



PERCEPTION OF ANAMBRA STATE RESIDENTS TOWARD MEDIA CAMPAIGNS AGAINST THE CONSUMPTION OF UNCERTIFIED HERBAL MEDICINE

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ABSTRACT: *The study examined the perception of Anambra state residents toward media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine. The essence of the study was to determine the extent of exposure of the residents to media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine. Study adopted two theoretical frameworks, and a survey research method was used. The study found, among others, that a majority of the respondents were moderately exposed to media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine; radio was the medium through which most of the respondents accessed media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine. Further findings revealed that the media campaigns against consumption of uncertified herbal medicine among the residents have not been so effective. The study concluded that the media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine convey uncertainty, a grey area by Anambra state residents. Thus, the study recommended that media should actively shed light on the dangers of consuming uncertified herbal medicine, committing themselves to features, editorials, radio presentations, news programmes, call-in-programs, and documentaries, among others.*

KEYWORDS: Perception, Media, Campaigns, Uncertified, Herbal medicine.



INTRODUCTION

Herbal medicine is the use of plants to treat disease and enhance general health and well-being. Herbal medicine, also called botanical medicine or phytomedicine, refers to using plants seeds, berries, roots, leaves, bark, or flowers for medicinal purposes. Herbalism has a long tradition of use outside conventional medicine (Miranda, 2021). The provision of healthcare falls mainly into the orthodox and non-orthodox systems. The non-conventional healthcare system includes complementary medicine of which herbal medicine (HM) is an important component. HMs are defined as materials or preparations obtained from one or more plants, raw or processed parts containing substances with therapeutic characteristics and other benefits to human health. A large percentage of the world's population depends on HMs in both developing (80%) and developed countries (WHO, 2019).

The use of HM is pivotal to the practice of African traditional medicine (ATM), and it was the major medical system available to millions of people in urban and rural communities of Africa, until the advent of Europeans (Abdullahi, 2011 cited in Aina, Gautam & Simkhada, 2020). It is a non-conventional system of disease management that employs various processes of consultation with herbalists, priests, media and diverse traditional deities together with herbal use. Herbal therapy, an oldest kind of medicare known to humans, involves the use of entire plant or plant part, for the treatment of various debilitating diseases (Petrovska, 2012 cited in Saggar, Mir, Kumar, Chawla, Uppal, Shilpa & Kaur, 2022) or to support good health. Various herbal formulations are available that have been shown to alleviate the symptoms of a variety of ailments, ranging from depression to cold and flu. WHO (2019) has prescribed specific criteria for the evaluation of safety, potency and quality of herbal remedies.

Also, it was estimated that around 80% of people throughout the world are using herbal formulations as a primary healthcare system (Payyappallimana, 2010 cited in Saggar, Mir, Kumar, Chawla, Uppal, Shilpa & Kaur, 2022) and is tremendously increasing day-by-day, due to toxicity and adverse reactions associated with modern allopathic drugs, which has also led to a rapid rise in herbal drug manufacturers. Herbal products have gained wide acceptability as valuable agents like antimicrobial, antifertility, antidiabetic, antiarthritic, anti-aging, antidepressant, sedative, antispasmodic, antianxiety, anti-inflammatory, analgesic, vasodilatory, anti-HIV, hepatoprotective, treatment of cirrhosis, acne, asthma, menopause, impotence, gallstones, migraine, alzheimer's disease chronic fatigue, and memory enhancing activities (Atmakuri & Dathi, 2010 cited in Saggar, Mir, Kumar, Chawla, Uppal, Shilpa & Kaur, 2022). Natural herbs have been extensively used to treat and prevent various ailments since ancient times.

However, despite the reported widespread use of herbal medicines globally and their benefits, they are not completely without potential danger. The haphazard, irresponsible, or non-regulated use of several herbal medicines may put the health of their users at risk of toxicity. In Nigeria, the National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) is a regulatory body empowered to regulate and control the manufacture, importation, exportation, distribution, advertisement, sale, and use of food, drugs, cosmetics, chemicals, medical devices and packaged water. NAFDAC currently lists herbal medicines that are sold and marketed in Nigeria without giving them full registration because extensive toxicological studies have not been carried out on these products and safety is not guaranteed. While others have not been certified for consumption.



