-old woman, they should be allowed to marry rather than being publicly ridiculed."

The comment also demonstrates a grounded awareness of the nuances and varying situations that the anti-child marriage law cannot equitably address. The law's applicability to all kinds of situations is a feature of strength but faced with social norms in communities, the defender thinks that the law's generalization of child marriage is also its weakness.

#### **5.2.1.2 Do not blame religion**

Religion should not be blamed for difficult situations experienced by married girls because this is not true for all. The comment establishes a global religion whose followers' opinions should not be taken lightly. The "nonsense comment" of opposers makes it obvious that they are not "aware that there are 1.7 billion Religion A believers in the world." The community of believers are of diverse cultures.

Opposers underestimate Religion A believers and do not realize the global Religion A believer community that shares "the same" the traditions as those "of people from [other religion-based states]. Despite this, the religion "also requires [believers] to obey the laws of the country they reside in, and most countries have a minimum legal age for marriage with parental consent." Opposers are commanded to look at the tribe and culture of a place rather than solely focusing on religion. Obeying the laws of the country corrects misconceptions that religious beliefs are lawless. Believers do have their own governments and obey laws on legal age for marriage. Religion should not be blamed for any flaw in cultural tradition.

"You have no right to dictate our tradition" seeks defense through cultural relativism. "Did we interfere with your tradition? If you want us to respect you, please respect us as well" are rhetorical questions invoking tolerance. Outsiders "dictating on a tradition" of the insiders and are "disrespectful" put the opposing outsiders in their place, which is outside. Outsiders should have nothing to do with the tradition.

Insiders versus outsiders and the "us" against them builds polarity, diverts the topic towards hostility between opposing cultures. Trying to calm the tension, Religion B believers who defend the defenders call for non-interference: "[it is religion]. Leave them with their own cultural traditions and ancient customs."

Religion B believers defend the defenders who think that while they "can't deny the fact there is something wrong, but that's their belief," they stand on cultural relativism. "Culture is culture" emphasizes the absoluteness of culture and the necessity of tolerance. Religion has nothing to do with it.

Hitting the point of conflict between religions, "We are not seeking war with [your] religion" recognizes the context where the disagreement occurs – Religion A believers and Religion B believers can best have peace by not meddling in each other's traditions.

One explained: "Do not belittle other religions. We have lost respect for one another, which is why there are so many tragedies today." Pointing to the tension, the comment continues with reproach on what Religion B believers have tolerated

within their own backyard without Religion A believer interference: "Men to men and women to women are in relationships, and they live under the same roof." Both religions condemn sexual immorality in non-heterosexual relationships. Religion B believers have been reproaching Religion A believers for the marriage of girls instead of noticing their own sexual immorality: "There are so many people interfering with Religion A believer culture. Do we interfere with yours? Don't be like that. Please respect our religion."

Some Religion B believers, faced with this kind of defender arguments, would agree not to interfere based on the knowledge that a global community of Religion A believers including "Religion A believers in the Middle East" that "that's their culture" in other parts of the world and not just in the country so respect for cultural differences should prevent non-Religion A believers from interfering with the culture that see nothing wrong in the marriage of girls.

### **5.2.1.3 The true religion**

Religion B is flawed, and its believers are jealous sinners. "Focus on what you believe in because we all have our own traditions, so respect our traditions instead" commands respect for cultural difference, and segues to "Have you seen any mistakes in our traditions like getting pregnant before marriage? None, right?" The comment pushes on with a declaration in the form of a question to assert the marriage of girls as the efficient solution for pregnancies outside of marriage. In defense of the tradition within the religion, "You're just jealous because you do not have that in your culture" turns the table around by criticizing the Religion B believers as people who envy the men who can have young girls as brides. Here the right

solution is paired with pleasurable moral rights enjoyed by the men— having young girls as brides but being morally correct at the same time. In these statements, tradition is equated with religion. On the one hand, the opposers with a different religion fail to prevent pregnancies outside of marriage. On the other hand, the defenders of another religion are successful in ensuring that no one among their girl-children conceived outside of marriage.

One comment clarifies that early marriage is a tradition with divine permission because it is allowed by God. Believers avoid sin by being "married early rather than imitating others." "Others" pertain primarily to the Religion B believers, "who engage in premarital sex." Early marriage's significance is elevated from being tradition to an efficient solution to the propensity to sin resulting in pregnancy outside of marriage: "Sexual intercourse is only permitted among married couples and not among boyfriends/girlfriends."

Contrast and comparison are used to strengthen their argument by contrasting early marriage under religious practice against other religions, such as same-sex relationships, living together, and premarital sex. The comparison suggests the superiority of the defenders' religious practices, aiming to persuade the reader by implying that the defenders' religious principles are morally superior compared to the religion of the opposers, which is Religion B.

The comment below goes straight to the point. From declaring the validity of early marriage and the ignorance of non-Religion A believers, the directive for the ignorant to remain silent and the assertion of the superiority of the defenders' religion over all

other religions based on its moral uprightness are evident. The assertion is direct: **The defenders' religion is the real and perfect religion. All others are fake and flawed.**

“Early marriage is permitted in [our religion]. If you don't have enough knowledge about our Religion A believer laws, it would be better to remain silent. We, Religion A believers, respect your beliefs, so you should also respect ours. PS: Our religion promotes early marriage, which is better compared to the other non-Religion A believers who allow same-sex relationships, living together, premarital sex, and other things that are abominable in the eyes of God...Our religion is perfect.”

The failure of non-Religion A believers in getting justice for women is evident when “if someone's daughter gets raped, it's treated as nothing in their culture.” In contrast, in Religion A believer areas, “if something like that happens, the perpetrator is immediately executed.” Men can be killed when they disrespect women.”Doing something bad to women can cost you your life.” While Religion B believers let go of injustices to women, Religion A believers' having high regard for women's purity shows their superior religious discipline because they are willing to kill their own men who disrespect women. The defenders' religion is superior in protecting women.

Pertaining to young girls who begin their journey into puberty, Religion is elevated as “better than Religion B where a 9-year-old is already flirting with boys and by 13, she is already ruined.” Religion B fails to keep the purity of their girls while, “for Religion A believers, it's better to get married early” than for girls to sin. While religion

protects the purity of Religion A believer girls and shields them from being ruined at an early age and “committing sin,” Religion B believers girls lose their purity by having multiple sexual relations very early in life.

Opposers point out the irony that even while the opposers’ religion fails and the defenders’ religion succeeds, the former still oppose the marriage of girls under another religious tradition. Religion B believers interference is based on a delusion of being better than Religion A believers. As the comment goes: “Wow, it's incredible how judgmental the self-righteous are. Hey, let me tell you, that's our...tradition. Why do you care? Did you contribute anything to their wedding? These [Religion B believers] are abnormal, too.”

Mocking Religion B for its religious failures, defenders argue that the hypocritical Religion B believers allow men to have “sex with ten or more of [Religion B believers] daughters before marriage.” With disgusting imagery, the fakeness of Religion B believers righteousness is painted vividly. Religion B believers opposing early marriage among Religion A believers commit what is “even more forbidden” which is to “have repeated sexual relations” with different women.

For the defenders, Religion B believers live in immorality, while Religion A believers adhere to sexual purity and moral uprightness. There is sarcasm applied: “They are surprised when [Religion A believers] get married at a young age, while they are not surprised when there are young pregnant girls who are not yet married. When sin becomes normalized among people, following God truly becomes something unusual.”

With a rhetorical question, "If you were put in their position or in their culture, would you agree to have it taken away?!" The defender diverts the focus away from the topic of discussion toward a question in the guise of respect for cultural differences but actually asserts superior understanding.

"Think about it! Respect their upbringing..." commands the opposer to respect a culture that is not theirs. "Don't be too advanced" invalidates the opposition by reminding the opposers of their lack of respect based on a limited understanding of the situation.

In the same tone, "What do you care about religious law? Why do [Religion B believers] interfere with us [Religion A believers]?" are rhetorical questions putting back the opposing Religion B believers to what the defender thinks the Religion B believers belong: To non-interference by not overstepping the boundary between religions. Explaining that the "young girl was not forced to marry that man; she chose to love him, so her parents arranged the marriage to prevent them from sinning" the defender attempts to correct the misunderstanding that the Religion A believer religion does not respect women's decisions on marriage while also pushing forward the religious logical solution to help believers avoid the commission of sin.

"It's better for them to get married than commit sin" demonstrates the religious understanding of human propensity to commit sexual sins, unlike the Religion B believers who live together "but not married."

To the defender, Religion B believers commenting “without knowing anything” is “more disgusting.” In this regard, the disgust is felt by the defender who knows better and has a superior moral and religious understanding of the predicament of young girls. Religion A believer religion values uprightness, while the opposing Religion B believers live in sin.

Knowledge of religion is a requirement of understanding the predicament of young girls in the Religion A believer context. “What do you care...? Why do [Religion B believers] interfere with us..?” are rhetorical questions to demonstrate the complexity of the issue that is being addressed by law that is not familiar to the opposer. The opposers are [Religion B believers] imposing on another religious law but have no idea of the complexity of the issue being addressed.

The assertion of **Religion B believers failure to achieve holiness** is a repeated theme illustrated through contrast: Tolerance for pregnancies “out[side] of wedlock” among Religion B believers against the prevention of this among Religion A believers; and, underage marriage prohibition leading to abandoned babies among Religion B believers against the prevention of baby abandonment among Religion A believers.

“You are [Religion B believers], we are [Religion A believer]; we worship differently and so our beliefs differ as well” insinuates irreparable differences coupled with a command for Religion B believers not to say things against Religion A believer ways: “Just focus on your own religion; leave us alone.”

#### **5.2.1.4 Woman's consent, woman is meant for man**

Emphasis on women's consent is also repeatedly emphasized. Usually starting off with rhetorical questions to divert attention towards the opposer's self-reflection on the shallowness of accusation by starting off with "Why, though? Is it deadly?" The logical sequence is to follow through with an explanation to show the opposer's ignorance on the importance of women's consent to marriage under Religion A believer tradition: "And, in our tradition as [Religion A believers], before a woman gets married to any man, she needs to have consent. She cannot get married if her parents or the woman herself does not agree."

The issue of pre-marital sexual relations is placed alongside the prohibited sexual relations between the same sex occurring in Religion B communities: "You do not have the right to judge our traditions" points back at the imposing [Religion B believers] community "where people get pregnant first, have a child before marriage, or where same-sex marriages occur." The us against you is repeatedly reflected in "Our belief." Expanding the argument is the added concern against Religion B believers who are portrayed as forgetting that "women are meant for men."

Asserting that there is "nothing wrong with that in [religion]," and "a woman [getting] her period" can get married," the logic is sourced from the biological reason that menstruation means readiness to conceive and have children. A girl who menstruates is already a woman: "In [our religion], marriage is not based on age. As soon as a girl starts having her monthly period, she can be married."

