



Newspaper Campaigns on Family Planning and Behavioural Change in Plateau State: A Systemic Review

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ABSTRACT

Background:

Family planning is a crucial aspect of reproductive health, and newspaper campaigns have been used as a strategy to promote family planning and behavioural change in Plateau State, Nigeria. Despite efforts to increase access to family planning services, uptake remains low, with a contraceptive prevalence rate of 8% in Plateau State (NDHS, 2018). Newspaper campaigns have been shown to be effective in influencing health behaviours, but there remains a gap in knowledge of the impact newspaper campaigns on family planning and behaviour change in Plateau State, Nigeria.

Objective: This study investigated the level of citizens' awareness of family planning through newspaper coverage in Plateau State, Nigeria.

Method: The study is a qualitative study that integrated literature and systematic review methods whereby, scholarly works on the subject matter were reviewed to draw inferences for the study under investigation.

Result: The study found that; exposure to family planning messages in the media was associated with a 10-20% increase in contraceptive use in developing countries; that about 45% of articles framed family planning positively with disparities in family planning coverage between newspapers in different regions of Plateau State, Nigeria; that family planning issues received limited coverage in Plateau State, Nigerian newspapers due to cultural and religious barriers accounting for less than 5% of health-related articles and that while family planning was occasionally covered, the depth and quality of coverage were often inadequate.

Conclusion: It concludes that family planning campaigns in Plateau State, Nigeria is being hindered by cultural and religious barriers otherwise, the newspaper as a medium of communication could have been effective in family planning campaigns in Plateau State.

Unique contribution: The study brought about the knowledge that family planning is not only a social issue but a critical aspect of public health (maternal/infant health) too. Secondly, scholarly related article (empirical studies) received less than 5% publication on family planning issue as a result of cultural and religious barriers.

Key Recommendation: the study recommends that Newspapers needed to give more prominence to the coverage of family planning campaigns in Plateau State, Nigeria.

Key Words: Newspaper, Coverage, Print Media, Behavioural Change, and Family Planning



INTRODUCTION

Family planning is a pressing concern in Nigeria, particularly in Plateau State, where the population is growing at an alarming rate. With a population of over 220 million people, Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation, and Plateau State is one of its most populous states. The state's rapid population growth has severe socioeconomic and environmental implications, exacerbating issues like poverty, unemployment, and strain on resources. Despite the importance of family planning, the uptake of modern contraceptive methods remains low in Plateau State, with only 12% of married women using them. This low adoption rate contributes to the state's high total fertility rate of 5.3 children per woman, significantly above the replacement level of 2.1.

The consequences of inadequate family planning are dire, with Nigeria accounting for approximately 20% of global maternal deaths. Behavioural change campaigns, often disseminated through mass media including newspapers, play a crucial role in addressing these issues by increasing awareness and promoting the adoption of family planning methods. However, the effectiveness of these campaigns and their coverage in newspapers remain understudied.

There is no doubt that behaviour change communication is instrumental to the transformation of the society towards bringing about change in the lifestyle of people. Development communication centers around the use of communication (mass media) as a veritable tool for development campaigns thereby bringing about attitudinal change to suit a development goal in the society. Likewise, development communication is a potent tool used for behaviour change campaign to help people learn, relearn and unlearn certain attitudes, (Ohiri 2024). This is more relevant in a multi-ethnic and multi religious society like Plateau State, Nigeria where various social and behaviour campaigns are met with stiff resistance on either ethnic or religious backgrounds. In most cases, the mass media are deployed to develop strategic campaign messages in a way that will appeal to the targeted audience and bring about the needed change, (Nancy & Dongre, 2021; Ohiri, 2024).

