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# Consumer Perception of Organisational Reputation of the Nigerian Bottling Company Plc. in Rivers State, Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT**

**Background:** In today's competitive business environment, organisational reputation has become a critical asset for companies seeking to establish trust, credibility, and loyalty with their customers. The beverage industry, in particular, is highly competitive, with numerous brands vying for consumer attention and loyalty. Nigerian Bottling Company (NBC) Nigeria Plc, a leading beverage company in Nigeria, operates in a highly competitive market, where consumer perception of organisational reputation plays a crucial role in determining brand loyalty and market share. Rivers State, Nigeria, provides a unique context for this study, given its large and diverse consumer market. The state's economy is driven by various industries, including oil and gas, manufacturing, and services. As a result, consumers in Rivers State have a wide range of choices when it comes to beverage products, making it essential for companies like NBC Nigeria Plc to maintain a positive organisational reputation.
**Objective:** This study investigated consumer perception of the organisational reputation of NBC Nigeria Plc in Rivers State, Nigeria.
**Method:** A mixed method of quantitative and qualitative approaches that involved descriptive survey research design and in-depth interviews was employed. Two distinct populations: residents of Rivers State as general consumers and employees of International Breweries operating within the state. The sample size of 380 respondents was determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling method. Data were collected using both questionnaire and interview guides. To ensure the validity and reliability of research instruments, experts in the field conducted face and content validity assessments, while a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.80 was obtained to confirm internal consistency. Furthermore, presented and analysed using descriptive statistics where data were presented in frequency distribution tables as well as weighted mean scores (WMS).
**Results:** The findings indicates that respondents agreed that quality of products, corporate social responsibility, cultural inclination, price of the products, and product advertising influence consumer perception of the products.
**Conclusion:** The study concludes that there is negative consumer perception of organisational reputation of the Nigerian Bottling Company Plc. in Rivers State, Nigeria due to lack of communications the quality

of their products, low level of corporate social responsibility, price of the products, and declining product advertising.
**Unique Contribution:** The study provides a localised framework for understanding consumer behaviour in identity-sensitive markets. It offers insights for aligning flagship product strategies with consumer identities to strengthen brand loyalty and reputation.
**Key Recommendation:** Findings of this study resonates the need for beverage companies to adopt culturally inclusive marketing strategies that acknowledge the diverse ethnic and political landscape of Rivers State. By designing campaigns that resonate with various ethnic groups and promoting values of unity and diversity, organisations such as the Nigerian Bottling Company Plc, can mitigate the influence of ethnic and political biases, thereby broadening their consumer base. Again, there is need to reinforce the brand narrative of their flagship products by emphasising their unique qualities and positive societal contributions, thereby strengthening corporate reputation and consumer trust.

**Keywords:** Perception, Reputation, Consumer, Organisational and Companies.

## INTRODUCTION

Consumer perception is a key driver of organisational reputation in the global marketplace, especially in industries where brand image and customer loyalty are critical to success (Oginyi, et al. 2023). In the brewing industry, where competition is fierce, an organisation’s reputation is often built on how consumers perceive its products, services, and values. Consumer perception is a subjective evaluation that individuals form about an organisation based on their experiences, interactions, and cultural contexts (Belch & Belch, 2018). It influences purchasing behaviour, brand loyalty, and word-of-mouth recommendations. Positive consumer perception generally leads to a favourable reputation, which in turn can enhance a company’s market share and profitability (Keller, 2020).

Increasingly, organisations are more cognisant of their actions and how they affect their perception, which enhances organisational reputation (Nwafor, et al. 2023). Owing to market size and potential, the number of competing enterprises in Nigeria are increasing. In the beverage industry, companies attract customers through promotional activities such as advertising and public relations. Hence, how to achieve and maintain a savoury image is an important issue. Shu-Ling Hsu (2018) opines that companies must establish their organisational reputation to stabilise their market position. This is to buttress the fact that companies' activities in the beverage industry should influence their organisational reputation measured by public perception. By determining the relationship between these variables, companies and marketers can effectively craft their strategies to entice consumers towards their brands. This contribution could further assist future efforts on the subject, especially in similar developing economies that share common characteristics with Rivers State and by extension Nigeria.