The Nigerian Government has established some anti-drug abuse agencies like the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) and the National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC). These agencies, coupled with the help of the National Orientation Agency (NOA), have embarked on various campaigns to minimize the rate of use of illicit drugs in Nigeria. NDLEA sponsored some campaigns on drug dangers, the aim of these campaigns are to minimize drug abuse and consumption of uncertified drugs (Ezeaka, Nwodu & Agbanu, 2024)

This has prompted media campaigns sensitizing Nigerians to the dangers of consuming such herbal medicine. Media campaigns are usually messages that cover and reach a large audience most frequently through television, radio, billboard, newspaper, magazine, and recently, through various social media platforms (Nelson, Ekhorugue & Asemah, 2021). The main purpose of any media campaign is to alter people's thoughts and actions (Ogbodu, Ogunyemi & Asemah, 2023). It can be seen as a set of activities aimed at achieving broader change in policies, behavior and attitude from an audience, which can be seen from three different categories: advocacy, enlightenment and persuasion in nature (Nwodu, Nsude, Emechebe & Ezeali, 2023).

The role of campaigns in moulding public opinions, habits, views, and attitudes toward an issue, place, or person can never be overemphasized. Many scholars have asserted, by various means, that campaigns are a series of organized actions for particular reasons. Keen observation of the world media environment will prove how campaigns have aided different disciplines in eliciting change in the minds of their target audience. In the political field, campaigns are used to attract votes in elections, the geographical sector it is used to inform and warn people about impending weather disasters and how to avail themselves of the consequences of the disasters.

Health sector is used to inform and educate people about outbreaks of diseases and how to treat and prevent them. The cases of Ebola virus, Lassa fever, COVID-19, and Cholera outbreak in Nigeria are typical examples. Therefore, this study examined the perception of Anambra state residents toward media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine.

The use of herbal medicine has become increasingly popular worldwide and it is often associated with self-administration. Consumption of some of these uncertified herbal medicines can lead to organ failure because of some toxic chemicals. The consumption is not illegal, provided they are certified by regulatory bodies, safe for human consumption, with the right source of materials. Despite several attempts by regulatory agencies in Nigeria to regulate and certify the sale of herbal medicines, there are still enormous cases of irregularities in the advertisement. In view of this, there are various media campaigns aimed at sensitizing and educating people to shun the purchase of uncertified herbal medicine. Scholars have looked into herbal medicine such as public awareness and attitude towards herbal medicine campaigns for the prevention and treatment of STDs in South-east Nigeria, and dynamics surrounding the regulation of herbal medicine in Nigeria and among other things. There is a literature gap in the area of perception of Anambra state residents towards media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine. This is the major knowledge gap the study attempts to fill. The objectives of the study are to determine the extent of exposure of Anambra residents to media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine; to ascertain the media channels through which respondents access the media campaigns; determine the level of effectiveness of the media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine; and to find out the level of satisfaction with the campaign among



Anambra state residents. The study is delimited to Anambra state residents. Literature was sourced from both secondary and primary sources.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was anchored on Social judgment theory. The theory was propounded by Carolyn Sherif, Muzafer Sherif, Roger Nebergall and Carl Hovland in 1961 (Asemah & Nwaoboli, 2022). The theory is premised on the idea that people have a range of opinions on any given subject, which can be categorised into three zones: the latitude of acceptance, the latitude of non-commitment and the latitude of rejection. The latitude of acceptance involves opinions that a person finds acceptable or agreeable, the latitude of non-commitment includes opinions that a person is indifferent towards and the latitude of rejection contains the opinions that one disagrees with or finds unacceptable (Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017 cited in Asemah & Nwaoboli, 2022). Simply put, Social Judgment theory seeks to explain how an audience processes messages (Asemah, 2019). Persuasive communication's main goal is to alter people's minds. SJT attempts to explain how likely a person is to change their opinion, the likely direction of that change, their tolerance for other people's opinions. The theory suggests that we are more likely to shift our attitudes towards messages that fall within our latitude of acceptance and non-commitment and away from those in our latitude of rejection (Asemah & Nwaoboli, 2022). The media play a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and they have been instrumental in highlighting the issue of consumption of uncertified herbal medicine. This theory is relevant to this study because it demonstrates how Anambra state residents perceived and judged the media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine.