There is respect for women's consent: "Before the marriage, it is first asked if

she agrees; she's not forced." Further, on following through with this argument, opposers are told that "such occurrences are rare; only a few can be counted on one's fingers." Religion B believers are wasting their time on the issue of child marriage, which is actually a non-issue because it is based on natural law that girls become women when they menstruate, and even so, "a woman's decision" is still respected. Marriage of the women-girls "are rare." If the married couple "can support themselves," Religion B believers are told: "it's none of your business." Religion B believers are deriving their overgeneralizing accusations on a global religion based on rare occurrences.

Establishing the logic based on natural law, which is unchangeable, the repeated assertion that **Religion B believers lack credibility** continues:

"Unlike in your cases, sometimes even your own children are abused." - On Religion B believers for allowing abuse of their children and letting the offender go free without accountability.

"What's better: getting married or being killed?" – Putting Religion A believer wisdom on marriage as a preventive solution for human propensity to sin versus the Religion B believers' pretension of not allowing marriage but girls ending up killed by their rapists.

"At least they are legally married, unlike others who get pregnant before marriage." - Discrediting Religion B believers as jealous hypocrites

"They want to stop such beliefs because they want minors to get pregnant without a father. They want by the time they are 18 years old, ten men have already had them. That's why they don't want them to get married first." - Religion B believers are sexually immoral because underage girls get pregnant without knowing who the father is, after having sexual relations with many men without marriage.

"You are so judgmental. We are not being sold; the money that the men give to our parents is to help us. It doesn't mean that our parents are selling us." – Religion B believers are making up false information toward Religion A believers. Painting mental images of Religion A believers as people who love money more than the welfare of their children.

Defenders argue for dowry as a right, not a way to sell a person: "As for the dowry, it is not a payment to the woman or her family; if you were to buy the woman, you could not afford even a single hair of hers. The dowry is one of the rights of the woman, and the person marrying her is obligated to give her a dowry. There is no limit to the dowry; it depends on the woman's parents. However, a smaller dowry is preferable."

### **5.2.1.5 Religious oppression**

Creating misinformation on child marriage is rebuked as being disrespectful towards the religion, insinuating **religious oppression** against its believers. Religious oppression is committed by Religion B believers who are the ones sinning and not able to follow their teachings on morality. Defenders think within the

knowledge of the Religion A community's separateness from Religion B believers governance: "There's no need to insult religions. Let's just separate [our place] from [your country] if you don't want to respect the traditions of [Religion A]." Here the context of Religion A believers in a nation is presented. There is a continuing call for the separation of the Religion A people from the Religion B-dominated nation.

The stance that opposers and their Religion B believers religion are disgusting is made evident. **The promise of holiness in Religion B is a failure.** At the most basic level, Religion B is unable to protect its children. Defenders see the imposing opposing Religion B believers as oppressive posers. As one defender goes: "You speak so harshly, yet you don't know anything about our tradition. Why don't you also stop your 'pleasures before marriage'? Gosh!" The euphemism for God pertains to a feeling of surprise for Religion B believers who cannot understand the tradition they are opposing while also unable to solve their own problems of sexual immorality that the Religion A believer tradition is actually trying to solve.

Evoking a feeling of oppression toward Religion A believers: "I didn't say that I'm a lord" the defender goes down to the level of the oppressed. " I just feel like something is wrong" makes the comment personal and invites the reader to reflect to understand better at the personal level. Drawing down the opposer to reflect at the personal level to have empathy and be open, the rhetorical question "Why did you say that?" diverts the issue toward the opposer and away from the issue of girl marriage. "We don't interfere with any woman, even if she's married, but you still flirt with other women" comparison between believers of different faiths points down to Religion B believers as the ones who are morally flawed.

“You’re crazy, older brother” discredits the Religion B believers male who opposes the marriage of girls but actually has sexual relations with women other than his wife. Aside from being seen as hypocrites, Religion B believers are people who lost their mind just like saying: Do not speak about opposing the marriage of girls among Religion A believers if you are Religion B believers. Being Religion B believers already discredits you as a speaker.

Amplified by declarations that “Religion B believers are so arrogant... traditions are inhumane, like animals” and “prioritizing s\*xual desire before considering marriage.” Religion B believers are painted in a grim image of sexual maniacs deserving utter “disgust.” The opposers are portrayed as sinners who contradict their own faith: “If they knew it was forbidden, why did they choose to get pregnant early? There's nothing wrong with it because they chose to engage in relationships early. It's better than having a child outside of marriage; that's a greater sin.”

Exaggeration: “[Holy woman] was “ described as “12 years old when she married [holy man] who was 90 years old.” The comment was not concerned with truthfulness but is intended as a direct attack on Religion B believers' religion projected by defenders as worthless opponents in the pursuit of holiness. The issue is not the marriage of girls but Religion B believers' jealousy toward a superior religion, thus leading Religion B believers to act “foolish, like an idiot.”

“You are disgusting!! The way you make comments, it's as if your religion has no flaws, huh!?” Here, Religion B believers are projected as clueless about their

accusations against the other religion while, at the same time, cannot repair their own problems.

With disgust repeatedly expressed and the argument deepened through shocking situations, the opposer is directed to reflect on self-hypocrisy: “You just marry them instead of raping them. Consider the elderly man who frequently discusses raping a minor. Which faith does someone who loves rape adhere to, even their priests sexually abuse a child? Before making a criticism against our tradition, Jeje, think about it first.” The “you” are Religion B believers who oppose but actually rape children. “Just marry them” is a solution for opposers-Religion B believers who cannot control their sinful desires.

“The elderly man” who “frequently discusses raping a minor” adheres to the Religion B believers faith. The gravity of sin is demonstrated by putting forward the image of priests who “sexually abuse” children. The image created in the mind is that Religion B believers, Religion Bs in particular, are rotten to the core, from laypeople to its religious leaders who instead of embodying holiness are acting without reason and morality. “Jeje” indicates a virtual giggle that adds a personal touch, directly addressing the reader and urging them to think carefully before criticizing another's tradition because the defender knows what is happening in everyone's everyday lives.

Further on, Religion B believers ignorance vs. Religion A believer's wisdom is reflected in comments defending the marriage of girls, and opposers are directly addressed as “those who are judgmental and lack knowledge about [the religion].”

They do not know that the marriage of girls does equate to having “a culture where older men must be the husbands.” The situation is different in each marriage as “it depends on the parents and the individuals getting married.” However, unlike other defenders, some comments clarify that “Religion has nothing to do with it.” When religion has nothing to do with it, respect for culture is invoked.

“There is so much gossip here” refers to Religion B believers who talk about things that are not true and invent false accusations against other people, which is “not surprising” because “Religion B believers are full of gossip.” Rebuking Religion B believers gossip for faulting the marriage of girls among Religion A believers, the defender puts out a rhetorical question to make them realize that they “don't know anything” about religion: “Isn't it also forbidden to live together without being married?”

Vividly pointing to Religion B believers immorality, a comment states that Religion A believer tradition is “good [because] there is marriage first before \*uck.” Those who \*uck first before marriage is “worse” because they have “casual sexual encounters without marriage.” The comment is directed to opposers who are given “a subtle reminder” who are reacting because they will surely be “affected” by the defender’s remarks.

Using Religion B believers guilt in abortion comes up; considered a grave sin in the two religions and a serious crime in the country. “What about those who get pregnant by you and then have an abortion? They throw it away here and there. You should also post about that.”

Opposers who are Religion B believers are challenged to open up about their own sexual sins and one of its consequences: killing babies in the mother's womb.

On the one hand, while Religion A believer teachings vary on the issue of abortion – some Religion A believer religious opinions forbid it at any stage of pregnancy, while others allow it but only in the early stage of pregnancy, up to 40 days (Mataly & Ali, 2014). On the other hand, Religion B believers teach that every abortion, no matter what the situation, is a moral evil. Yet, according to defenders, abortions and the throwing of dead babies occur in Religion B believers communities.

With a tone of exhaustion, defenders find a hopeless case of Religion B believers interference based on a lack of wisdom and plead to leave Religion A believers in their own affairs: "You're right that if you don't know anything about [the religion], just stay out of it and don't interfere with the religion. We also don't interfere with other religions."

One defender pointed out that the way to cure Religion B believers ignorance is to study the religion and see it from within: "You don't know anything about [the religion]. [It] is really beautiful, but you don't want to study it."

#### **5.2.1.6 A holy act**

Holy people in the religion set the example for early marriage. Using divine authority by mentioning religious law and beliefs, early marriage is presented as a

respectable act by two of the most holy people in the religion. Religion A is “the most real religion in the world,” and believers perfecting it is admirable and worthy of emulation.

As per divine law, the marriage of girls is declared as God’s decree. As a will of God, religious ceremonies marrying girls is sourced from divine authority. God is never questioned for His will.

Divine law places parents as the protectors of their children, “a decision of the parents” who “are just trying to prevent their child from straying off the right path.” The act to protect through marriage is based on religious family values addressing the reality that girls entering the age of puberty will be “getting involved with a man or having a boyfriend.”

As “having a boyfriend or girlfriend is considered...prohibited” in the religion, “[it] is conservative and preserves its purity.” It is unlike Religion B believers whose teachings are conservative but live in immorality, letting their own girls in puberty age enter into sexual relations outside of marriage. Opposers concoct misinformation that Religion A believer’s tradition to marry girls violates children. This accusation is demeaning and offensive to Religion A believers. The peacemakers among the defenders have one echoing call: “I hope that everyone can understand and respect each other’s beliefs.”

Marriage is a holy act and so marriage even of girls is also holy. Marriage is not child abuse committed by parents. If decided by parents, it is a solution based on religious values that address the expected problem of propensity of girls entering

puberty toward sexual relations. Upon puberty, the urge is biological – it is the readiness to conceive when menstruation begins.

For the defenders, the marriage of girls, twisted by Religion B believers as a form of violation of children called “child marriage” is not a mere practice deprived of reason or goodness, or a habit deprived of critical thought. Marriage of girls is a solution to protect children, who have become adults through menstruation regardless of age, and prevent them from losing their path to following divine law to achieve holiness. Wrongly tagged as child marriage, marriage regardless of age is a solution so parents can fulfill their divine duty to ensure that their children follow the path to religious perfection. As one comment challenges the opposers and pits them against divine law: "That's better than the children here who get pregnant without knowing who the real father is or who got them pregnant and are not married. Sometimes, even their own fathers impregnate them. Which should you follow: human laws or God's laws?" Seeking sexual relations at the age of menstruation, the comment above suggests that girls who have turned into women ready for conception could even become temptations to their own fathers.

So marriage is the path to holiness, which is the perfection of living free from sin. This perfection can be achieved by avoiding immoral relationships such as “adultery,” which “is forbidden in religion. Reaching puberty means the age of temptation that “relationships like boyfriend and girlfriend” could lead to “having sex without marriage.” “[Religious] law demands it to “be legal” so when the “man can afford to give a dowry and support a family, he should get married” as an act of purity, instead of having premarital sex, which is the act of the impure.

When defenders themselves are not citing the same reasons: some call it part of tradition and the others consider it a religious duty or “law of our religion to prevent adultery,” all defenders regard sex outside of marriage as “one of the greatest sins against” God.