Nigeria Bottling Company (NBC) Ltd is a member of the Coca-cola Hellenic Bottling Company A.G., an anchor bottler for the Coca-Cola Company in 29 countries including Nigeria. The Nigerian Bottling Company is a beverage firm that is the franchise bottler of Coca-cola in Nigeria. The firm has also owned the Nigerian franchise to market Fanta, Sprite, Schweppes, Ginger Ale, Limca, Krest, Parle Soda and Five Alive. Nigerian Bottling Company has eight bottling plants in Nigeria which provide supplies to various depots for onward distribution to wholesalers or dealers and one of these plants is situated in Rivers State. Nigerian Bottling Company has been operating the Port Harcourt plant since 1973. With an installed capacity unit cases of 35million and a warehouse capacity pallet space of 5,700, it is the first plant to launch Behavioural Based Safety in Nigeria, which has the highest volume of 148,376 cases in 24 hours from two PET lines. The Port Harcourt plant has consistently maintained a system line efficiency of over 70% on a month-to-month basis. Specifically, achieving an efficiency score of 202, with a Year-to Date System Line Efficiency (YTD SLE) of 72.4%, which is higher than all other plants. This simply means that the Port Harcourt plant has been performing well in terms of operational efficiency, maintaining a higher level of productivity over time. After all the Nigeria Bottling Company Port Harcourt plant boasts of, we are yet to ascertain the perception of the consumers concerning how well the company has built its reputation especially in its` engagements with the host community and its environs.

Rivers State, situated in the heart of Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta region, serves as a microcosm of the challenges and opportunities facing corporations in balancing profit motives with social and environmental responsibilities. As consumers become more conscientious and discerning, the success of beverage companies is increasingly tied to their ability to align with societal expectations and contribute positively to the communities they serve. The importance of consumer perception in shaping corporate behaviour cannot be overstated. As suggested by Fombrun and Shanley (1990), consumers perception are multifaceted, encompassing factors such as media portrayal, word-of-mouth, and individual experiences. These perceptions significantly influence consumer attitudes and choices, thereby affecting a company's market standing and overall success. In this context, consumer perception plays a pivotal role in shaping the expectations and demands placed on beverage companies in Rivers State.

The Nigerian Bottling Company in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, operates within a socio-economic landscape where its reputation has gained prominence as a strategic imperative for organisations (Carroll, 1999). As a major player in the beverage industry, the company faces a pressing challenge related to understanding and managing the influence of consumer perception and organisational reputation on the effective implementation of programmes and initiatives. Consumer perception, influenced by media representation, word-of-mouth, and individual experiences, play a pivotal role in shaping consumer expectations and attitudes toward a company's activities (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). Simultaneously, organisational reputation serves as a significant determinant of consumer trust and brand loyalty, impacting the company's overall success (Deephouse, 2000). Beverage companies, particularly multinational corporations like Nigerian Bottling Company (Coca-Cola) rely heavily on consumer perception to maintain their market position. However, despite the acknowledged importance of consumer perception and organisational reputation in the context of activities, there is a dearth of research that specifically examines these dynamics within the operations of Nigerian Bottling Company in Port Harcourt.

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This study aims to fill this gap by conducting a thorough evaluation of how consumer perception and organisational reputation jointly influence the execution of programmes and initiatives by Nigerian Bottling Company in Port Harcourt. While existing literature provides general insights into the relationship between consumer perception and organisational reputation, the nuances specific to the beverage industry and the unique socio-economic context of Port Harcourt remain unexplored. Through an in-depth examination of the factors that shape consumer perception and organisational reputation in the context of Nigerian Bottling Company in Port Harcourt, this study intends to offer actionable insights for industry practitioners and decision-makers. The findings will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities inherent in managing organisational reputation in a specific corporate and regional setting, facilitating the development of targeted strategies that align with the expectations and needs of local stakeholders.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Generally, this study seeks to evaluate consumer perception of organisational reputation of Nigeria Bottling Company in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sets out to achieve the following objectives:

1. Analyse the determinants of consumer perception of Nigerian Bottling Company in Rivers State.
2. Determine the relationship between consumer perception and the organisational reputation of Nigerian Bottling Company in Rivers State.
3. Evaluate the role of media and word-of-mouth communication in shaping consumer perception of Nigerian Bottling Company in Rivers State.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was anchored on the Stakeholders theory. The Stakeholders theory as proposed by Freeman (1984), is a framework that emphasises the interconnected relationships between organisations and their various stakeholders. According to Freeman, stakeholders are individuals or groups who can affect or are affected by the achievements of an organisation's objectives. This theory goes beyond the traditional focus on shareholders and highlights the importance of considering the interests and expectations of a broader range of stakeholders, including customers, employees, communities, and regulatory bodies. In the context of evaluating the influence of consumer perception and organisational reputation, Stakeholder Theory provides a relevant lens for understanding the dynamics at play. The theory suggests that the success of organisational initiatives is contingent upon recognising and responding to the expectations and concerns of diverse stakeholders. For instance, customers may evaluate the company based on its commitment to sustainable and ethical practices, while employees may be influenced by the company's strategic efforts in their decisions to remain with or endorse the organisation. Communities surrounding the company's operations may scrutinise company's initiatives for their impact on local development and environmental sustainability. Regulatory bodies may also shape company's practices through legal requirements.

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Furthermore, the theory is a theory of organisational management and business ethics that accounts for multiple constituencies impacted by business entities like employees, suppliers, local communities, creditors, and others. It addresses morals and values in managing an organisation, such as those related to corporate social responsibility and market economy. The stakeholder theory lists and describes those individuals and groups who will be affected by (or affect) the company's actions. The stakeholder theory identifies the groups and individuals relative to a corporation. It also describes as well as recommends methods by which the interests of each party can be catered for by the management of the corporation (Freeman & Reed, 1983). The stakeholder theory is one of the classical theories in public relations. The theory is apt for this study owning to the existential expression it finds in given stakeholders the needed opportunity to contribute to the brand excellence.

**Conceptualising Public/Audience Perception**

Public perception refers to the collective opinions, beliefs, attitudes, and impressions held by individuals or groups within society regarding an organisation, its products, services, actions, or reputation (Onwe, et al. 2021). It encompasses the subjective interpretations and evaluations formed based on various sources of information, experiences, and interactions with the organisation. Public perception plays a significant role in shaping the reputation, credibility, and overall image of an organisation in the eyes of its stakeholders, including customers, employees, investors, regulators, and the general public.

According to McCombs and Shaw (1972), Public perception is influenced by a multitude of factors, including:

- **Media Coverage:** News articles, social media posts, and other forms of media coverage can significantly impact public perception by shaping narratives, highlighting specific events or actions, and influencing public opinion through framing and agenda-setting processes.
- **Corporate Communication:** The messages, statements, and communications disseminated by the organisation itself, including press releases, advertising campaigns, corporate social responsibility initiatives, and public statements by company executives, can shape public perception by framing the organisation's identity, values, and intentions.
- **Consumer Experiences:** Direct experiences and interactions with the organisation's products, services, employees, and brand can influence consumer perception by shaping individual attitudes, satisfaction levels, and loyalty towards the organisation
- **Social Influence:** Social factors such as word-of-mouth communication, peer recommendations, and social norms within peer groups or communities can significantly impact consumer perception by influencing individuals' opinions, beliefs, and behaviour through social validation and conformity.

5. **Crisis Management:** The organisation's response to crises, scandals, or controversies can profoundly influence consumer perception by affecting perception of trust, accountability, transparency, and ethical behaviour.

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Understanding consumer perception is essential for organisations as it directly influences consumer behaviour, stakeholder trust, investor confidence, regulatory scrutiny, and overall organisational performance (Oginyi, et al. 2023). Fombrun and Shanley (1990) further opine that by monitoring and managing consumer perception effectively, organisations can proactively address concerns, build positive relationships with stakeholders, and enhance their reputation and competitive advantage in the marketplace.