Regulatory Frameworks Governing Herbal Medicine

In Nigeria, the regulation of herbal medicine is governed by various regulatory bodies, including the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), the Traditional Medicine Development Division (TMDD) of the Ministry of Health, and state-level agencies (Ojonugwa et al., 2021). These regulatory structures aim to oversee the manufacturing, importation, distribution, and sale of herbal products, ensuring compliance with safety, efficacy, and quality standards. Additionally, there are traditional medicine councils at both federal and state levels, which collaborate with traditional healers to promote regulation and standardization within the traditional medicine sector (Kasilo & Wambebe, 2021).

The existing regulatory frameworks in Nigeria have made significant strides in formalizing the herbal medicine sector and enhancing consumer protection (Odubo et al., 2023). They have helped to create awareness about the importance of quality control, good manufacturing practices, and product labeling. However, weaknesses persist, including inadequate enforcement of regulations, limited resources for monitoring and inspection, and challenges in coordinating efforts between regulatory agencies (Noah et al., 2021). Moreover, there is a lack of harmonization between national and state-level regulations, leading to inconsistencies in implementation and oversight.

Several gaps exist in the regulatory frameworks governing herbal medicine in Nigeria, with significant implications for public health and safety (Adebisi et al., 2022). These include the absence of standardized training and certification requirements for herbal practitioners, which can lead to variations in practice and quality of care. Additionally, there is a lack of



comprehensive data on the safety and efficacy of herbal remedies, making it difficult to assess their risks and benefits accurately (Faulkner et al., 2020). Furthermore, the proliferation of unregistered and unregulated herbal products in the market poses serious health risks to consumers, including contamination, adulteration, and drug interactions. Addressing these gaps requires concerted efforts to strengthen regulatory capacity, enhance collaboration between stakeholders, and promote evidence-based practices in the herbal medicine sector (Veziari et al., 2021).

The perception theory was also used; it was propounded in 1960 by Klapper (Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017). It is one of the limited effects theories that show how individuals perceive things differently as a result of their different cognitive structure of needs, perceptions, beliefs values, attitudes, skills etc. according to the theory, perception is the process by which individuals select, organize and interpret inputs to create a meaningful picture of the world.

The theory is subdivided into four categories which are:

Selective Exposure: This states that people selectively expose themselves to media messages based on reach of media, accessibility, age, cultural acceptability and taboos. The theory is within the practice of psychology, often used in media and communication research that historically refers to individuals' tendency to favour information which reinforces their pre-existing views while avoiding contradictory information. It has the notion that people cannot be affected by messages they do not expose themselves to and as such could curb information overload when they selectively expose themselves to certain information while avoiding others

Selective Perception: This predicts that people will only interpret messages to suit their pre-existing beliefs about the messages. This is often influenced by social relationships as each of us tends to decode communication messages in the light of our previous experiences and current moods, needs and memories. It is, therefore, the process by which individuals perceive what they want to in media messages while ignoring opposing viewpoints. It is a broad term to identify the behaviour all people exhibit to tend to see things based on their particular frame of reference, needs, moods and emotions (Asemah *et al.*, 2017).

Selective Retention: This is the ability of an individual to retain certain messages in mind while ignoring others. This is often influenced by several psychological factors such as choices, values, culture and emotions.

Selective Attention: People select which information to pay attention to at any given time. The messages that do not arrest the attention of the audiences will not have direct effect on them. This explains why advertisers use all kinds of gimmicks to catch and retain audiences' attention. These selective processes help us to select what information we consume, remember and interpret in personally important and idiosyncratic ways. Perception theory is dramatically opposed to the misconceived assumption of the magic bullet theory and has four related selective ideas of selective exposure, selective attention, selective perception and selective retention. Perception is understood as the process of obtaining knowledge through the senses; to receive impressions by means of bodily organs; and to take cognizance of the existence, character or identity of something by means of the senses, to see, hear or feel (Ngene, 2016).

In other words, perception requires exposure to stimuli, as well as a specific level of attention paid to the stimuli, before the stimuli are understood by the audience Ezinwa (2014) as cited in



Ezegwu, Obilichi, Agbasimelo and Omokhapue (2021). Baran (2004) cited in Asemah and Nwaoboli (2022) concurs with the process noting that it is the process by which people expose themselves to and retain only the messages that are consistent with their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs. This means that residents' perception of Awka residents toward media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine may be based on their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs.