One comment explains that the tradition of girl marriage “is not intended to exploit children or deprive them of their freedom to be happy while they are young.” A holy example is intended to help Religion A believers achieve perfection in religious living. The marriage to the girl is ‘not just to enjoy’ having sexual relations with a girl but “is a way to worship the Almighty Creator” through avoidance of sin. Non-Religion A believer “brothers and sisters and even our fellow Religion A believers” who do not adhere to this tradition can “hopefully...understand this.” Opposers “should not rush to judge the parents” whose daughters are married early because “their true intentions” are misunderstood when in truth they are acting as parents whose purpose is perfect and spiritual for their daughters. The marriage of girls is deeply misunderstood by those who are not believers. The advice for non-believers is to “not judge traditions or other cultures immediately.”

The marriage of the young girl to a religious icon is a match made for eternity. Girls who marry early emulate the example of the young girl, and are assured of a place in heaven. What parent would not want a heavenly place for their daughter? Early marriage is following the love story of a religious icon. It is holiness in living and is the mark of superiority of the religion.

So, to accuse this kind of marriage of being wrong is “demeaning,” “frightening.” It is slander and defamation against a holy act in a superior religion. Pitying the married girls is unacceptable. The holy young girl was like another religious icon in Religion B who was very young at marriage. Early marriage runs through history as an act of holy people and so it is a holy example of practice of faith. If early marriage is to be tagged as a practice among Religion A believers, labeling it as “harmful” is outright offensive.

The reference to holy living among men pertains to preventing the “irresponsible spreading of semen.” Any man who engages in sexual relations with a woman outside of marriage is committing “a great sin.” Marrying the girl first before engaging in sexual relations prevents the commission of sin. Not doing so is “deemed as adultery and fornication, which are highly frowned upon in our culture.” Understanding the nature of men to spread their semen, the sin of irresponsible sexual acts can be avoided by following the “tradition... to marry.” Irresponsible procreation is frowned upon, in contrast to the disgust for immoral acts of girls who reach puberty. For men, being responsible in their sexual relations is good practice of faith. There is nothing wrong for Religion A believers “to marry at an early age; in fact, it can be beneficial for us to avoid engaging in undesirable activities that are prohibited in religion.” Contrary to the accusation of opposers that a child being married is a wrongdoing, marriage within religious law, even if the bride is a young girl, is a solution to sin, a path to holy living, and an emulation of the act of two of the most holy people in Religion A.

As the marriage of girls is not a practice or habit being made without critical thought or basis, it is profoundly spiritual and superior because it puts into order the life of girls who will have the propensity to sin when reaching the age of menstruation. The marriage of girls is part of the holy social order that Religion A believers strive to attain. It is a solution to a world fallen into disorder because of sexual relations between women and men who are not married. For the defenders, the disorderly world immersed in sinful desires is the one thing that Religion B fails to fathom and resolve. Religion B believers should stop opposing because they do not have credibility in achieving holiness. This statement directly asserts the act as holy: "In our tradition, it is not forbidden to marry early. Rather, it is [holiness in living]...to avoid things forbidden in our religion. Let's just respect each other."

### **5.2.2 Speech acts of the opposers of child marriage**

Opposers vary in their acts, reflecting a lack of deep thought for united action in tackling child marriage practice while also leaning towards anti-Religion A believer or theophobic sentiments.

#### **5.2.2.1 Religious abuse**

. At its surface, the appeals of comments analyzed are mainly to emotions, evoking feelings of pity and concern for the young girls who are victims of abuse because of a harmful tradition kept alive by religion. The descriptions of the distressing situation and the plea for mercy for the children aim to elicit an emotional response from the audience and encourage them to empathize with the victims and

ultimately put blame on the religion where the tradition or practice is located.

There is a grave concern for the girl child's welfare. Her small and frail body being subjected to the dangers of sexual acts with a presumed bigger and older male is child abuse. Weddings administered within a religious setting puts the religious authority to blame for the young girls who "die because their private parts are abused on their first night... so young, around 12 or 13 years old, and the men are 40 to 50 years old." They "deserve pity" "but tradition...shows no mercy towards children."

Use of hyperbole to elevate the severity of the situation because young girls "even die" due to abuse on their first night and the extreme consequences. Emotives on the "poor children who "deserve pity evoke strong emotional responses and empathy towards the victims, appealing to the audience's sense of compassion. Highlighting the significant age difference between young girls (around 12 or 13 years old) and the men (40 to 50 years old) involved in these harmful practices is the use of contrast to bring out the imbalance of power and vulnerability.

Child welfare concerns contend that the child will not be able to enjoy her childhood because "instead of playing and studying, they already got married" to a male who "looks almost like her father. Instead of enjoying her youth, she got caught up in that reality." The child is pictured as trapped within an abusive situation and deprived of any hope for full human development.

Accusations of religious abuse of children are couched within insulting

comments that mention festival-like weddings of young girls as a form of manufacturing an image of an evil religious practice that “shows no mercy towards children” who are not yet able to give their consent.

Religious cruelty also comes up when commenting about the harshness of tradition that “shows no mercy towards children” and whose parents are only concerned with the traditional dowry, seen as a form of payment by the older groom to the very young bride.

#### **5.2.2.2 Rights are for all**

Asserting the universality of human rights supports the act of blaming religion. Denying women their rights when describing a young girl's sad plight in early marriage to an older man stresses the loss of innocence and premature transition to adult responsibilities, the comment evokes sympathy by highlighting the injustice and tragedy faced by young girls forced into early marriages, thus, invoking moral outrage.

Young girls are not emotionally and mentally prepared for marriage so the potential negative consequences of the marriage and the subsequent sexual act denies young girls their right to well-being because they will not be able to enjoy being a single grown-up woman and do not “even know what marriage is.”

The mother's right to protect her daughter is also denied when “a mother vehemently refuses to let her 9-year-old child get married” but fails in preventing the marriage, and “the mother loses her rights over her own child.”

Other comments instantly take off from the human rights argument, saying “forced marriage should be condemned because this is a human rights violation” and that “every woman should [be able] to choose” and make their own decision because their life is at stake. The comments that call to stop supporting the practice are grounded in the argument of “human rights violation”, and so provide an ethical grounding for the argument against forced marriage. The position child marriage as forced and so is universally unacceptable within the framework of internationally recognized human rights.

Making “women more vulnerable to violence” as a result of marriage is a logical cause-and-effect appeal and still within the right to the safety and well-being of girls. Appeal to emotions is used to evoke empathy and stir the audience to respond with either anger or indignation. Comments that stress the personal impact on the child and the child suffering make the issue more relatable to the audience.

Comments also used commands such as “Stop supporting practices!” Criticizing child marriage is combined with inciting readers to act against it. This call repositions the audience from passive readers to active commenters who join a moral and just cause.

Comments that pertain to the practice of making “every woman more vulnerable to violence” bring the issue up as a broader concern, as it is not an isolated issue but is part of the widely-known global social problem of gender-based violence.

The rhetoric brings the case against child marriage as forced marriage that abuses young girls, unethical, unsafe, and oppressive. Logical-emotional appeals cultivate a sense of social responsibility among the readers and urge immediate action to protect the rights and well-being of girls.

In the universality of human rights, child marriage as a social problem is isolated from the practice based on religious grounds. No matter what the religion is, child marriage is a human rights violation. This rhetoric attempts to present child marriage as a practice found in various societies and evades the mention of religion as the culprit. However, in the context and audiences of the comments, this “diplomatic” rhetoric seems weak because the practice happens within a particular tradition that derives its rationale from religion.

### **5.2.2.3 Religion B sense of supremacy**

Opposers tend to assert that child marriage as a sin from the standpoint of supremacy of Religion B believers opinion. Some comments perform Religion B believers supremacy as they condemn the religion presented in the child marriage ceremony. They pertain to Religion A as a failure, undesirable, a failure, flawed, bad, lawless, disgusting, hypocritical, shameful, stupid, among other similar adjectives while at the same time representing their own religion as a source of truth and goodness.

For the opposers, it is a religious failure to provide the wrong solution because in child marriage, the “outcome of their relationship does not end well. Their relationship will just be filled with constant arguments.” The opposer attacks the religious justification of child marriage, noting that it leads to the wrong solutions as it will only result in unsuccessful relationships.

The religion is blamed for refusing to adapt to modernity and civilization, refusing to abandon child marriage as an uncivilized practice. Calling for the condemnation of the practice insinuates the condemnation of the religion when commenting that the “ancient traditions should no longer be followed... in the digital age [but those who practice child marriage are] still stuck with caveman thinking.”

When criticized, Religion B is shielded from blame. "Sorry, but not everyone .... is truly a believer. Those who violate God's laws are not... believers. True Religion B believers are also forbidden from having sex with the same sex or with someone who is not married. God said that those who break His commands are not with Him. And true believers would not..."

Calling the tradition “wrong and infuriating” and its practitioners “idiots and useless people” who deserve to be cursed reflects strong emotive language used to evoke anger and disdain toward those who support or engage in the practice. Commenting that those who facilitate child marriage “should be apprehended” because it is “like legalizing pedophilia” equates child marriage to pedophilia, which is a crime. This, again, provokes outrage and incites anger toward Religion A as backward as opposed to Religion B, which values happy marriages. For opposers,

child marriage practiced by non-Religion B believers only leads to unhappy marriages filled with hate and hardships, to unstable and destructive relationships.

Many comments are mainly vehement denunciations. "That tradition is so wrong and infuriating. Those idiots and useless people, I really want to curse them," lays the groundwork for the argument by adopting a tone of outrage and disdain. It aligns the practice with ignorance, suggesting that those who uphold it are not just uninformed but intrinsically flawed in their character. This affront is compounded by the assertion that the tradition is deep in religious ignorance, hinting at a deeper systemic issue within the religious frameworks that support such practices. Assertion of Religion B believers supremacy is evident: "That's why [Religion A believers] and the government or other religions don't understand each other; they adhere to false beliefs." Reflecting the treatment of Religion A believers as outsiders, one comment threatened that "prohibited acts here in the [country] can result in charges."

The comparison made in the comment that those who marry off children "should be apprehended" is "like legalizing pedophilia" serves to heighten the moral stakes of the argument. By equating the tradition to pedophilia, the speaker classifies its practitioners as pedophiles and criminals, and so inciting societal condemnation. This analogy aims to dismantle any perceived legitimacy of the practice by associating it with actions that are repugnant. The critique extends to attacking the underpinnings of the tradition, implicating religion as fundamentally flawed with followers complicit in committing the crime.

Further elaborating on the societal implications, the text states, "No wonder

that place has no progress. It is inhabited by armed individuals and bandits." This generalization taps into stereotypes of lawlessness and stagnation to paint a picture of a society mired in chaos and thus incapable of progress. By linking the existence of harmful traditions like child marriage to a societal backdrop of banditry and disorder, the comment underscores the broader detrimental effects of these customs, framing the religion and cultural practices as hindrance to social advancement.

This text proceeds with a pragmatic plea to re-examine unreasonable tradition, "This is the reason why traditions ought to be challenged. If ethics and science tell us that something is actually wrong with a tradition, we should change it!"