Plateau State, Nigeria is a complex society comprising of over 250 ethnic groups with more than 3 different religious groups among other socio-cultural diversities that abound in the society. According to ethnologies experts, like Lewis *et al*, (2015), they observed that the number of living languages spoken in Plateau State, Nigeria amounts to 526, of which 520 is classified as indigenous living languages. These cultures have over time become integral part of life and essentially define the belief system and behaviour of the people and their approach to life generally. Culture forms the basis of how people think, the way they greet their new born and bury their dead, what they eat, how they dress among others (Idang, 2015). The way to understand a people is to understand their culture. It is, therefore, essential to consider cultural factors when communicating health innovations within a society. Accordingly, Leffler (2015) argued that ignoring or downplaying cultural elements in health



communication efforts may lead to strong public resistance, mistrust in the programmes, and a lack of participation from the intended audience.

To a great extent, the success or failure of every health campaign in a multicultural setting like Plateau State, Nigeria lies in the approach and utilisation of existing cultural platforms (Shem & Asicus, 2023). Several health campaigns that were unsuccessful in some parts of Plateau State, Nigeria due to certain cultural barriers eventually became successful when behaviour change communication and use of cultural platforms like traditional rulers, religious leaders and celebrities known by the people were utilised. This clearly demonstrates the indispensable role of the strategic nature of such communication which takes into cognizance culture and diversity consideration in a multicultural society. Any communication approach that disregards the cultural beliefs and traditional institutions of a people is often perceived as an attempt to impose foreign values on them (Onwe, et al. 2017). Additionally, many Plateau State, Nigerian cultures are inherently conservative and slow to embrace new ideas, which explain the resistance to change and to campaigns that challenge established norms (Shem & Asicus, 2023).

It is therefore, imperative for various media of communication to be harnessed for behaviour change communication most particularly the traditional forms which still enjoy popularity among the populace owing to the level of credibility they have earned over time. This study focuses on newspaper reportage of behaviour change communication in the implementation of family planning in Plateau State, Nigeria. The various print media are known to play significant roles in every society. The print media just like the electronic media also play complementary roles in keeping the people informed, educated and entertained, among other functions (Parveen, 2018). Sambe (2015), identifies the unique features of the newspaper as the portability and reviewability of news items on the print media in circulation. The reviewability is the ability of news items or information of the print media to be read and reread at convenience (Sambe, 2015).

Similarly, Adeyemo and Obaje (2020) averred that newspaper is an infallible, commendable and dependable veritable mass media tool of disseminating information to the general public which can influencing specific actions. Newspapers coverage does not just give the public expedient report on issues and developments that are of public concern, but they adequately give detailed and oriented account on the issue. Existing knowledge provides that the conventional functions of the newspapers are aimed at collectively building an ideal society, free and healthy enough to foster a true democracy and thus serve as a means for information, socialization, cultural promotion and or entertainment (Amodu, Usaini & Ige, 2014; Noble, 2018; Nwafor, & Nwabuzor, 2021; Pickard 2020).

Michael (2018) believes that the print media are obliged to provide the citizenry with information and discussion on important societal issues as a social responsibility function. This function places a demand on newspapers to cover, analyze and report significant developments within and outside a given society (Michael 2018). Plateau State, Nigerian



newspapers over the years have given wide coverage to the developments in the health sector which include but not limited to outbreak of diseases like Ebola virus, Covid-19 pandemic, Zika virus, bird flu and the curbing of population explosion through family planning (Chinedu-Okeke et al, 2021). The newspapers in Plateau State, Nigeria have created awareness and information flow in building public attention on how population surge can be controlled in Plateau State, Nigeria to avoid the menace of overpopulation which has several attendant effects. The newspapers in performing the agenda-setting function of the mass media have discouraged the members of the public from giving birth to more than four children during one of the family planning campaigns launched years ago (Sarah & Bradley 2021).

The key problem of this study is on the knowledge that Plateau State, Nigeria is the Africa's most populous nation, thereby faces significant challenges due to rapid population growth and inadequate family planning measures. With a population of approximately 220 million in 2020 and a growth rate of 2.6% annually (United Nations, 2020; NBS, 2022). Again, National Bureau of Statistics reported that Plateau State, Nigeria has over 33% poverty and over 20 million out of school children (NBS, 2022). According to Adebowale et al., (2019) Plateau State, Nigeria is projected to become the world's third-most populous country by 2050. This explosive growth poses severe socioeconomic and environmental challenges, exacerbating issues such as poverty, unemployment, and strain on infrastructure and resources. Despite the urgent need for effective family planning, the uptake of modern contraceptive methods remains low. The Plateau State, Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) of 2018 reported that only 12% of married women use modern contraceptive methods, far below the global average of 57% (National Population Commission & ICF, 2019). This low adoption rate contributes to Plateau State, Nigeria's high total fertility rate of 5.3 children per woman, significantly above the replacement level of 2.1 (World Bank, 2019).