Perception occupies a significant position in product marketing practice. Scholars in both marketing and management such as Nwafor, (2019); Aligwe, (2017); and Orji-Egwu, and Nwafor, (2015) have tried to explain its relevance in various forms and with diverse definitions. Achumba (2000) defines it as the process of selecting, organising and interpreting stimulus received from the five physical senses of vision, hearing, touch, smell and taste. Perception begins when one is confronted with a stimulus or a situation. Osuagwu (2002) sees it as the process by which incoming stimuli receives by consumers' senses are interpreted and transformed into meaningful picture. Robbins (2001) on his part defines it as a process by which individuals organise and interpret their sensory impressions in order to give meaning to their environment. Perception is important in political marketing simply because electoral behaviour is based on their perception of what reality is, not on reality itself. The world as it is perceived is the world that is behaviourally important.

## METHODOLOGY

A mixed method of quantitative and qualitative approaches that involved descriptive survey research design and in-depth interviews was employed. Two distinct populations: residents of Rivers State as general consumers and employees of International Breweries operating within the state. According to the 2019 projected populations published by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBC), the projected population of Rivers State is seven million, two hundred and thirty-four thousand, nine hundred and seventy-three (7,234,973) and this forms the population for the study. The sample size for this study was 384. This was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling method. This sample was considered to be representative enough for the population. The study adopted the multi-stage, purposive and convenience sampling techniques. The purposive sampling technique was used to identify members of staff of Nigerian Bottling Company and International Breweries who will provide the needed information for the study. For interview, the researcher selected three managerial staff members who are unit heads Corporate Communications Department of the Organisations and consumers of the products. For the survey, the multi-stage sampling was adopted. Firstly, the three existing senatorial districts of Rivers State was drafted. In the second stage, one local government was selected from each of the senatorial districts. At the third stage, one ward from each of the local government areas was selected. This selection, again, was based on the level of development of each ward. Finally, the research employed convenience sampling to administer instruments to the respondents. The convenience sampling technique was adopted to make questionnaire administration easy. To ensure the validity and reliability of research instruments, experts in the field conducted face and content validity assessments, while a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.80 was obtained to confirm internal consistency. Furthermore, presented and analysed using descriptive statistics where data were presented in frequency distribution tables as well as weighted mean scores (WMS).

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**RESULT**

**Table 1: Mean $(\bar{X})$ analysis of the key determinants influencing consumer perception of Nigerian Bottling Company**

| S/N | Items | SA 4 | A 3 | D 2 | SD 1 | Total | Mean $(\bar{X})$ | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Quality of products | 134<br>536 | 157<br>471 | 25<br>46 | 62<br>62 | 376<br>1115 | 2.9 | Agreed |
| 2 | Corporate social responsibility | 101<br>404 | 109<br>327 | 110<br>220 | 56<br>56 | 376<br>1007 | 2.6 | Agreed |
| 3 | Cultural inclination | 92<br>368 | 113<br>339 | 108<br>216 | 63<br>63 | 376<br>986 | 2.6 | Agreed |
| 4 | The price of the products | 99<br>396 | 93<br>279 | 121<br>242 | 63<br>63 | 376<br>980 | 2.6 | Agreed |
| **5** | The way the product is advertised | 201<br>804 | 82<br>246 | 33<br>66 | 60<br>60 | 376<br>1176 | 3.1 | Agreed |
| | **Grand Mean** | 2.9 | 2.6 | 2.6 | 2.6 | 3.1 | **2.8** | Agreed |

Table 1 shows that all five identified factors; quality of products (2.9), corporate social responsibility (2.6), cultural inclination (2.6), product pricing (2.6), and advertising (3.1), were perceived by respondents as influencing consumer perception of the Nigerian Bottling Company. The grand mean score of 2.8 confirms a general agreement among respondents that these variables significantly shape consumer perception.