The emotional weight of the message intensifies when "many girls die because they have vulnerable bodies. Men can be like demons, craving for it." The shocking imagery depicting the physical frailty of young girls and the predatory nature of men underscores the immediate, life-threatening risks posed by the tradition. This statement portrays Religion A male believers' demonic capacity for evil, vilifying their characters and implicating the tradition in systemic violence against women. The religious tolerance for such violence is implicitly condemned, contributing to the overarching narrative of Religion A as one of crime and moral decay.

The dialogue contributes an additional layer of rhetorical strategy through confrontational language, as seen in "Hey, fool. Did I mention any religion?... Stop pretending to be smart. Idiot." This defensive posture against defenders exposes the

sense of supremacy driving the argument while also undermining the credibility of the Religion A tradition.

Some comments take a back seat in the attacks against the religion by saying: “First of all, apologies. We respect your traditions and culture, especially if that has been practiced and accepted in your place.” However, after a pause, the comment pushes forward with “a 13-year-old girl does not yet have the maturity to make decisions.” Thus, representing a self-righteous Religion B believers’ accusation of grave sin committed under the Religion A believers’ tradition.

With a facade of humility, respect, and objective critique, comments acknowledge cultural differences but with a pronounced concern for child welfare, blame the religious tradition for enabling such situations. The tone of righteousness with facade of humility insinuates the supremacy of the Religion B believers perspective when commenters say they “understand the culture and traditions” and apologize for expressing what seems to be “judgment” but is actually an “opinion and a question” that tries to understand the incomprehensible “content of the story to better grasp their culture and traditions.” Religion B believers are simply very concerned with the wrongdoing.

The comment “we cannot avoid sharing our opinions” not only pertains to the inherent human behavior to express but, in the context of a nation's Religion B believers-dominated democratic space, points to the wrongdoing of an undemocratic practice of a religious minority wherein freedom of expression and individual rights are not respected. The Religion B commenters establish their credibility, authority,

and educated opinions, thus projecting an air of Religion B supremacy.

Along with the air of supremacy is the act of blaming religious hypocrisy of Religion A believers who destroy Religion B goodness: “A [Religion A believer] woman” who became a mistress and “destroyed” the Religion B family. “When I spoke to him, he showed no mercy despite having children with me; his response was that he would rather kill” than leave the relationship with the mistress who is a Religion A believer is a comment that insinuates an evil influence from the Religion A believer woman. “I apologize for my views” seeks to temper emotional reactions and present a facade of humility but is still part of the scheme to moral ascendancy.

“How pitiful you are!” and “Oh my God!” bares the Religion B moral ascendancy because Religion B believers know what is good and right as opposed to the Religion A believer parents who cling to “wealth” as “the trade-off” for the sorry fate of the “pitiful” child.

From these comments analyzed, the accusations of ignorance, criminal behavior, societal stagnation, and ethical failings with negative imagery and confrontational rhetoric, the comments mobilize hatred against Religion, rallying for a hatred-filled Religion B believers’ crusade against Religion A.

In defense of Religion B believers’ reactions that project supremacy, the credibility of Religion B believers as opposers has been attacked by the defenders of child marriage. As rebuttal, comments quality how Religion B believers should act: “Sorry, but not everyone called a [Religion B believer] is truly a [Religion B believer].”

Those who violate God's laws are not [Religion B believers]." Opposers presenting themselves as Religion B believers assert moral purity because "True [Religion B] believers are also forbidden from having sex with the same sex or with someone who is not married." Absolutism is evident in these comments.

"Divine authority and infallibility are claimed when stating that "God said that those who break His commands are not with Him." This asserts a legitimate claim to a higher power— God itself, who cannot be questioned. Mentioning God stands on the divine authority of Religion B believers to prescribe what sin is, dispelling challenges to Religion B. This, in turn, consolidates the Religion B believers community's shared standard of Godly behavior, as opposed to the defenders who do not follow the Religion B believers moral standard.

The Religion B believers standard is further explained. "Marrying someone who is younger or a minor is not acceptable." The necessary preparations for marriage—"emotionally, physically, spiritually, financially, and at the right age." Rationalizing the repeatedly mentioned "true Religion B believers" who follow a holistic set of criteria before marriage as opposed to those who practice child marriage.

"That's how true Religion B believers should act because that's also what God commands for true Religion B believers" combines the moral, rational, and divine arguments to point to the supremacy of Religion B believers opinion on the Religion A believer sinful practice of child marriage by "parents " who also "did not finish" their education because they themselves were also married early.

Religion B believers salvation is the response to attacks against Religion B believers credibility: "That's why it's important to educate people to become aware." The way to help the uneducated Religion A believers is to "not judge them" and strive to educate them on the wrongful act brought by "traditions and cultures that cannot be easily removed" because they are embedded in a religion that is not Religion B.

Insult is a device used by comments who mock the Religion A believer practice of washing before prayer: "Hey sis, what if there's no water for washing? What will you use to wash? Your urine?" Adding to the insults, insinuating the stupidity of the religion because it does not make sense from the Religion B believers point of view because it is a practice that is "hard to understand" because "because superstitions and beliefs take precedence." The country " isn't developing" because of this practice from the religious minority.

"Except for those who are good, your culture seems rebellious" gives the image of a religion where being "animalistic," being "money-driven," and "parents selling their children" to "escape poverty" and "confine the youth" to a life of abuse are the norm— all rebellious acts from the perspective of Religion B God's holiness.

Sarcasm is performed when referring to the "unavoidable to mention" of the religious icon who "married a 6-year-old and consummated the marriage when she was 9 years old." Highlighting the irony of the religion: "Well, [religious icon] is a good example" exposes irony because the holiness ascribed to him is betrayed by sexual

acts with a very young girl— sinful even if consumed within the bounds of marriage. The tone of presenting an irony in question format is also a statement of ridicule based on Religion B believers' contempt for the abominable act by a revered religious icon. Opposers challenging the portrayal of the religious icon as holy is intended as a challenge to the holiness pursued by the believers of Religion A. The opposers project the entire Religion A as deprived of ethics and flawed.

The repeated emphasis to “educate your child first” is housed within the context of English Religion B education, which developed from Religion B believers tradition, as opposed to non-English Religion A education, which is constructed within the teachings of religion. Even when the source of comments are “from different cultures,” Religion B believers education is the solution to the “wrong tradition” in religion.

Religion B believers' insults go deeper into derogatory comments on the sexual practice of Religion A believers. “How pitiful for this young girl. I respect their beliefs and traditions, but this one, my God... she might still be growing pubic hair and yet she's being married off. I'll just sing 'Stupid Love,' especially the part where it goes '\_\_\_\_\_'s private part is completely wrecked.” The comment insults and incites disdain toward the “tradition and religion [that justify] greed, wickedness, and worldly desires,” mocking the religion where the practice emanates. Combining a sense of pity for the “young girl” and shock value because “she might still be growing pubic hair and yet she's being married off” paints a mental image that evokes disgust and derision, a hopeless case for moral transformation such that the only way to escape is to “run to [the city].”

Religion B believers who “oppose and criticize” the practice “are accused of being disrespectful and evil towards their religion” are being wronged. “Goodness gracious” marks the good intentions of Religion B believers toward the erring Religion A believers.

This comment illustrates Religion B believers rationality and goodwill toward Religion A believers as an admission of Religion B believers failure: “You have a point. However, being an addict or rapist is a wrongful act or vice that is not acceptable behavior, and this is punishable in any country. We deeply feel anger and sadness if we become victims of such acts. Our judgment (as Religion B believers) is fair when it comes to a father who rapes his own child - the entire nation is outraged, demanding appropriate punishment or retribution for the offender. (But we can't take the law into our own hands.) That is why we are concerned when a young child is being married off to an older person. If the child reaches the appropriate age, you won't hear any negative comments from us. (By appropriate age, we mean at least 18 years old) Even if you marry them to a 70-year-old, we can say that they have enough capacity to make decisions. However, a 13-year-old or as young as 9 is still a child and not yet mentally mature to make such decisions. The ugly incidents that happen, even under Religion B, are not what we desire or support (for example, cases of rape or abuse by relatives, young kids having boyfriends or girlfriends). Sometimes it is due to the immaturity of a foolish person who has not yet developed proper thinking. That is why we have such concerns about your traditions.” The long explanation emits logic but also treats the defenders as backward in logic. the air of supremacy is evident in “our judgment is fair,” “not what we desire or support” and

“we have such concerns with your tradition” and “if a child reaches the appropriate age, you won’t hear any negative comments from us.” Child marriage is also lumped together with the crimes of addiction rape and incest. However, while rational, the opposer comment lacks deep rootedness in specific mention of either divine or human law. Without deep rootedness, the long comments are only long opinions on what is right and wrong.

In some comments, invisibility comes up as a prescription to avoid receiving the ire of Religion B believers who “judge and make suggestions.” Directing the Religion A believers to not “post it so that we can’t comment and feel pity” commands them to be silent in their traditions and not assert their religious presence online.

#### **5.2.2.4 Do not blame religion**

It is the wrong interpretation of religious text, according to Religion A believers who oppose child marriage. The parents did not understand what the religious tenets meant in marriage. Religious law is where parents respect their daughter’s decision. Religion places importance on consent in marriage. The educated Religion A believer understands that marriage depends “on the woman. Even at a young age, if a girl” to decide if she “doesn’t want to get married. She cannot be forced by her parents or anyone else who wishes to marry her.”

The Religion A believers who oppose child marriage point to the diversity of beliefs in under the religion because “there are many branches.” The wrong beliefs

and mistakes from religious ignorance make other Religion A believers prone to misinterpreting religious teachings. In various ethnicities, there are varying interpretations of religious teachings. As one comment explains, "There are also many branches of Religion A believers. There are [various ethnicities]. My spouse is a [Religion A ethnicity]. Not all Religion A believers behave in that way."

Grounding their arguments on their authority on the subject as Religion A believer commenters, they all echo the same speech that religion is not the culprit. Taking off from ethical credibility and logical reasoning, their comments point to parental roles and socio-economic conditions contributing to the practice. The issue is complex and so needs a nuanced understanding to avoid blaming religion.

However, there is disagreement on who or what to blame if it is not religion. Some comments say poor parents are being taken advantage of by others: "I am a [Religion A believer] too, but I do not agree with this tradition. I don't know how it can be stopped. It's pitiful to see young girls married off to older men, with some [people] taking advantage [of] the parents' poverty." Others blame the parents who should be accountable because they "are the ones who really talk and come to an agreement" with the "young girl" being "not aware of it" and so unable to decide or give her informed consent.

"If you are a true [Religion A believer]" appeals to identity and establishes credibility while also setting a moral benchmark for genuine faith that prohibits marriage "against the will of the woman,"

"I am also a [Religion A believer[, but [praise God], none of our family members are rushing into early marriages" establishes the shared values and community identity. Expressed in a positive tone, it is a personal testimony that invites trust from the audience.

Comments from Religion A believers are inclined to address the confusion between culture-based practice and religious obligation and encourage reflection. "It is important to prioritize education and enjoy our youth. Let's not rush into marriage. We should also consider the future of our children." Reminding of the positive outcomes of not rushing into marriage, the comment rings a universal appeal to human aspirations for personal fulfillment and the well-being of their families regardless of religion.