The consequences of inadequate family planning are severe. Plateau State, Nigeria accounts for approximately 20% of global maternal deaths, with a maternal mortality ratio of 512 deaths per 100,000 live births (WHO et al., 2019). Additionally, the country faces a critical challenge with unwanted pregnancies, with an estimated 44% of all pregnancies being unintended (Guttmacher Institute, 2020). Behavioral change campaigns, often disseminated through mass media including newspapers, play a crucial role in addressing these issues by increasing awareness and promoting the adoption of family planning methods (Ajaero et al., 2016). However, the effectiveness of these campaigns and their coverage in Plateau State, Nigerian newspapers remain understudied. Again, the focus of previous scholars such as Ajaero et al., (2016); World Bank, (2019); WHO et al., (2019); Akinwalere, (2019); Guttmacher Institute (2020) and Zandam, Mitra & Mitra (2022) were generic and none was specific on the situation of Plateau State, Plateau State, Nigeria.

This research aims to analyze how Plateau State, Nigerian newspapers cover behavioral change campaigns related to family planning, examining the frequency, framing, and depth



of such coverage. Understanding media representation of these crucial campaigns is essential for evaluating their potential impact on public awareness and attitudes towards family planning in Plateau State, Plateau State, Nigeria. Hence, the need to investigate newspaper coverage of family planning campaign especially where newspapers is a key information source that play a vital role in shaping public perceptions. This informed the basis for carrying out this research to ascertain if these campaigns are effective, and or has resulted to a change in people's behaviour in Plateau state.

OBJECTIVES

1. The general objective of the study is to determine the level of citizens awareness of family planning through Newspaper coverage in Plateau State.
2. To ascertain the effectiveness of the family planning campaigns based on the framing patterns of the coverage.
3. To investigate the challenge hindering newspaper campaigns on family planning from resulted to behavioural change in Plateau State.
4. To examine the depth and quality of newspaper coverage on family planning in Plateau State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Family Planning Campaigns and Behaviour Change in Plateau State, Nigeria

Family planning campaigns in Plateau State have intensified in recent years, focusing on expanding access to modern contraceptives and reshaping reproductive health behaviours through community-based and facility-based interventions. Programmes implemented by the Association for Reproductive and Family Health (ARFH), including community mobilisation and the scale-up of DMPA-SC self-injection, have contributed to a measurable increase in contraceptive uptake. Recent programme data indicate that the modern contraceptive prevalence rate (mCPR) among women of reproductive age in Plateau State increased from 21.7% to about 26%, signalling gradual but positive behaviour change toward planned childbearing and birth spacing (Association for Reproductive and Family Health [ARFH], 2025). Although this progress is noteworthy, broader empirical evidence shows that only about 23% of married women use any family planning method, with approximately 21% relying on modern methods, suggesting that behavioural shifts remain uneven and constrained by social norms and access challenges (Bamiwuye et al., 2017).

A persistent gap between awareness and utilisation further illustrates the complexity of behaviour change in Plateau State. Studies conducted in Jos North Local Government Area report very high awareness of family planning methods among men (93.1%), yet actual utilisation with partners remains considerably lower at 42.3%, reflecting the influence of gender dynamics, misconceptions, and spousal negotiation on contraceptive behaviour (Ibrahim et al., 2023). Among women, unmet need for family planning remains substantial, with local studies estimating that over half (56%) of women of reproductive age desire to



delay or limit childbirth but are not using any contraceptive method (Pam et al., 2018). These statistics suggest that while campaigns have succeeded in increasing knowledge, sustained behaviour change requires deeper engagement with cultural beliefs, fear of side effects, and male partner support.

