

## Word of Mouth Communication and Women's Perception of Family Planning in Akwa Ibom State

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### ABSTRACT

This study was designed to examine the effect of word-of-mouth communication on women's perception of family planning methods in Akwa Ibom State. To achieve the study's objectives, a survey research design was used. The population of the study comprised women of reproductive age and nursing mothers between the ages of 18 to 45 years currently using modern contraceptive methods and is approximately 2,964,000 according to Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (2024). Sample size of 400 respondents was determined using Taro Yemane formula, since the population was finite, and respondents were selected using convenience sampling technique. Data were collected through online Google form questionnaire and analyzed using tables and simple percentages. While hypotheses were tested using simple regression analysis with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 25). Findings revealed that referral, celebrity endorsement and source credibility all had positive and significant effect on women's perception of family planning methods. It was concluded that referral, celebrity endorsement and source credibility were positive and significant predictors of women's perception of family planning methods. It was therefore recommended amongst others that government and other stakeholders should ensure that information about family planning methods is communicated by highly credible and trusted sources, such as healthcare professionals and respected community leaders.

**Keywords:** *Word of Mouth Communication, Women's Perception, Family Planning Methods, Referral, Celebrity Endorsement, Source Credibility, Akwa Ibom State.*

### INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth in population is a major problem for many developing countries including Nigeria and Akwa Ibom State in particular. Reproductive health of women in rural areas is poor due to several factors namely negative perception of family planning, inadequate access to healthcare services and personal reasons. According to United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (UNDESA,2022), The proportion of women of reproductive age (aged 18-49 years) who have need for family planning services and satisfied with modern methods (SDG indicator 3.7.1) is 77 per cent globally, a 10-percentage point increase since 1990 (67 per cent). This progress occurred in spite of the fact that the number of women with a need for family planning has increased from 0.7 billion in 1990 to 1.1 billion today. Family planning allows people to attain their desired number of children, if any, and determine the spacing of

their children. It is achieved through use of contraceptive methods and the treatment of infertility (World Health Organization, WHO, 2024). Benefits of family planning includes protection of women's and children's health by reducing high-risk pregnancies, reduces the risk of unintended pregnancies among women living with and helps people to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health.

Etim, et al (2023) observed that individuals, Government, organization/companies such as service providers like health care services are using word of mouth communication in a bid to improve customer perception and patronage of their offerings. Dimensions of word of mouth communication under consideration include referral, celebrity endorsement and source credibility. It is considered to be one of the most powerful forces in the marketplace and especially valuable to service providers (Ferguso & Leiriao, 2017).

### **Statement of the Problem.**

Family planning methods and reproductive health of women have been a serious concern of Government, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and individuals, with various policies and strategies developed to promote it. But despite these interventions and policies its adoptions still remains low (WHO, 2024). Studies done on word of mouth communication and perception in many industries and countries around the world revealed that there is lack of clear evidence on their effectiveness. Hence, the need to carry out this study in order to investigate the effect of word-of-mouth communication dimensions (referral, celebrity endorsement and source credibility) on women's perception of family planning methods in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria\

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study was to investigate the effect of word of mouth communication on women's perception of family planning methods in Akwa Ibom State.

The specific objectives were to;

- i. investigate the effect of word-of-mouth referral on women's perception of family planning methods in Akwa Ibom State.
- ii. determine the effect of word-of-mouth celebrity endorsement on women's perception of family planning methods in Akwa Ibom State.
- iii. examine the effect of word-of-mouth source credibility on women's perception of family planning methods in Akwa Ibom State.

### **Hypotheses of the Study**

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested in the study

- Ho<sub>1</sub>: Word of mouth referral has no significant effect on women's perception of family planning methods in Akwa Ibom State.
- Ho<sub>2</sub>: Word of mouth celebrity endorsement has no significant effect on women's perception of family planning methods in Akwa Ibom State.
- Ho<sub>3</sub>: Word of mouth source credibility has no significant effect on women's perception of family planning methods in Akwa Ibom State.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This model was constructed to show the relationship between the independent variables (referral, celebrity endorsement and source credibility) and the dependent variable (women perception).

### **Concept of Word-of-Mouth Communication (WOM)**

Word-of-mouth communication (WOM) involves individuals or groups exchanging information about a specific organization, its products, or services. This exchange typically leads to either a positive recommendation for customers to patronize or a discouragement from patronizing the organization's products or services (James & Inyang ,2022). It is a marketing effort that is used to cause customer to talk about, promote, suggest, and sell such product to another customer (Fakhrudin & Yudianto, 2021). One of the advantages of WOM is the fact that personal or advertising messages originate as one-to-one

communications and can occasionally reach millions of customers within days. Dimensions of WOM includes referral, source credibility, and celebrity endorsement.