"True religion does not violate children" also stresses the mistaken tendency by opposers to blame religion without an understanding of what the religion teaches. The same is emphasized by a comment that projects the logic, practicality and humaneness of religion through testimony, scenario and rhetorical question directed to both the Religion A believer-hating opposers and the defenders to reflect on: "I am a [Religion A ethnicity], and according to my research, while religion does not specify a minimum age for marriage, reaching puberty, having sound judgment, and comprehensive maturity before entering into a marital contract—as well as having the capacity to understand and fulfill the rights and responsibilities of a spouse after marriage—are clear prerequisites in religious law. So, my question is, can a 13-year-old really handle the responsibilities of caring for babies as a spouse? Yes, it is our culture, but every cultural practice in religion should be considered carefully."

Here, while the comment admits the existence of the practice within Religion A culture, it uses evidence through research to emphasize that readiness is important in Religion A marriage. The comment dispels judgment against Religion A and points readers to avoid generalizing the practice that could be practiced differently across diverse Religion A cultures.

Testimonials like "I am a Religion A believer, but I would never tolerate such practices" and "I am a [Religion A believer ethnicity], and I am against this tradition" establish the authority to speak and dispel misconceptions against Religion A. A similar act is performed by comments that explain the practicality of religion as a religion because "an older man can surely find a woman of his own age, not a child" because a "child is being forced" when entering an unfamiliar life of marriage." Religion believes that "young people should enjoy their childhood." When the parents of the child allow it "because of money," in the eyes of true religion, it is "still wrong. This kind of culture must be prohibited." Religion A will not tolerate forcing children into marriage. It is unfair to blame religion.

The same voice echoes from Religion A commenters who express concern for the "pitiful... child who has no understanding of the responsibilities she will face as a wife," who are "always against this practice," who has a family where "no one has ever married at such a young age or to an older man." These comments provide testimonies that debunk the prevailing misinformation about the religion whose followers, especially the parents, subject their children to sexual and other forms of abuse via child marriage.

One comment from a Religion A believer reflected on the role of tradition and parents and called for change: "If there's something I'd like to change, it would be this tradition. Most of the youth in our community are not very aware of this issue. It feels like you have to follow what your parents want because it's what they desire. As a result, many get married early in our community." The comment continues, "If there's something I'd like to change" is the call to action with concern for the welfare of young people who "are not very aware of this issue. The obligation "to follow what your parents want" reflects a shared cultural experience outside of religion and clarifies why Religion A should not be blamed .

The comments sound true because they are located within the religion and can illuminate how religion is not the culprit. Religion A believer parents will allow their children to choose their partners "as long as he is the right man" because this is what is important and child marriage does not have significant meaning in a relationship. Religion A believers will not tolerate forcing children into marriage as it is "not a good practice." The practice happens "in areas where poverty is severe and education is lacking" even when "girls themselves believe that marriage will secure their future." Commenta explain the difficulties the families face, appealing to readers' understanding of the difficult circumstances: "Marrying off a daughter allows families to reduce their expenses by having one less person to feed." Religion A believers point out that it is "a very wrong decision" even if necessary for survival.

Comments like this repeat that Religion A believers will not tolerate forcing children into marriage because "that is not culture" and that should be made known

to many people. While some families may practice child marriage “not all [Religion A believers] do. If I were to choose, I wouldn’t want to marry someone with such a significant age gap.” These words underscore the disapproval of child marriage to argue that it is against religious principles. For Religion A believers who oppose child marriage practice, the practice should not be attributed to the religion itself. Child marriage is an issue of culture and circumstance. These comments correct the misunderstandings within and toward the Religion A community.

### **5.2.3 Common rhetorical appeals, strategies, and devices among defenders and opposers**

**Defenders** of the marriage of girls draw from logic, with emphasis on efficient practicality, sourced from the highest of all laws: divine law. They maintain that religious perfection is the most effective way to protect children by curing sinful human nature, striving for holiness, and obeying divine law. The religious practice of marrying girls is a remedy for the sinful world, which Religion B fails to cure.

With rebuttals, claims, warrants, evidence, context, and other argumentation techniques, defenders explain the logic of practicality in keeping believers from immoral sexual acts; comments lean towards attacks on the character of the opposers, who are mainly referred to as Religion B believers.

The question of which faith does an individual who loves rape adhere to, even if their priests sexually abused a child, prompts the opposing Religion B believers to question their moral consistency.

When the opposing forces are instructed not to underestimate them and refrain from discussing the girl's marriage, indicating their lack of understanding and no right to interfere, the emotional appeal for respect for a different culture is used. Even while appeals for respect for difference are used, the character of Religion B believers is put down and condemned for jealousy toward the Religion A believer practice because while Religion B believers cannot marry young, Religion A allows their children to experience the joys of marriage at an early age.

The story of a religious icon who married a girl who was 15 years old draws in **emotions** for the happy and successful love story, pulls in the logical practicality and effectiveness of religious laws, and highlights the **credibility** of the most known holy couple in religion.

Contrasting the practice of early marriage in the defenders' religion with practices in other religions such as same-sex relations, cohabitation, and premarital sex, defenders assert that Religion A principles are **morally superior** to those of the opposing religion, which is primarily Religion B. For defenders, there is legitimacy to early marriage; non-Religion A believers are ignorant and troublesome. Religion A remains consistent in moral uprightness over all other religions. The defenders' Religion A is the most authentic religion globally, and is flawless in the path it offers

toward holiness.

The repeated rhetorical questions directed at the opposers who are equated to be Religion B believers is an invitation to study Religion A before judging it. Understanding Religious Law is a prerequisite for comprehending the situation of young girls in the Religion A believers' world.

The frequent questioning why Religion B believers interfere with Religion A is a rhetorical exercise designed to show the complexity of an issue that Religion A is addressing, the complete ignorance of the interfering Religion B believers whose daughters lose their purity early in life due to multiple sexual encounters and whose men engage in repeated sexual relations with different women. Unlike the holiness pursued in Religion A, which includes the marriage of girls as a holy act, Religion B believers are hopeless animalistic sinners deserving disgust. Being a Religion B believer is equated to having a lack of **credibility** to speak about the issue of holiness in living because Religion B fails in this regard.

Among **opposers**, the comments analyzed are primarily **emotional**, invoking feelings of compassion and concern for the young girls who are victims of abuse perpetrated by religion.

Opposers believe that young girls who are subjected to abuse, and on their first night, are at risk of dying due to the wrong treatment. By highlighting the significant age gap between young girls (around 12 or 13 years old) and men (40 to

50 years older) involved in harmful practices, contrast is employed to highlight their power and vulnerability, and grave violation of rights.

**Accusations** of religious mistreatment against children are accompanied by offensive statements on celebratory weddings with the abused girls to create an image of abominable religious practices that disregard the rights of vulnerable children.

The call to **condemn** the practice directs that Religion A should be condemned, including when using logical arguments that point to traditional customs as no longer relevant in the 21st century and those involved in child marriage being stuck in an obsolete mindset.

Supporting universal human rights advocacy suggests that the blame on religion can be justified. The social issue of child marriage falls under the broad definition of human rights that should be practiced anywhere in the world regardless of religion.

Opposers take a **Religion B-centered** approach by expressing concerns about girls who have not yet attained the maturity to make choices but are forced within Religion A practice. Through words of humility, respect, and self-professed impartial criticism, comments that recognize cultural diversity while also acknowledging and advocating for child welfare still blame the religious customs. The solution is **Religion B salvation**, which involves educating individuals about the goodness and justice within the religion. Religion B believers' logic and empathy

towards Religion A believers sound condescending, reflecting a religion-centered supremacy in knowing what is reasonable. The emotion-filled comments that paint a grim image of child marriage generate bad feelings toward Religion A, leaning towards alienation and hate, theophobia, and **prejudice against Religion A and its believers.**

**Religion A believers who are opponents of child marriage argue that religion is not at fault.** Those who do not want to get married cannot be forced by their parents or anyone else, even for young girls. Religion's practicality is demonstrated by its ability to justify the need for children in marriage. The prevailing myth of an abusive religion where parents love to force their children into child marriage is disproven by opposers who belong to Religion A. These opposers voice their concerns about the child's lack of understanding of her role as a wife and of having a family. This group of opposers provides a way to balance the building up of bad feelings toward Religion A.

Opposers and defenders ground their positions on concern for child welfare. All comments emanate from wanting the best for the girl-child. While opposers argue that loss of childhood and entry into a difficult life upon marriage, defenders disapprove of leaving girls to their own decisions that could lead them to a morally poor life of sexual immorality and pregnancy outside of marriage.

Opposers lean on consent equated with individual freedom or self-autonomy while defenders stand on collective duty and religious purity. While opposers put

forward modernity and discard obsolete ways, defenders draw from ancient people revered over history.

Most of the opposers blame Religion A and its communities especially parents, and assert the universality of human rights. Defenders discredit the religion of opposers, marking them as moral failures.

While most opposers project themselves as saviors, the defenders see the opposers as ignorant hypocrites who will go to hell for their sins. While defenders see their own selves as seekers of holiness, opposers see the defenders as criminals.

Ultimately, on one end, when speaking in the tone of Religion B, opposers emit an air of supremacy in recommending what is good and just for humanity. On the other end, often speaking as believers, defenders project superiority in understanding the sinful human nature and the efficient solution to prevent sin and achieve holiness. While the marriage of girls is a crime for opposers, it is a holy act for the defenders.

Some observations on commonalities and differences:

**Common claims:**

-Assertion of child welfare, woman's consent, parent's duty

**Common assertion but in opposition against each other:**

Superior religiosity, marriage as sacred (implied among opposers but directly referred to by defenders)

**At odds with one another:**

- Religious Law vs. Government Law
- Age of readiness for marriage and child-bearing: Biological vs. Numerical Age
- Situatenedness vs. Universal Human Rights

**5.2.4 Rhetorical world of child marriage**

Studying the defenders' comments, child marriage is sustained by a rhetorical world. Defenders' belief in child marriage as a superior rhetorical act of holiness and mark of true religion is the context (Hoey & Kendrick) that sets the tone of rhetorical communication. Defenders use visual rhetoric to paint vivid imagery of the context. Taking off from the rhetorical problem of sin, the readers are always given rhetorical questions to direct the focus on self-reflection on real social problems. For the defenders, social problems cannot be solved by the opposers or any human law but only by divine law. Failure as human beings is frequently used to attack the opposers' credibility. This form of attack is frequently used as offense, which is actually the defense.

To guide the reader from self-reflection toward judgment, the defenders paint vivid images of choosing a path of early marriage for the girls that emanates from deep faith that goes beyond human affairs— it comes from the unquestionable divine law. The marriage of girls is a rhetorical act in itself among believers, an assurance of a holy place that belongs to the successful followers of the superior religion. Child marriage, especially for girls who reach puberty, is the most superior path to life holy

and eternal.