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**Table 2 Mean $\left(\bar{X}\right)$ Analysis of factors that influence Consumer Perception of Nigerian Bottling Company in Rivers State**

| S/N | Items | SA<br>4 | A<br>3 | D<br>2 | SD<br>1 | Total | Mean $\left(\bar{X}\right)$ | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | The products undermine my believes | 29<br>116 | 32<br>96 | 179<br>358 | 136<br>136 | 376<br>706 | 1.8 | Disagreed |
| 7 | Increase revenue of government | 131<br>524 | 129<br>387 | 63<br>126 | 53<br>53 | 376<br>1090 | 2.8 | Agreed |
| 8 | Contribution to societal growth | 76<br>304 | 130<br>390 | 106<br>212 | 64<br>64 | 376<br>970 | 2.5 | Agreed |
| 9 | Improve health condition of the people | 13<br>52 | 10<br>30 | 193<br>386 | 160<br>160 | 376<br>628 | 1.6 | Disagreed |
| 10 | Contribute to the health challenges of society | 56<br>224 | 78<br>234 | 127<br>254 | 115<br>115 | 376<br>827 | 2.1 | Disagreed |
| | **Grand Mean** | 1.8 | 2.8 | 2.5 | 1.6 | 2.1 | **2.16** | Disagreed |

Table 2 above is indicative of the listed factors do not influence consumer perception. Majority of respondents in the table above disagreed that the products undermine believe, improves health condition and contribute to health challenges with a mean score of 1.8, 1.6 and 2.1 respectively.

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**Table 3: Mean$\left(\bar{X}\right)$ Analysis of role of the media and word of mouth in shaping perception of Nigerian Bottling Company**

| S/N | Items | SA 4 | A 3 | D 2 | SD 1 | Total | Mean $\left(\bar{X}\right)$ | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Highlight the benefit of products | 132 | 131 | 49 | 64 | 376 | 2.8 | Agreed |
| | | 528 | 393 | 98 | 64 | 1083 | | |
| 2 | Highlight the quality of products | 122 | 115 | 79 | 60 | 376 | 2.7 | Agreed |
| | | 488 | 345 | 158 | 60 | 1051 | | |
| 3 | Evaluate the health benefits of products | 100 | 107 | 50 | 119 | 376 | 2.5 | Agreed |
| | | 400 | 321 | 100 | 119 | 940 | | |
| 4 | Educate the people about the products. | 140 | 100 | 83 | 53 | 376 | 2.8 | Agreed |
| | | 560 | 300 | 166 | 53 | 1083 | | |
| | | 2.8 | | | | | | |
| | **Grand Mean** | | 2.7 | 2.5 | 2.8 | | **2.7** | Agreed |

Table 3 presents the analysis of respondents' views on the role of the media and word of mouth in shaping consumer perception of the Nigerian Bottling Company. The results indicate that respondents generally agreed and suggests that the media and word of mouth play a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions across several dimensions; including product benefits, quality, health implications, and consumer education. The grand mean score of 2.7 further supports the conclusion that respondents agreed that media and word of mouth positively influence consumer perceptions of the Nigerian Bottling Company.

## DISCUSSION

### What are the key determinants influencing consumer perception of Nigerian Bottling Company in Rivers State?

Table 1 indicates that respondents agreed that quality of products, corporate social responsibility, cultural inclination, the price of the products and the way the product is advertised are all determinants influencing consumer perception with a mean score of 2.9, 2.6, 2.6, 2.6 and 3.1 respectively and with a grand mean of 2.8.

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Research shows that targeted media campaigns can have a profound effect on consumer perception, particularly when cultural or political symbols are involved (Belch & Belch, 2015). Organisations can proactively manage their reputation by addressing perceptual gaps. Consumer perception of an organisation's strategic efforts significantly impacts stakeholder trust and credibility. Positive perceptions of its initiatives can enhance trust and confidence in the organisation's commitment to social and environmental responsibility (Brammer & Millington, 2008). Word-of-mouth, particularly within political and political circles, acts as a powerful influencer, reinforcing or challenging the brand's image in different communities (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). Another emerging factor is the role of Nigeria Breweries in CSR initiatives. Word-of-mouth communication is also a critical factor, as 65% of respondents strongly agreed that their perceptions were influenced by what friends and family said about Coca Cola.