In response to these barriers, recent family planning campaigns in Plateau State increasingly combine behaviour change communication with service delivery strengthening and policy advocacy. ARFH-supported initiatives have focused on training health educators, engaging community and religious leaders, and improving provider capacity to offer client-centred counselling, all aimed at translating awareness into consistent contraceptive use (ARFH, 2024). These integrated strategies align with national reproductive health goals and have begun to normalise conversations around birth spacing and voluntary contraception at the community level. While long-term behavioural outcomes are still evolving, the observed rise in contraceptive prevalence and reduced resistance to modern methods suggests that family planning campaigns are gradually reshaping reproductive health behaviours in Plateau State, though sustained investment and culturally sensitive messaging remain essential.

Behavioural change campaign

Behaviour change communication involves the deliberate use of communication strategies to influence and encourage shifts in knowledge, attitudes, social norms, beliefs, and behaviours. The terms Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) and Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) are often used interchangeably, as both describe the structured coordination of messages and activities delivered through various channels to engage multiple layers of society ranging from individuals and communities to service providers and policymakers (Nancy & Dongre, 2021). SBCC is rooted in theoretical frameworks and guided by empirical evidence. Programmes are typically developed based on available data and follow a systematic approach that includes problem analysis to identify barriers and motivating factors for change, followed by the creation of a set of well-targeted interventions aimed at encouraging specific behaviour patterns. The SBCC strategy serves as the guiding framework for these interventions. It outlines the target audiences, defines the behavioural communication goals, and ensures the alignment of key messages, materials, and activities across different communication platforms (Ezike, et al., 2016; Dixon, 2018).

In the Plateau State, Nigeria nation, as it is in other parts of the world, the behavioural change theories have offered a helpful foundation for the numerous health programmes. In the process of accepting or adopting a new behaviour, people go through a number of stages, including exposure, attention, attraction to the message, comprehension, knowledge, positive attitudes, retention, motivation, decision-making, and skill acquisition related to the new idea. According to John Hopkins University Report, (2000) the new behaviour needs to be reinforced and solidified when it was determined (JHU Report, 2000, p.47-49).

It is also widely accepted that the mass media are indispensable to mobilize people wherever there is need to change people's knowledge, attitude and/or behaviour. Schramm (2000,



p.133) as cited in Durkin (2017) says concerning the mass media imperative in this context: an efficient use of mass media for economic and social development implies that they should be as local possible. Their programmes should be prepared by people who are familiar with the culture they are speaking to, and they should come from their audience no farther than is necessary. Additionally, there should be ways for the audience to report back to the media. The Sun newspaper exhibited consistent leadership in promoting activities in health and population/family planning (Brennan, 2019). The above is essentially the main lesson concerning the place of the mass media in behavioural change communication. In other words, localized media planning, programming, message substance, and presentation are the most effective ways to influence behaviour. In order to be used successfully, the mass media should not be viewed as merely a tool of the government that is employed to communicate in a one-way fashion from the top of the social hierarchy to the masses at the bottom.

Instead, they should be primarily involved in democratic engagement, production and distribution of ideas within society. Have access and be involved in the communication process not just via human connections but also through media programming and presentation are crucial. According to (Ogbuoshi, 2020), the ability and willingness of the mass media to provide access to the media and to encourage people to physically participate in the behavioural change communication process are crucial factors in the success of this mode of communication. Additionally, Dennis McQuail's democratic-participation media theory supports this viewpoint. According to democratic-participation philosophy, the media should directly promote cultural pluralism. Media are to be used to stimulate and empower pluralistic groups, (Ogbuoshi, 2020). This is one of the most important lessons to be learned from Plateau State, Nigeria's family planning and other health campaigns. All of these campaigns have involved the people, the local people, in the management and implementation of the media initiatives. For instance, in 1992, when the Planned Parenthood Federation of Plateau State, Nigeria launched a family planning campaign, it employed a series of public service announcements to encourage couples to visit family planning clinics. The organization also selected and negotiated contracts with 17 radio and 18 television stations nationwide for over 8,000 broadcasts, as well as local project officers and other stakeholders like religious bodies, local chiefs, grassroots associations, and local entertainers and artists (Piotrow et al, 1997, p.121 in Shem & Asicus, 2023).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The agenda-setting theory of the press as posited by McCombs and Shaw (1972), cited in Okoro et al. (2013), contend that the mass media do not tell us what to think but what to think about. The proponents of this theory argue that the amount of attention accorded to an issue in the media communication affects the level of importance assigned to that issue by the mass media audience. Agenda-setting theory helps in the understanding of the effects of mass media content on the audience. The theory explains the effect of the media on culture and societal development process. It describes the powerful influence which the mass media