The speech acts of defenders collaborate or complement one another (Craig). They are contextually situated (Hoey & Kendrick) while inviting reflection on real-life problems as a common ground of concern (Burke) for all, and segueing to guide judgment (Craig). Readers listen to the argumentation that uses the Aristotelian appeals (ethos, pathos, logos) for the online audiences, combined with rhetorical devices such as rhetorical questions and strategies for the superior holy path marriage of young girls to prevail. The Religion A believer defenders of child marriage, even if the focus (and objects of jokes) of opposers, use common social context and knowledge of the problem to present solutions offered by divine law. The entire rhetorical process becomes an assertion of religious superiority, setting the stage for child marriage practice to be sustained.

Defenders are rich in persuasive argumentation (Ramage, Bean & Johnson): Justification of child marriage using reasons of sexual immorality and unwanted pregnancy; laying the ground for the shared concerns for child-related problems of parents; and the warrants of belief in divine law, the values of happy life or holy living, and inferences on parental responsibility and experiences. The defenders form a community of people united in the search for a solution, each giving heart-felt opinion and information and reiterating the pursuit of effective solutions.

The Toulmin method's additions to the persuasive argumentation of Ramage, Bean, and & Johnson provide for claims, qualifiers, rebuttals, and backing.

Defenders' claim comes out through the demonstration of the ease and effectiveness by which girl-related social problems are addressed, thereby asserting the superiority of religious solutions. Comments qualify that solutions are only effective for those who understand the real issue which is spiritual, particularly that of the propensity of puberty-age girls to sin. Alongside the throwing of insults on the failures of opposers, defenders clarify that only those who belong to the faith can genuinely understand the solution. Defenders launch rebuttals on the opposer claims for child abuse and human rights violations by describing imageries of Religion B believers' hypocrisy. This is combined with rhetorical questions that direct reflection on the inability of human-made law and Religion B believers impositions to solve problems that are quickly addressed by Religion A believers who practice child marriage. Using real-life scenarios as backing and references to sexual immoralities abounding in Religion B communities, the credibility of opposers is torn down while that of the defenders is lifted up.

Defenders of child marriage post comments that reflect Feretti's and Adornetti's rhetorical pragmatics. Defenders' comments take off from the context of problems faced by parents and families such as the unwanted pregnancies and abandonment of babies, sex outside of marriage and sexual infidelity. Intentionally or not, the defender as speaker talks directly to an opposer or group of opposers and finds soft spots for persuasion. The pun on the ignorance of the opposers, tagged as Religion B believers who do not have enough knowledge of the situations of girls in Religion A believer communities, is used as a take-off point to assert the practicality and effectiveness of the divine law that allows the marriage of children.

In defenders' comments, rhetorical pragmatics is evident in the use of directed communication and assert the validity of child marriage practice. Even if some of the defender comments impolitely fire insults on opposers, there are those that take back offensives or emit politeness and cooperation in finding solutions to difficult everyday problems faced by most parents and families.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **RESEARCH SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.1 Summary**

This research studied the comments to Facebook posts on child marriage, particularly the marriage of girls to older men or boys with almost the same age as the bride. The resulting themes were further analyzed to arrive at identifying speech acts of opposers and defenders. Rhetorical devices were also identified while speech acts and themes were explained. The entire process resulted in the examination of rhetorical acts of defenders and opposers of child marriage practice.

This research recognized various studies on child marriage through the discipline of communication, including the schema of social media (Kasimoglu & Tekin) and rhetoric (Eisler). It recognized the pre-human rights practice of child marriage around the world that echo the same in the rhetoric of the defenders. This old practice has been rooted in religious purity and family duty for clan prosperity and continuity. The continuation of the clan ensured the survival of religious or ethnic communities through the production of offspring early in life. The rhetorical acts identified by this research supplements these explanations. Through the discipline of communication, understanding the old practice is possible through an analysis of the rhetorical acts that are performed up to the present day by the defenders in Facebook posts.

One study that related to this research was the one done by Nisa Ul-Haqq in 2009. Pointing out that early marriage should not be confined to the understanding that is cultural, it emphasized the need for religious conversations within the religious laws that are derived from religious teachings and tradition. It called for the gathering of evidence that will be presented as religious counterarguments backed by data. As various literature have been producing data in various forms (statistics, life stories, testimonies, etc.), this research on rhetorical acts can contribute to the creating counterarguments.

At first glance, the speech acts between defenders and opposers are completely at odds. The opposers see abuse but the logic of defenders see the marriages as sacred. There is also mutual disrespect for the character and credibility of one another. However, no one wants a bad life for the girl. Child welfare and the duty of parents are emotional concerns that unify the opposers and defenders.

Opposers have the availability of religious writers who oppose child marriage. Their testimonials and body of work offer religious arguments that resound with respect for their own religious ideals. Their credibility based on knowledge of tradition and religion is strengthened by their scholarship on the topic of child marriage. The arguments of opposers have been written about by religious scholars like Ramdani & Karim (2023) who discussed women's rights in marriage under Religious Law, emphasizing consent and readiness for marriage based on age. Baraie, Rezaei & Nadrian (2023) identified factors like religious interpretation and family views that influence child marriage. Ullah and Hasan advocated for ending child marriage due to its harmful nature and violation of children's rights, while Hasan

(2023) pointed to religious tenets to address the implementation gap in ending child marriage practice. Sheik (2018) also called for a reform-oriented approach within Religious Law when addressing child marriage. Sadly, despite religious scholarship discouraging child marriage, the predominant approach to ending it focused on the human rights perspectives advocated by UN agencies and civil society organizations that are motley devoid of religious scholarship.

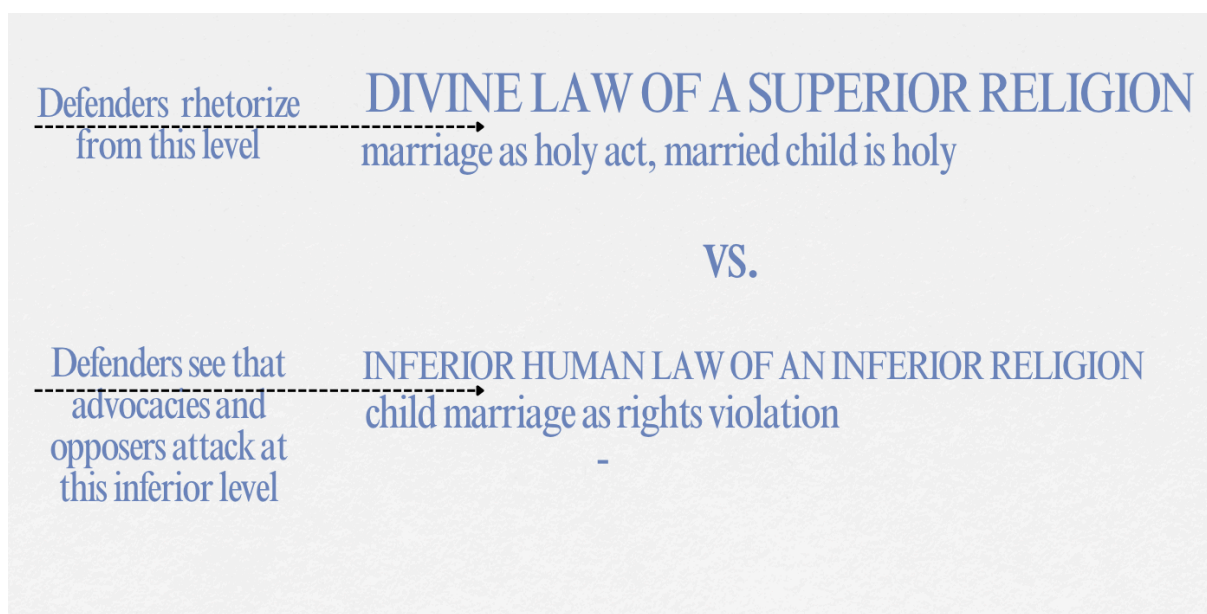
Despite the presence of Religion A believers who oppose the practice, majority of the opposer comments are laden with anti-Religion A sentiments, making the rhetoric of Religion A believers who do not support child marriage sound lesser in discourse. With similar tendency, defenders of child marriage are also more focused on comments that tear down Religion B believers' credibility. The world of Facebook comments becomes a space for word war between religions, of who knows best or has genuine concern for children. Although both are concerned with child welfare, opposers point to rights and justice, while defenders point to the superior religious path of protection and holiness.

The defenders' speech acts mainly reflect the defenders' conviction that marriage, even if early, is a practical and efficient solution to the flawed human nature. This practicality and efficiency of religion make it the supreme and true path to holiness. Along the same logic, the marriage of girls is not just a practice or habit deprived of deep thought. A practice or habit is mistaken to indicate a usual way of doing things without the need for deep reflection or critical thinking, therefore shallow or dumb. For the defenders, this judgment is unacceptable and invalid right at the start. Advocates to end child marriage are hitting precisely the wrong nerve when

they pertain to child marriage as a practice, and even more so labeling it as a harmful cultural practice.

For the defenders, child marriage is not a practice, not just cultural or devoid of religious value. More so that it is not harmful. Choosing a path of early marriage for the girls emanates from deep reflection and efficient religiosity. It is beyond culture because it comes from a high-level divine law. It is not harmful because it saves children from the harms of sexual immorality, and assures them of salvation from sin and entry into heaven, and a holy place that belongs to the holy followers of the superior religion in the afterlife.

**Figure 8:** *Defenders' Rhetoric*



#### Summary of research implications

- Current literature on advocacy and studies are revealed to be limited to rights-based analysis and approach.
- Another way to approach child marriage practice, the Rhetorical Tradition of

Communication Theory is presented. There is a rhetorical world that sustains child marriage practice.

- Literature of religious writers/scholars who seek to end child marriages is available to derive rhetoric.
- Rhetorical act of religious superiority and speech acts of defenders can help us understand the complex child marriage issue and see ways to engage with defenders.
  - Holy act as opposed to crime or rights violation
  - Not a practice or habit deprived of deep thought
  - Emanates from belief in the superiority of the religion
  - Opposers who have pro-Religion B position and anti-Religion A leanings are revealed.
- The fundamental concern for child welfare is a common ground that can benefit advocacy.

The rhetorical act that sustains child marriage may also possibly explain other practices that are deemed unlawful or abusive but sometimes justified under religious beliefs.



**Figure 9:** *Divine Law*

Marriage, regardless of age, is like the holy acts of waging war, self-sacrifice and honor killings. They are justified and considered above human law, explaining why these practices are sustained despite efforts against them. The speech acts of human rights are insufficient when confronted with divine rights derived from divine law.

## **6.2 Conclusion**

### **Religious superiority overcomes opposition.**

The current literature on child marriages primarily focuses on the opposers' viewpoints, covering prevention strategies, harmful effects, legal aspects, economic implications, and religious perspectives. Much literature highlighted economic needs, social norms, and conflicts contributing to the perpetuation of child marriage. Accusations of committing a crime and violating the human rights of children are the speech acts that defenders perceive as Religion B believers' impositions that are oppressive to Religion A believers.