### **Referral**

Sánchez-Casado, et al., (2019) asserted that customer referral is when an existing customer recommends existing brands to their friends, family, colleagues, or peers to encourage patronage. It is any peer-to-peer communication about companies' products and services to influence peer members to patronise the companies.

Customer referral occurs mostly from a satisfied customer who has enjoyed a remarkable experience with a company's brand and is more likely to tell others about his/her experience about the products or services. In other words, when customers are dissatisfied with a firm's products or services, they tend to spread negative word-of-mouth communication to discourage their friends, family, colleagues and others from experiencing the same (Bulte, et al., 2018).

### **Celebrity Endorsement**

According to Freire, et al., (2018) in Awah, et al., (2024), a celebrity is any person who is influential and popular, admired and spoken much about by many people in a society. They can stir up consumers' desires, hopes and dreams. They can also serve as the personification of a brand creating bonds and establishing relationships with consumers.

Celebrity endorsement is a type of marketing campaign that involves celebrities from movie stars, entertainers, and athletes. Celebrity endorsements are now considered a unique feature of modern marketing (Sufian, 2021).

### **Source Credibility**

Hussin, et al. (2020) stated that source credibility refers to the veracity of the information. Society's assessment of credibility is based on various concepts such as objectivity, accuracy, dependability, and timeliness. Individuals seek information for various purposes, often to acquire control, achieve comfort, acquire new knowledge, and address and resolve issues.

Wertgen and Richter (2020) showed that the trustworthiness of source of information is frequently used to mean positive characteristics of a communicator that impact the recipient's approval of a message. Expertise determines a speaker's credibility based on their topic knowledge, whereas trustworthiness is linked to the source's reliability. If a customer receives a message from a highly trustworthy source, they will have a more favorable attitude compared to receiving a message from a less trustworthy source.

### **Customer (Women) Perception**

Customer perception is the customer's overall opinion, thought, awareness and feelings about a company and its product and service offered. It is the process by which a customer selects, organizes, and interprets information/stimuli inputs to create a meaningful picture of the brand or the product (Kibret, 2018).

Udonne and Eke, (2023) opined that perception is a process whereby individual selects, organizes as well as interprets sensations. The level of any individual's perception affects the way he interprets the world around him. In a simple term, perception refers to the awareness consumers have about a brand and their impressions or opinions about it.

### **Word of Mouth Communication and Women Perception of Family Planning Methods**

Family planning according to World Health Organization (WHO, 2024) allows people to have the desired number of children they can cater for and space them using modern contraceptive methods. Through the use of word-of-mouth communication today, individuals or groups are able to exchange information about a specific organization, its products, and services. This exchange usually leads to either a positive

recommendation for customers to patronize or negative consumption of the products or services based on their perceptions.

It was observed that an average woman in Nigeria does not believe in modern family planning methods. This is because the government, NGOs and individuals still have much role to play, since word of mouth communication is considered to be one of the most powerful forms of communications that can change women's perception about family planning methods especially in Akwa Ibom State.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Health Belief Model (Hochbaum, Rosenstock, & Kegels, 1950)**

This study was anchored on health belief model propounded Hochbaum, Rosenstock, & Kegels, (1950). The model emphasizes on health-related behaviours. It has many variables like perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefits, perceived barriers, cues to action, and self-efficacy. It is helpful in knowing why women may or may not choose to use family planning methods. Perceived susceptibility: Through personal stories shared by peers who experienced unintended pregnancies can make the risk seem more real and relatable. For example, a woman discussing how an unplanned pregnancy impacted her life can help others perceive their own susceptibility.

Perceived severity: Using influential community members, celebrities or healthcare providers can share information and stories about the health, economic, and social challenges of unintended pregnancies in community gatherings, women's groups, or through digital platforms where women communicate.

Perceived benefits: WOM referrals from peers who have used family planning methods successfully can show benefits such as health improvements during informal conversations.

**Perceived barriers:** These includes discussions done by trusted individuals can help identify and address common barriers such as myths, fears, side effects, and access issues. For instance, a peer educator can share how she overcame similar barriers and provide practical solutions, thus reducing perceived obstacles.

**Cues to action:** Cues to action can be brought back through reminders from peers, community leaders, and healthcare workers through discussions, reminders via WhatsApp groups, and other communication materials can lead to prompt action.

**Self-efficacy:** Having training sessions with women led by experienced users (source credibility) of family planning methods can boost confidence and change their perception on family planning methods.