communication can have in determining not only the issues that members of the society talk about, but also how they talk about them (Udeze & Okechukwu, 2013).

In the context of this study, the theory described above, aimed at setting agenda for public discuss and performing their social responsibility role by acting as watchdog over the environment. In this light, by reporting the issues that concerns Plateau State, Nigerians on controlling population surge through family planning, the press in Plateau State, Nigeria is largely setting the agenda for the public and determining the kind of message that will go to the reach of the public and the one that must not. Thus, the theory is suitable for this study because it helps to corroborate the understanding of the main idea of the study which is to assess the media coverage of issues on family of Plateau State, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted integrated literature and systematic review methods whereby scholarly works on the subject matter were reviewed to draw inferences for the study under investigation. According to Christmal and Gross (2017, p.7), an integrative literature review method is a non-experimental approach where researchers objectively evaluate, summarize, and draw conclusions about a subject matter through a methodical search, categorization, and thematic analysis of previous qualitative and quantitative research studies on the topic under investigation. The integrative review approach simply brings together earlier empirical or theoretical studies to provide a more in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon. Integrative reviews, thus, have the potential to build a well-informed research, practice, and policy initiatives. Well-done integrative reviews present the state of the science, contribute to theory development, and have direct applicability to practice and policy. Integrative review is appropriate for this research because it provides a comprehensive understanding on the subject of newspaper coverage of family planning in Plateau State, Nigeria. Based on the reviewed studies, the researchers drew inferences on Plateau State, Nigeria's newspaper coverage of the family planning campaign.

DISCUSSION

Family planning remains a critical issue in Plateau State, Nigeria, and newspapers have played a mixed role in shaping awareness and practice. Studies show that while awareness is generally high, actual utilization of contraceptives lags behind. For instance, Olubodun, Balogun, and Ogunsilu (2020) found that over 70% of rural women in Ogun State were aware of family planning, yet less than half (35%) had ever used it. Pills and injectables were the most common methods, but barriers such as lack of spousal support, fear of side effects, and desire for more children limited uptake. Age and occupation also influenced usage, with women aged 31-40 more likely to adopt family planning than younger women, while farmers were less likely than traders. This highlights the gap between awareness and practice.

Similarly, Anate et al. (2021) reported that although all postpartum women surveyed were aware of contraceptives, only about 12% had strong knowledge, and less than 40% used modern methods. Implants and condoms were most popular, with predictors of use including



good knowledge and the intention to stop childbearing. Again, awareness did not translate into consistent practice, underscoring the need for targeted education and advocacy.

Media coverage plays a crucial role in bridging this gap. The Population Reference Bureau (2015) noted that exposure to family planning messages in developing countries increased contraceptive use by 10–20%, though Plateau State, Nigeria-specific data was limited. Plateau State, Nigerian studies, however, reveal shortcomings: Okenwa et al. (2011) found family planning accounted for less than 5% of health-related newspaper articles, while Adekoya and Adeoti (2017) observed that only 30% of such articles were comprehensive. Salawu et al. (2019) showed mixed framing 45% positive, 30% neutral, and 25% negative while Omoera (2018) highlighted regional disparities, with southern newspapers covering family planning 1.5 times more than northern ones. Exposure to mass media messages, according to Ajaero et al. (2016), was linked to higher contraceptive use, especially among southern and socioeconomically advantaged groups.