As there is a lack of rhetorical studies examining how child marriage practice is sustained from the defenders' point of view, this research's contribution is showing how defenders of child marriage see the good in the practice and sustain it through an emphasis on divine law over human efforts, viewing it as a religious duty to children way above and encompassing human rights; prioritizing religious purity over material well-being.

Their traditional beliefs surrounding readiness for motherhood upon menstruation clash with modern child rights concepts. Opposers within religious

communities offer insights into the nuanced relationship between tradition and religious law, emphasizing the need for their perspectives to be acknowledged in efforts to combat child marriage. Religious scholars who argue for human rights within religion should be engaged.

The communication-focused studies on child marriage (Kasimoglu & Tekin; Eisler) showed social media as an avenue or space of opportunity to reach out to the girls, and the contribution that rhetorics can make in analyzing the roots of child marriage practice. The availability Facebook comments on child marriage is an opportunity to study the issue in a safe zone for researchers who are outside of the practicing community. Social media allows for the exchange of comments that emanate directly from the speakers without fear of physical backlash. Facebook comments is a communication space rich in rhetoric.

This research on in Facebook comments eventually contributes to highlighting the value of communication discipline in understanding seemingly complex and polarizing issues by understanding rhetorical acts. This expands the understanding of the problem of child marriage from the perspectives of both the defenders and opposers, which turn in results that can guide advocates in coming up with suitable messaging that the defenders may be open to listen to and with rhetoric that they may be able to accept for conversation.

Answering the main question of the rhetorical acts of defenders and opposers, the following are the conclusions:

- The rhetorical act of defenders is Religious Superiority.
- The rhetorical act of opposers is hard to identify as themes and speech

acts vary, not unified, ranging from human rights to assertion of Religion B believers' nationalist supremacy leanings with tints of anti-Religion A sentiments.

With a feeling and assertion of the superiority of the religion, defenders believe that theirs is the final and most perfect religion. Viewing it as superior to Religion B, they see it unwise to follow Religion B, which they consider flawed and incapable of guiding believers to follow a life of holiness. The context of defenders' comments sometimes reflect a collective sense of injustice on them by the dominant Religion B believers.

Unlike the defenders who seem to be united by their rhetorical act of religious superiority, the opposers cannot be consolidated by one act. Calling out violations of the rights of children and women, accusations of child abuse, hate comments on the families, insults on the situation of the married girl and her husband, and outright denunciation of Religion A are scattered rhetoric.

With the opposers' speech acts loosely thrown into the comments, defenders of child marriage practice will remain closed against anything below religion. The opposition needs human rights advocates and feminists who bring the agenda into the communication field, with a serious focus on finding ways for persuasive public speaking guided by the Rhetorical Tradition in Communication Theory.

The practice of child marriage itself can also be considered a rhetorical act in itself. The act of marrying girls and boys is an act of religious superiority, especially

in contexts where Religion A believers feel oppressed by the Religion B majority. There is a possible explanation that continuing child marriage could also be a way to assert that Religion A remains superior and cannot be taken over by Religion B.

Conclusion on the rhetorical act of defenders:

**Child marriage is sustained by the rhetorical act of religious superiority.**

**The continuous practice of child marriage could be an assertion of religious superiority.**

**Science supports religious arguments.** Although not explored in this paper, while religious superiority is the primary rhetorical act of defenders, religious arguments in defenders' comments are backed with science-based knowledge that the age of puberty is also when sexual curiosity begins, making girls who begin menstruating inclined to have sexual relations.

### **6.3 A dialogic process: "I tried to understand but I was too suspicious so I sometimes became vulnerable."**

As a reflection on the discourses of knowledge production by Mumby (2006), what started out as a quest for the Discourse of Understanding became a dialogic immersion between three discourses— Understanding, Suspicion, and Vulnerability. Saludadez (2020) described the four types of knowledge production per Mumby. The Discourse of Representation explores the separation between the knower and the known, viewing communication as a vessel for preconceived ideas. The Discourse of Understanding, in contrast, sees communication as symbolically shaping existing realities, leading to a dialogical understanding of the world. The Discourse of

Suspicion delves deeper into power structures within knowledge, while the Discourse of Vulnerability challenges traditional hierarchies of knowledge production, advocating for a more open and politically aware approach that acknowledges the intersection of communication, identity, and power.

While the researcher tried to disassociate from the feminist inclination toward Suspicion to examine the power relations that explain the persistence of child marriage practice, the 30 years of advocacy work and immersion as a development worker in communities where child marriages happen had to come out once-a-while to provide an anchor for understanding. Suspicion had to show itself not as a blockage but as a push to dialogue with oneself as a researcher trying to understand, and as a feminist seeking ways to end the practice. Without suspicion, there is no anchor to understand and it would be hypocritical for the researcher to claim to understand without her own anchor. She sought to understand because she had an intention in mind, emanating from suspicion but willing to undergo a genuine search to understand. If the intention was merely to understand, the researcher felt that there would be no reason strong enough to subject herself to many days of inquiry into the world of comments of child marriage defenders. While in the process of understanding, the researcher allowed herself to be vulnerable (and feel emotional dialogue with the comments). At this point, Discourse of Vulnerability was in operation, a necessary state of mind to reach an understanding. Discovering uncomfortable knowledge, the researcher was vulnerable, opening up to other possible explanations for child marriage practice, mentally accepting that her views may not always be right. To be vulnerable or open to being wrong was necessary to reach the intention of understanding. To be suspicious was the anchor so the

researcher can still find her way back to why she went through the dizzying process anyway.

So, in the experience of writing most parts of the dissertation, the researcher had to shrug off her feminist lens, thus explaining why despite the clarity of gender issues, she chose to be silent about it. Refraining from using the feminist lens that she has been used to was challenging but was necessary to go beyond her oppositional understanding of the child marriage issue. However, she also chose not to totally let go of her feminist self so she will not be totally rootless. The feminist self was silenced but still fully aware such that in the process of understanding the practice, revelations on what sustains the practice also feeds the feminist, even if silently. The feminist was heard in the beginning, in the rationale to establish the inherent bias of the researcher and set in place her purpose in the research. It was an anchor to understand power on the defender's side but restrained from judgment or suspicion of power play. At the end of the study, the feminist revealed itself in the notes for advocates, like a necessary inhale for fresh air after a long deep dive into vulnerability, long enough to understand what rhetorical act sustains child marriage practice. Knowledge production in this process was not compartmentalized. We sometimes cannot tame the mind for what it has been used to doing but we can direct it to learn other ways of finding knowledge.

#### **6.4 Recommendations**

As a recommendation, the rhetorical act of defenders should inform advocacy on ending child marriage practice.

#### 6.4.1 Persuasive communication

Advocates seeking to end child marriage should understand the rhetorical act and appeals/devices/strategies of those who allow or facilitate the marriage of their children. They should also learn the art and skill of rhetorical communication. Directly pushing for the stance on child marriage as a harmful cultural practice may have limited reach when trying to persuade the defenders who are deep into the performance of religious duty and derive logic, emotions and credibility from the pursuit of religious perfection. Labeling the issue and messaging for persuasion should be planned with rhetorical acts in mind to generate respect from the defenders so openness to ideas on the alternatives to marriage of children can begin.

The rhetorical acts of Religion A believers who oppose child marriage should be highlighted and their persuasive voices amplified. In addition, as comments that affirm marriage as a holy sacrament in Religion B are missing in the Facebook comments, opposers who acknowledge and demonstrate respect for the rhetorical acts of defenders as religious in nature could ring softer alongside the holy act rhetoric of defenders.

Advocates should expand their allies and reach out to Religion A believer writers. For example, the arguments of Hasan, who explained human rights within religious tenets have not found their way into the prevailing research and human rights-based advocacies to end child marriage.

Taking a relational approach by borrowing politeness and cooperation from Rhetorical Pragmatics and Ong's situatedness could open doors for conversations. Religious similarities can be explored to build religious conversations that could eventually end the occurrence of child or early marriages. In addition, adopting a relational approach by utilizing rhetorics respecting diverse viewpoints while at the same time opening conversations for alternatives to child marriage could be beneficial for advocates seeking to end the practice.

#### **6.4.2 Notes for advocates**

Reviewed literature on child marriages have mostly focused on the agenda of opposers. A wealth of knowledge has been gathered that includes various prevention and response knowledge and strategies (Nugrahen, Nugroho, Hidayah), evidence on the harmful effects through data and stories of girl-brides (Ekobi), laws and legal reforms (UN), and the micro and macro economic implications (Oluwaseyi).

Some have presented religious views (Ramdani). However, no rhetorical study to examine what sustains child marriage practice has been found.

The results of this rhetorical study inform advocates of the rhetorical acts of defenders, as well as the rhetorical acts of opposers. Those of the opposers echo the same with the literature in condemning child marriage and finding ways to save the child.

#### 6.4.2.1 Level off on who is a child

While current literature turns to prevention strategies that focus on empowering girls, in the minds of the defenders, childhood is not defined from the Eurocentric view (Liebel, 2017). A child reaches adulthood upon reaching the age of puberty, which for girls is the age of menstruation. Even when married before this age, arranging the path toward procreation, which is considered a religious duty, is ensuring the right path for the child, which is the duty of the parents (Nasution, 2020).

In Nasution's study, the definition of the child as culled through themes from the holy book is **relational**, not individual-centered which measures childhood by the number of years (Liebel). Also from the Religion A believers' point of view, having a child is a religious duty, a wealth that is part of the pleasures of life and, at the same time, a trial or test, among other religious definitions.

These relational definitions that can be understood only by knowing the religion is what the defenders have been pertaining to when referring to Religion B believers ignorance about the Religion A tradition: "Please don't make comments like that because in the Qur'an, early marriage is allowed."

This has also been the point of the religious scholars (Ramdani, Shiek; Karim; Baraie, Rezaei & Nadrian; Ullah) exploring and explaining child marriage within religious teachings, either as a reaction or contribution to the human rights-based approach to addressing the issue of child marriage. For these scholars, religion has

a complex set of laws that may have various interpretations. Comments that may sound simple actually reflect the complex world of religious practice. Repeated references to religious ways, such as "But in [religion], even underage individuals can get married" and "forbidden for a man to touch a woman who is not his wife. It is a great sin in the eyes of our Creator; that is the law of God..." reflect a call for obedience to a superior set of religious laws.

The study through social media provided clues on the situation of married girls who have reached out to social media to tell their situation and find support. Such acts of these girls indicate their decision to leave the community space to move into their own online space that opens up spaces beyond or away from the physical space they were born into. This online individual space for the girls provides opportunities to engage with them through empowering rhetoric. Eisler's study on rhetoric analyzed the roots of child marriage practice and recommended strategies to end it. As Eisler limited it within the feminist mind, making the strategies more effective will need information from this study on the rhetorical acts of defenders and opposers. Understanding the rhetoric can help make suitable arguments against the rhetoric of those who defend child marriage practice. Knowing the rhetorical acts of opposers can help bring to light what rhetoric could be listened to and what will not.