Ezeh, and Cookey (2018) examined public awareness and attitude towards herbal medicine campaigns for the prevention and treatment of STDs in South-East Nigeria. The researchers employed the survey research design with questionnaire as an instrument for data collection. A sample size of 385 was drawn from the population comprising all the residents of Anambra, Ebonyi and Enugu states by means of the Australian Size Calculator of the National Statistical Service (NSS). Theories of agenda-setting and health belief models were used to back-up this study. The researchers found that the publics of South-Eastern Nigeria are aware of herbal medicine campaigns against STDs in Nigeria. Outdoor/word-of-mouth was considered the most dominant medium of herbal medicine campaigns, followed by radio, television, internet, billboard and newspaper. The attitude of the public towards the campaign was found to be more positive than negative, although certain factors like lack of herbal medicine regulation hampered the effectiveness of the campaigns.

Nwodu, Nsude, Emechebe and Ezeali (2023) examined Anambra state residents' attitudes towards radio campaign messages on compliance to covid-19 protocols, with the objectives includes: to determine the level of awareness of Anambra state residents to radio campaign messages of covid-19 protocols; to determine the extent radio campaigns influenced residents' compliance to use of face masks and to ascertain the level of influence of radio campaigns on residents' compliance to hand washing etiquette. The forms of delivering the campaigns considered were radio jingles, radio dramas, public service announcements, and sponsored health talks. The scholars used the survey research method. Four hundred (400) participants were surveyed across six (6) purposively selected local government areas in Anambra State

Itua and Bature (2024) delved into the intricate dynamics surrounding the regulation of herbal medicine in Nigeria, aiming to elucidate the challenges and opportunities inherent in balancing traditional practices with modern regulatory standards. Drawing from a multidisciplinary approach encompassing medical anthropology, public health, and legal studies, this research explores the historical roots of herbal medicine in Nigeria, tracing its evolution from indigenous healing practices to its current status within the broader healthcare system. It examined the cultural significance of traditional medicine, considering its role in local communities and its enduring relevance in addressing healthcare needs, particularly in underserved rural areas.

However, alongside the rich tapestry of traditional healing, concerns regarding safety, efficacy, and standardization have prompted calls for regulatory reforms to align herbal medicine practices with modern healthcare standards. The researchers also scrutinized the existing regulatory frameworks governing herbal medicine in Nigeria, analyzing the strengths, weaknesses, and gaps therein. It explores the tension between preserving traditional knowledge and ensuring consumer protection, highlighting the need for a nuanced approach that respects cultural heritage while safeguarding public health. Furthermore, the researchers assess the implications of regulatory interventions on various stakeholders, including herbal practitioners, consumers, and policymakers.



Sittie, Mohammad, Diamla, Bangcola, Manalundong, Alawiya, Sittie and Abolbashar (2023) investigated and explored the medicinal plants that are readily available in Masiu, Lanao del Sur, in the Philippines. The researchers adopted an in-depth interview method. The researchers discovered that in Masiu, Lanao del Sur, there was a lack of understanding of the species of traditional medicinal herbs. It was further revealed that use of medicinal plants demonstrates that traditional herbal treatments play an important part in the health care of the region's indigenous peoples. Traditional knowledge of medicinal plants in the area is rapidly fading since the younger generation is uninterested in learning about them and those who do know keep their knowledge to themselves. The researchers recommended that it is critical to implement conservation measures and conduct additional research on indigenous peoples' plant uses to make better use of our abundant natural resources.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study area was Anambra State. The choice of the area was based on its accessibility to researchers and proximity. Anambra state afforded the researchers opportunity to meet varieties of respondents from different ethnic backgrounds who assumed to follow media reports and events, especially the media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine. The study population is a subset of the target population from which the sample was selected. Therefore, the population of this study refers to all residents of Anambra state. The projected population of Anambra state in 2023 was 5,953,500; the sample size was 384 and was derived using Krejcie and Morgan's sample size formula. Anambra state has three senatorial districts; the researchers used a multi-stage sampling technique. One local government each was selected at random from each senatorial district and two communities from each local government making it a total of six communities in all were studied. 384 copies of the questionnaire were randomly distributed.

FINDINGS

Three hundred and eighty-four (384) copies of questionnaires were distributed to the respondents in Anambra state. Out of the 384 copies distributed, only 371 copies were retrieved and found useful. Thus, the presentation and analysis were based on the 371 copies.

Table 1 depicts the extent of exposure to media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine. The implication of the table is that a majority of the respondents were moderately exposed to the media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine.