The choice of medium is also significant. Newspapers and posters provide permanence; radio offers wide rural reach and overcomes illiteracy barriers, while television combines sound and visuals but remains urban-centered. Campaigns often follow stages mobilization, confirmation, implementation, and consolidation with mass media most effective in the early stages, while interpersonal communication, drama, and community engagement become vital later. This multi-media approach has proven successful in other health campaigns, such as polio and HIV/AIDS, and even smaller initiatives like Bauchi State's 1993 mother-care campaign, which combined posters, rallies, radio dramas, and training for health workers.

Recent studies emphasize the importance of framing. Salaudeen (2022) found that Plateau State, Nigerian online newspapers often used duty and solution frames, encouraging action but offering limited practical guidance. This suggests that while newspapers can set the agenda, they must improve both the frequency and quality of coverage, particularly in northern Plateau State, Nigeria where cultural and religious barriers remain strong. Integrating newspapers with other communication channels; blogs, traditional institutions, youth seminars could enhance acceptance and practice.

RESULT

1. That exposure to family planning messages in the media was associated with a 10-20% increase in contraceptive use in developing countries.
2. That about 45% of articles framed family planning positively with disparities in family planning coverage between newspapers in different regions of Plateau State, Nigeria
3. That family planning issues received limited coverage in Plateau State, Nigerian newspapers due to cultural and religious barriers accounting for less than 5% of health-related articles.
4. That while family planning was occasionally covered, the depth and quality of coverage were often inadequate.



CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while Plateau State, Nigerian newspapers have contributed to awareness of family planning, their coverage remains limited, uneven, and sometimes poorly framed. To achieve meaningful behavioural change, campaigns must adopt integrated communication strategies that combine newspapers with radio, television, interpersonal contact, and community-based initiatives. Only through such synergy can family planning messages reach diverse audiences and help address Plateau State, Nigeria's pressing population and health challenges. The idea of "enter-educate," whereby the media use communication-entertainment to educate the audience, has been established in family planning campaigns. A recording of the juju singer Sunny Ade and Onyeka Onwenu's song "Choices" was even utilized in Plateau State, Nigeria as part of a family planning campaign to successfully promote the use of contraceptives and other similar devices for child spacing and family planning.

Lastly, there are compelling arguments for giving the media a significant role in communicating behavioural change. First, the public views the mainstream media as a significant source of novel ideas in many nations, according to survey results. Second, compared to other communication channels, popular media reach a far larger audience. Third, the use of mass media as advocates for health communication has been shown to be economical. Fourth, because they think the media represents public opinion, policymakers and community leaders are more likely to promote positive media coverage. Three approaches to working with the mass media are suggested in this regard: public relations, public information, and influencing entertainment programs.

RECOMMENDATION

- i. Federal and State Ministry of Health need to give more prominence to the coverage and reportage of family planning campaigns in Plateau State, Nigeria.
- ii. Plateau State Ministry of Health should circulate the outcomes of family planning campaign reported by newspapers on Plateau State metropolis to other parts of the states as well as the entire northern region where there is lower coverage.
- iii. All stakeholders like the traditional rulers, religious leaders and or celebrities identified by the targeted population to communicate behaviour change campaign on family planning should be integrated to soften the reception of the message as well as obliterate tendencies of resistance.
- iv. More family planning campaigns should be launched by the federal government in collaboration with state governments to re-enforce the quality of message delivery.



Ethical Clearance

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the National Institute ethical committee. The purpose of this paper is to review political communication in Plateau State, Nigeria, identify its role, weakness, effectiveness and how it can be strengthened.

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This paper was not funded by any outsider by the authors.

Conflict of Interest

There was no conflict of interest as 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.

Author's Contribution

Dr. Samuel Atuluku conceived the idea and drafted the initial manuscript, Dr. Abdulahi Adamu a review of related literature while Dr. Eze, Uchenna Hyginus worked on the method and discussion. All the authors jointly proof read the final manuscript.

Availability of data and materials

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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