#### **Empirical Review**

Awah, et al., (2024) did a study on celebrity endorsement and consumer buying behaviour of generation Y: A study of select betting businesses in Uyo Metropolis, Akwa Ibom State with the aim of determining the influence of celebrity endorsement on the buying behaviour of Generation Y consumers. Data were obtained using a survey of 288 respondents drawn from the customers of the betting firms who were within the generation Y age bracket and analyzed using the simple regression model (SRM), descriptive and inferential statistics, while hypotheses were tested with linear regression at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that celebrity endorsement had significant influence on generation Y consumer buying behaviour. It was therefore, recommended that managers of betting firms should promote effectively the use of celebrity with good public image amongst others.

Onobrakpeya and Otutuadum (2024) investigated on electronic word-of-mouth and customer purchase intention for hotel services in Delta State, Nigeria. The aim of the study was to examine the effect of electronic word-of-mouth on customer purchase intention for hotel services in Delta state. The study used the snowball sampling technique with sample size of 384 respondents determined using the Cochran formula. Data were collected using questionnaire and analysed with descriptive and inferential statistics Pearson correlation analysis and regression analysis were used for hypotheses testing. Findings showed source credibility has significant positive relationship with customer purchase intention for hotel services. The study concluded that electronic word-of-mouth has significant positive effect on customer purchase intention for

hotel services in Delta state. It was recommended amongst others that hotel managers should consistently check online review platforms for comments, respond swiftly and openly to any concerns presented by guests.

Etim, et al (2023) did a study on the effect of word-of-mouth communication on customer patronage behavior towards smartphones in Calabar, Cross River State. The specific factors examined were customer referral, celebrity endorsement, and social media. A cross-sectional survey research design was employed to gather primary data from 276 smartphone users, who responded to a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire. The collected data underwent analysis using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics, specifically multiple linear regression, conducted in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 23). The results indicated that customer referral, celebrity endorsement, and social media exerted significant positive influences on customer patronage behavior towards smartphones. Consequently, we suggest that smartphone marketers should implement incentive programs, capitalize on celebrity endorsements, and utilize social media platforms to attract new customers and foster positive recommendations for smartphone brands. From the limitations of this study, we proposed theoretical directions for future research.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The survey research method was adopted as a research design for the study. According to Akpan, et al (2022), this method also allows researchers to study people, and the entire situation directly.

### Population of the Study

The population for this study consisted of women of reproductive age and nursing mothers between the ages of 18-49 and is estimated at 2964000 according to Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (2024).

### Sample Size Determination

The sample size was calculated using the Taro Yamane (1975) statistical formula for sample size determination and was put at 400 respondents.

### Sampling Technique

The convenience sampling technique which is a non- probability sampling design was used to collect data from these 400 respondents. This sampling procedure was adopted because the researcher easily chooses people, he/she can reach and get in touch with.

### Methods of Data Collection

The online survey instrument (Google Forms) was used to collect. It was divided into two parts A and B. Part A focused on respondents' demographics data aimed at identifying respondents and their characteristics. While part B focused on the independent and dependent variables of the study. Thus, statements that measured these variables were made and the respondents given options to choose from an adjusted five-point Likert rating scale.

### Reliability of the Instrument

The research instrument was subjected to Cronbach Alpha reliability to test the level of reliability of the research instrument. The result was substantially high enough to justify the use of the research instrument as shown below.

**Table: 3.1: Cronbach Alpha Pre-test Result**

S/N	Variables	No of Items	Coefficient
1	Referral	3	0.734
2	Celerity endorsement	3	0.677
3	Source credibility	3	0.799

4 Perception 3 0.801

**Source: The Researcher’s Computation (2025).**

The resulting Cronbach coefficients for each item were 0.6 above, indicating the reliability, or internal consistency, of the tested items.

**Method of Data Analysis**

Based on the nature of data collected the statistical methods adopted for data analysis was regression analysis which was used for testing the hypotheses to ascertain the relationship that exists between the identified variables. The data were analyzed with the help of a statistical tool using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 25).

**DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION**

This section shows the analysis of data collected from 400 respondents, who were women of reproductive age including pregnant and nursing mothers in Akwa Ibom State. The aim was to examine the effect of three word of mouth communication variables, referral, celebrity endorsement and source credibility on women’s perception of family planning methods using multiple regression analysis to test the hypotheses.