Table 2 indicates that radio is the medium through which most respondents (39%) accessed media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine. Thus, radio is a strong medium in the reception of media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine.

Table 3 clearly shows that a majority of respondents 141 (47%) rated the level of effectiveness of the media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine as less effective and, 123 (33%) rated the campaign as not effective. This reveals that media campaigns against



the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine among the respondents have not been as effective. The data above indicated that a significant number of the respondents are not satisfied with the media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study investigated the perception of Anambra state residents toward media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine. Objective one posed to find out the extent of exposure of media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine. The data revealed that a majority of the respondents were moderately exposed to media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine. These findings align with Asemah's (2021) observation that the mass media are known to always set an agenda for the public to follow, this they do by raising salient issues, occurrences, and events, as they happen in society and bringing them into the public glare.

The objective two sought to ascertain the media channels through which the respondents access media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine. It was found that radio is the medium through which most respondents (39%) accessed media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine. Thus, radio is a strong medium in the reception of media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine. This finding also corroborates the positions of Asemah, Anum and Edegoh (2013) cited in Unosha (2023) where they state that radio is a tool for development as well as Asemah (2013) cited in Unosha (2023) states that everyone has access to the messages on Radio and television.

The objective three is to determine the level of effectiveness of the media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine. The data in the table clearly shows that a majority of respondents 141 (47%) rated the level of effectiveness of the media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine as less effective and, 123 (33%) rated the campaign as not effective. This showed that media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine among residents of Anambra state have not been as effective. While 29 (8%) respondents said it is very effective, 17 (5%) respondents said it is effective, although 61 (16%) respondents could not say anything on the matter. This finding corroborates the position of social judgement theory as applied in the study. Social Judgment theory seeks to explain how an audience processes a message (Asemah, 2019). Persuasive communication's main goal is to alter people's minds. SJT attempts to explain how likely a person is to change their opinion, the likely direction of that change, and their tolerance for other people's opinions. The theory suggests that we are more likely to shift our attitudes towards messages that fall within our latitude of acceptance and non-commitment and away from those in our latitude of rejection (Asemah & Nwaoboli, 2022).

Objective four was designed to find out the level of satisfaction with the campaign among respondents. The data in table 5 indicated that a significant number of the respondents are not satisfied with the media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine. This finding disagreed with that of Amah, Oladele and Asemah (2022) who noted the "Ember months" campaigns on motorists in Benin City had positively influenced the driving behaviour of the respondents. The finding tallies with the position of perception theory. The perception requires exposure to stimuli, as well as a specific level of attention paid to the stimuli, before the stimuli are understood by the audience Ezinwa (2014) as cited in Ezegwu, Obilichi,



Agbasimelo, and Omokhapue (2021). Baran (2004) cited in Asemah and Nwaoboli (2022) concurs with the process noting that it is the process by which people expose themselves to and retain only the messages that are consistent with their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs. This means that the perceptions of Anambra state residents toward media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine may be based on their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs.

CONCLUSION

Medicinal herbs have played an essential role in human health care systems all over the globe, not only in sick situations but also as a possible material for maintaining adequate health. Uncertified herbal medicine by regulatory agencies in Nigeria has continued to pose a health challenge to numerous users. The study concludes that a larger number of the respondents are moderately exposed to media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine and they accessed media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine through radio medium. Also, the media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine among Anambra state residents have not been as effective. From the analysis of the data, the conclusion from the study is that the media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine convey uncertainty, a grey area by Anambra state.

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APPENDIX

Tables

Table 1: Extent of exposure of Anambra state residents to media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine

Response	Frequency	Percentage
To a large extent	87	24
To some extent	120	32
Moderate	141	38
Not at all	23	6
Total	371	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 2: Channel/ Medium used in accessing media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Radio	144	39
Television	110	30
Newspaper/Magazine	51	14
Internet/social media	34	9
Others	23	6
None of the above	9	2
Total	371	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 3: Response on the level of effectiveness of the media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine among Anambra state residents

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very Effective	29	8
Effective	17	5
Can't tell	61	16
Less Effective	141	38
Not Effective	123	33
Total	371	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 4: Response on whether the respondents are satisfied with the media campaigns against the consumption of uncertified herbal medicine

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Highly Satisfied	41	11
Satisfied	30	8
Can't tell	50	14
Less satisfied	112	30
Not satisfied	138	37
Total	371	100