**What is the nature of the relationship between consumer perception and the organisational reputation of Nigerian Bottling Company in Rivers State?**

Table 2 shows the relationship between consumers and organisational reputation; respondents believe the relationship is positive because of the responses from the respondents and with a grand mean of 2.49. When we talk about relationship, so many factors are responsible for either positive and negative outcome. The study's findings contribute significantly to the existing literature on CSR and reputation management, particularly in the context of developing countries. Through empirical evidence, the researchers demonstrate a positive correlation between CSR activities and firm reputation, highlighting the potential for CSR initiatives to enhance stakeholder trust, loyalty, and brand equity. The study emphasises the importance of strategic alignment between CSR efforts and organisational values, as well as the role of transparent communication and engagement in shaping public perceptions of corporate behaviour.

**In what ways do media and word-of-mouth communication contribute to shaping consumer perception of Nigerian Bottling Company in Rivers State?**

Table 3 explain the role of the media and word of mouth in shaping consumer perception. Respondents agreed that media and word-of-mouth communication contribute to shaping consumer perception by highlighting the benefit of products, highlighting the quality of products, evaluating the health benefits of products and educating the people about the products, with a mean score of 2.8, 2.7, 2.5, 2.8 respectively and a grand mean of 2.76. A great deal of research has demonstrated that word of mouth affects choice, diffusion, and sales. Consumers are more likely to buy products their friends recommend (Leskovec, Adamic and Huberman, 2007), and doctors are more likely to prescribe prescription drugs that other doctors whom they know have prescribed previously (Iyengar, Van den Bult and Valente, 2011). Similarly, word of mouth and online reviews have been shown to foster the spread of information (Goldenberg, Libai and Muller, 2001), boost new customer acquisitions (Schmitt, Skiera, and Van den Bulte, 2011), and increase sales in various product categories (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Godes and Mayzlin, 2009). In his popular book on word-of-mouth marketing, for example, Sernovitz (2006, p. 6) argues that the most important way to generate word of mouth is to "be interesting" and that "nobody talks about boring companies, boring products, or boring ads."

## CONCLUSION

The researcher concludes by stating that positive public view of Coca Cola enhances the companies standing, while negative perceptions can undermine their reputation. Additionally, the role of media and word-of-mouth communication was found to be critical in shaping consumer opinion. This emphasises the need for Nigerian Bottling Company to engage effectively with both traditional and digital media, ensuring that the narrative around its brand remains positive and aligned with consumer expectations. This provides foundation for Nigerian Bottling Company to develop strategies that strengthen consumer loyalty and enhance its market position.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing from the conclusion above the following recommendations are here put forward:

1. The companies should adopt an inclusive marketing strategy that acknowledges the diverse ethnic and political dynamics in Rivers State. By developing campaigns that resonate with various ethnic groups and promoting values of unity and diversity through its corporate social responsibility programme.
2. The companies should implement a consumer feedback mechanism that tracks real-time perception of both the company and its products.
3. Nigerian Bottling Company should strengthen their presence through active engagement with media relations officers to ensure consistent and positive coverage of their brand.

### Ethical Clearance

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from all participants involved in this study. They were fully informed that the research was conducted solely for academic purposes and that their participation was entirely voluntary. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured throughout the research process.

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### Conflict of Interest

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

**Authors 'Contributions**
Tamunoiselegha May Aso conceived and designed the study. Prof. Richard Nlemanya Amadi provided overall academic supervision and conceptual guidance. Prof. Nsereka Barigbon Gbara contributed to data collation and theoretical refinement. Dr. Harcourt Whyte Dike led the data analysis, interpretation, and manuscript review. All authors critically reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and are responsible for its content, including the similarity index.

**Availability of Data and Materials**
The datasets supporting the conclusions of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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