**Table 4.1:** Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for the joined effect of referral, celebrity endorsement and source credibility on women’s perception of family planning in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

	B <sub>1</sub>	SE	B <sub>2</sub>	t-value	Significant (2 tailed)
Constant	0.727	0.243		2.989	0.003
Referral	0.712	0.037	0.715	19.318	0.000
Celebrity endorsement	0.057	0.033	0.072	1.708	0.089
Source credibility	0.177	0.025	0.228	6.945	0.000
Dependent Variable: Perception					
R =	0.951				
R <sup>2</sup> =	0.905				
Adjusted R-Square =	0.904				
Std. Error of estimate =	0.71936				
F-statistics =	716.742				
Probability (Significant p-value) =	0.000 <sup>b</sup>				

*\*significantly related at 5% (p<0.05). B<sub>1</sub>= unstandardized beta, B<sub>2</sub>= standardized beta, SE= standard error.*

**Source:** The Researcher’s Computation (2025).

Table 4.1 shows a regression coefficient of R<sup>2</sup>= 0.905, which indicates that the independent variables: referral, celebrity endorsement, and source credibility collectively explained approximately 91% of the variation in dependent variable; women’s perception of family planning. This means that referral, celebrity endorsement and source credibility, when collectively applied as word of mouth communication indicators were collectively accountable for 91% of the changes in women’s perception of family planning, while 9% of the changes in women’s perception could not be attributed to factors that can be accounted for.

Results on the table also indicates that the joint effect of the independent variables in the model and the dependent variable was very strong at R= 0.951. According to the coefficient of determination R<sup>2</sup>= 0.905 and the adjusted coefficient of determination; adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 0.904, the regression model of this study is said to have a very strong explanatory power of the dependent variable.

In addition, the F-ratio = 716.742 and p-value < 0.000 on the ANOVA suggest that the results of the

regression model could not have occurred by chance and that referral, celebrity endorsement and source credibility significantly predicted the changes in women's perception of family planning. The regression results show that all the three word of mouth communication indicators significantly affect women's perception of family planning methods. Referral (0.712, S.E = 0.037,  $t= 19.318$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ), Celebrity endorsement (0.057, S.E = 0.033,  $t= 1.708$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.089$ , and Source credibility (0.177, S.E = 0.025,  $t = 6.945$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ).

### Discussion of Findings

Findings of the study revealed a significant effect on the three dimensions of word of mouth communication (referral, celebrity endorsement and source credibility) and women's perception of family planning methods in Akwa Ibom state. However, the result of the first hypothesis shows that the calculated probability (Sig.) of 0.000 in table 4.1 was less than the  $p\text{-value}$  of 0.05, we concluded that there is a significant effect of referral on women's perception of family planning methods in Akwa Ibom State. This finding is consistent with the findings of Etim et al (2023) who revealed that customer referral exerted significant positive influences on women perception of family planning. It was revealed from the study that, women who scored high in referral are bound to have positive perception on family planning methods.

The result of the second hypothesis indicates that the calculated probability (Sig.) of 0.000 in table 4.1 was less than the  $p\text{-value}$  of 0.05, which states that there is a significant effect of celebrity endorsement on women's perception of family planning in Akwa Ibom State. This result is also in line with that of Awah et al (2024) who found out that celebrity with good public image will easily inspire trust and confidence as well as enhance their product and services acceptability including family planning methods.

The third hypothesis reveals that the calculated probability (Sig.) of 0.000 in table 4.1 was less than the  $p\text{-value}$  of 0.05, which denotes that there is a significant effect of source credibility on women's perception of family planning in Akwa Ibom State. This result is in line with that Onobrakpeya et al., (2024) who found that there is a significant positive relationship between source credibility and women's perception of family planning methods in Akwa Ibom State.

### Summary of the Findings

The study investigated the effect of word of mouth communication on women's perception of family planning methods in Akwa Ibom State. Data were collected from 400 respondents comprising of women of reproductive aged 18-49 years. The word of mouth communication (independent variables) examined were referral, celebrity endorsement and source credibility. Multiple regression analysis was used to analyze the data. The key findings are summarized as follows:

1. **Referral** had a statistically significant and positive effect on women's perception of family planning. This implies that women could refer their friends and families based on the positive experience they have using any of the family planning methods.
2. **Celebrity endorsement** significantly affect women's perception by way of endorsing influential figures in the community to spread the adoption of family planning methods.
3. **Source credibility** was found to be significantly related to women's perception of family planning methods, by relying and believing on trusted and credible sources.

### CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion of findings, the following conclusions were made:

- (1) There is a significant effect between referral and women's perception of family planning methods in Akwa Ibom State.
- (2) There is a significant effect between celebrity endorsement and women's perception of family planning methods in Akwa Ibom State.
- (3) There is a significant effect between source credibility and women's perception of family planning methods in Akwa Ibom State.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, the researchers made the following recommendations:

- i. Government and other stakeholders should establish or encourage local support groups among women where they can share their experiences and provide referrals about family planning methods.
- ii. Government and Non-governmental organizations should partner with well-known and respected female celebrities to endorse family planning methods through various media channels.
- iii. Stakeholders should ensure that information about family planning methods is communicated by highly credible and trusted sources, such as healthcare professionals and respected community leaders.

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