#### **6.4.2.2 Work with divine law**

The rhetorical act of defenders demonstrates that power is not the hands of humans, including the girls, but rather in the hands of divine law being followed by a community of believers. Divine law is above human knowledge and therefore cannot

be questioned for validity. Human rights, which refers to human affairs, are not enough to change divine law.

The approach taken by the Women Refugee Commission et al. to empower the girls reflects an individual-centric approach, which can be deterred by the community whose actions are to protect their own children and think in terms of the collective over individual interests.

Encapsulating child marriage within the crime of child abuse invites antagonism as it tries to make criminals of the parents and the community who are acting to protect the child from further harm away from sexual relations outside of marriage, which, in turn, leads to unwanted pregnancies that leads some girls to abandon and endanger the lives of newborns and their own.

International and national laws and legal reforms will also fall below divine law. The holy act of marriage will not be subject to laws and reforms created by humans. Rhetoric equates opposers who stand on the arguments of rights and laws with the act of oppression of the religious way of life in the Religion B-dominated context. Religion A being the minority, opposing child marriage could even solidify the stance of the practicing communities on child marriage as an assertion of their existence as the people living religiously, persevering against the attacks of the opposing and dominating Religion B believers.

The study on the drivers of child marriage conducted by the US-based Women Refugee Commission, which pointed to economic need, conflict-induced

displacements, social norms and socio-political issues can show evidence that child marriage brings more hardship for children, depriving them of the right to full human development through health and well-being and education. However, the evidence being presented is only at the surface level of the practice. While the evidence invalidate the claim that child marriage is a practice to protect girls from hardships, the defenders' rhetorical acts reflect that these are direct attacks on the integrity of the parents and communities who regard themselves as deeply spiritual and committed to protecting their children from the harms of this world.

For the defenders, the issue is not just material, not just of this world. Although economic conditions such as the capacity to make a family are involved, marriage is not just for worldly desires or wealth but for a heavenly purpose. Economic and social hardships for a married girl are not comparable to the place among the holy people being offered through religious purity. Reasons for health, well-being, and education are necessary conditions for a better life. However, sexual purity and sinless life, which are indispensable to achieving holiness, are above all these material concerns.

The rhetorical acts of defenders ring similar to religious scholars who explain that the concept of a child varies within the religion and, contrary to prevailing definition, a girl who has reached menstruation is ready for marriage. The girl stops being a child of the parent and enters into the realm of religion for marriage. Marriage seals that readiness to bear children. The concept of child rights, which is central to the argument of advocates, came up only decades ago as accepted by governments around the world. The traditional belief of readiness for motherhood

upon menstruation has existed for hundreds of years prior to the creation of the concept of child rights.

Studies on the evolution of child marriage (Espesor) should help us better understand how to change traditions. However, changing traditions that were established long before the creation of human rights will require understanding the tradition first before demanding it to change. These traditions have existed long before the concerns for child rights.

Attacking the subordinate or powerlessness of women and girls is an argument based on the right to equality (Valerio & Butt; PILIPINA). However, defenders have been set in the order of complementary roles of women and men in religious tradition. Outsiders calling out for human rights and attempting to change the social order through reforms and interventions on education, livelihood, economic rights, sexual and reproductive rights, voice/choice/agency (UN Women; UNICEF, UNFPA, and Girlsnotbrides) on an ancient set of roles for women and men may be welcomed interference, but will not be able to interfere with the path to holiness in the true religion that is believed to be superior to any human law, government or international entity.

As an additional note, the defenders' consistent reference to the opposers as ignorant should be considered a challenge to Religion B believers who are knowledgeable in divine law and religious living. The defenders' rhetorical act that is religious in nature deserves counter-arguments from Religion B believers who

understand the context of purity in living, including the sanctity of marriage.

#### **6.4.2.3 Argue from within**

The opposers of child marriage who are of the same faith with defenders provide a chance for non-Religion A believers to understand the context of tradition within religious law (Ramdani). Their rhetoric points to tradition within religion that is encouraged but is not forced. Their call not to blame religion, whether directly or not, has not been supported by efforts mentioned in the reviewed literature. What these group of opposers say deserve space and support among the advocates to end child marriage.

Hasan's arguments on maturity, sound judgment, consent, and exemption of the marriage of a religious icon to a girl can guide the rhetoric to argue for the end of the occurrence of child marriages in Religion A believer communities. As the defenders' rhetorical acts are derived from religious law and passages from the holy book, the rhetorical acts to respond may also come from the same.

Advocates should expand the advocacy to ally with religious scholars who speak about child rights and ways to negotiate these rights within religion, while also deriving arguments from sociological and political theory (Omran, 1990; Santoso, 2016; Nurjanah, Santoso, Fatarib, Jalil, Murdiana: 2022; Kamali, 2001; Ridho, [n.d.]; Abuarqub, 2009; Mawdudi, Rajab-Ramadhan 1407). While the rhetorical acts of defenders point to religious world view to defend child marriage, religious scholars who promote human rights provide nuanced perspectives on child protection, right to

education and health, understanding of parental duties, and the centrality of human rights within the religion.

#### **6.4.2.4 Explore rhetorical theory-based communication**

Consciously or not, rhetorical elements are present in the persuasive communication happening in Facebook comments on posts about child marriages. Appeals and devices to construct mental images of what or who is right and wrong, and devices to defend or oppose provide the rhetorical scape by which advocates against child marriage can try to examine, understand and engage with and influence. Two theories that came up from the rhetorical analysis could be useful for persuasive communication.

#### **Speak with politeness, cooperate**

An observation on rhetorical acts that came up after going through the analysis is the possible use of Rhetorical Pragmatics (Leech, 1983; Al-Hindawi, Mayuuf, Juwahid: 2016), which looks at the politeness principle and cooperation principle (Leech, 1983). "Rules of Politeness" (Lakoff, 1973) have rules advocates can follow. Comments that attempt to bring clarity into the discussions in Facebook can approach with politeness. First rule is to not be imposing. The literature on the advocacy to end child marriage and the opposers in the comments in Facebook have been imposing their own view. Opposers disrespect the defenders' religion when commenting: "Read [holy book]; it's prohibited, not just in [your religion]. So, don't say '[praise God]' with, haha." Here, the assertion of Religion B believers' holy

teaching to impose on Religion A marriage tradition is not rhetorically pragmatic. Imposition with insult on a revered religious expression followed by “haha” for laughter, is offensive to defenders.

The second is to give options from within, which the opposers have not been doing. What the opposers impose is this: "That's why many convert to Religion B because of such traditions in [your religion]—you're still young but already burdened with responsibilities. This is what we say: 'Small but already big.'" This comment gives the option of leaving the religion to convert to Religion B.

Even advocates, as reflected in the reviewed literature, although prescribing prevention and response, are not directly speaking with practicing families and communities to negotiate options. They are the same with the opposers where blaming and criminalizing have become the default.

The third rule is to be friendly and make the audience or recipient of the message feel good is also not taken into consideration by advocates. "Cooperative Principle" by Grice (1975) can facilitate the communication of advocates with communities where child marriages occur by beginning at the level of shared concern for child welfare. Leaving temporarily the advocacy based on accusations for human rights violation, building a spirit of cooperation could be an entry point toward the goal of halting the occurrences of marriage of children.

The relational approach of these principles are demonstrated in the rhetorical acts of defenders and opposers who open or end the comments with “sorry but,” “I

apologize,” and “peace” greetings. Being relational as an approach echoes the mindset expressed in the rhetorical acts when defenders pertain to community or global faith, the parents’ concern for the child, the protection of the unborn and newborns, helping the young avoid a life of sin, collective religious duty to ensure a holy path for believers, and so on.

The relational way runs contrary to the way most opposers have been acting through their comments and the strategies of advocates who approach the problem from the outside—through programs and laws. Relational actions recognize differences and balance against the individualistic-universalistic Eurocentric (Baaz, 1999). As the rhetorical acts of the defenders emit a relational mindset, persuasive communication that is relational, non-imposing, could be an entry point for advocates to finding ways to end or alternatives to child marriage.

### **Situatedness brings clarity**

Ong (1982) wrote about orality, which emphasizes situatedness. The situatedness approach could render valuable insights into practical communication strategies to end child marriage. The defenders’ repeated rhetorical questions and phrases such as “it is like this,” “nonsense” and “nowadays” emphasizes the current and varying situations faced by families where the girl belongs, and the search for practical solutions.

Practicality in solutions for accurate and current situations that need urgent solutions also have repeatedly been mentioned by defenders:

"They are surprised when Religion A believers get married at a young age, while they are not surprised when there are young pregnant girls who are not yet married. When sin becomes normalized among people, following God truly becomes something unusual."

Defenders perceive opposers' comments as blaming religion and put forward the observation that opposers comment on the situation without thinking through their position. The rhetorical questions demonstrate the opposers' lack of understanding of the situations that led to the marriage:

"You're being too much of a victim. Just from your statement, you're already very wrong, and then you're saying you have dreams? Are you embarrassed? If you really had dreams, then you should have thought about them before doing something shameful! In your statement, it seems like you're blaming religious law. Tsk!"

Ong wrote extensively about orality and its role in integrating societies, as well as how orality is strengthened by literacy. Social media, usually classified as literate culture, is considered oral culture (Grimmelman, 2015; Hutchins, 2024). Situatedness is the mark of an oral culture where speakers are shaped by their social, historical, geographical, cultural, and political contexts and experiences. Politeness in acknowledging the situatedness and finding ways for cooperation can inform and shape the prevailing accusation-focused advocacies.

Opposers prescribing what is right and accusing the parents and the Religion A community of child abuse and violations are not knowledgeable of both the situation and the laws within the religion. Without knowledge of religious concepts,

including the complexity of the dowry or the gift given to the bride's family, the opposers' lack of credibility is made obvious: "The dowry that a man gives to his future wife is not considered a payment. The article you used is incorrect. ...Dowry is a benefit given by a man to a woman when they marry." The comment reflects knowledge of religious texts that the learned opposer can address.

#### **6.4.3 For future study**

While the research has been able to understand to a certain extent child marriage practice through the rhetorical acts of defenders and opposers, it has limitations. The defenders who are non-Religion A believers located in communities where child marriage is still practiced were not heard from the comments.

The genre of virtuality of Facebook comments, which requires speakers access to the Internet and smartphones limits the diversity of the speakers and audiences. It excludes speakers who have no access to or with limited literacy on social media. If it happens that some of the comments gathered were posted by speakers from indigenous communities, their rhetorical acts remained hidden to the researcher.

As the marriage of girls became the focus of the comments, the rhetorical acts on the marriage of boys remained invisible. Related future studies that would like to support the results and rationale of this research should consider expanding or diversifying the Facebook posts that generate the comments and schemas of

analysis as well.

Religious scholars that have been invested in the rhetorical analysis of the religious teachings should be heard further. Seeing that the defenders' consistent stance on religious rhetoric can be considered a wake-up call not only for Religion A religious scholars, but also for Religion B religious scholars who can be an excellent match to communicate divine law and religious living. The defenders' religiously based rhetorical argument can be engaged in conversation with Religion B believers who also grasp the importance of living with purity, which includes respecting the sanctity of marriage while also having adherence to the rights of women and children under international and national laws.

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