

Chapter 9

Media Campaign on Exclusive Breastfeeding: Awareness, Perception, and Acceptability Among Mothers in Anambra State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Research has proved that Exclusive Breastfeeding is vital in achieving optimal infant and child health, growth and development; and so there have been media campaigns in support of the initiative. This chapter explored the relationship between the media campaign for exclusive breastfeeding and mothers' decision to comply based on Symbolic Interactionism, Diffusion of Innovation, Social Responsibility, and Gate-keeping Theories. The questionnaire survey, conducted among 400 mothers in Anambra state, Nigeria, revealed that despite the enormous benefits of exclusive breastfeeding that have been well established and enormous campaign which has created tremendous awareness on the need to exclusively breastfeed babies, social structure of communities and social interaction within the community influence mother's perception and acceptability of the message. The study, therefore recommends that view of the opinion leaders and people with decision-making power should be sought after to know their stand on the issue of exclusive breastfeeding. Appropriate communication strategies should be developed to get their support for the idea since they are the custodians of the culture and have great influence on the people.

BACKGROUND

In recent years, there has been a serious campaign on 'Exclusive Breastfeeding' throughout the world, which has created a tremendous awareness on breastfeeding. Exclusive Breastfeeding (EBF) has been described "as providing infants with only "breast milk from the mother or a wet nurse, or expressed breast milk and no other liquids or solids with the exception of drops or syrups consisting of vitamins, mineral supplements, or medicines, from birth to six months (WHO, 2005). It differs from Predominant Breastfeeding (PBF), wherein breast milk constitutes infants' primary nutritional source, but infants also

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are given other liquids such as water, tea, juices, oral rehydration salt solutions, or ritual fluids (Labbok & Taylor 2008).

The government, in collaboration with some social welfare organizations like World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations International Children Education Fund (UNICEF), have been promoting the health of children and mothers through the promotion of appropriate breastfeeding practices and maintain that the ideal food for the young infant is the human breast milk. They emphasized that breast milk has a specific characteristic that matches the infant's nutritional requirements during the first year of life which is vital in achieving optimal infant and child health, growth and development. According to them, breast milk is not contaminated and contains protective substances that kill bacteria responsible for much infection in young babies. This means that it contains an anti-infective factor that prevents infections.

In Nigeria, there is some level of awareness of the importance of breastfeeding and the intention of mothers to breastfeed their babies up to a year is recorded (Agunbiade & Ogunleye 2012), but it is in the term "Exclusive" that the problem lies (Davies-Adetugbo 1997). Exclusive breastfeeding rates in Nigeria are amongst the lowest (13%) in the world (Agho, et al, 2011; Ogbobo, 2015). It compares poorly with other neighbouring countries in the region - Nigeria lags behind Ghana (53.4%), Republic of Benin (43.1%) and Cameroon (23.5%) (Agho, et al 2011).

This is because there are family members and physicians who do not support the practice and, some women feel that it is painful and unpracticable. Again, activities of baby milk companies who continued to advertise baby milk have continued to impede the advances made in exclusive breastfeeding education, while some mothers are constrained by their working conditions on day to day involvement with their infant (Warren, 2005), and spend less time with their babies, (Harris-Solomon, Holmlund & Youcha, 2008). If mothers deny their infants this sensitive opportunity, chances are that the infants will lack the basic nutrition, a situation that has a very severe consequence on the child's health and development.

A great need has, therefore, been created for planning and building articulated communication strategies to interpret issues and policies which will help in changing perceptions; and bring about positive development. Issues are shaped by the information made available to the people by the media to which they are exposed directly or indirectly to (Soroka, 2003). Reception of such information will help in understanding issues as they arise; and influence audiences' overall perception of them and further a better mutual understanding between individuals and groups within a society (Graber, 2004).

To realize this concern in Africa and Nigeria in particular, some welfare organizations like WHO and UNICEF and Nigerian government undertake communication activities as would help in spreading the news about the benefits of Exclusive and sustained breastfeeding among mothers. They have been organizing a series of seminars, workshops and media campaigns to educate mothers on the benefit of exclusively breastfeeding their babies. Some of the hospitals (government, private and mission) have been tagged 'baby-friendly' hospitals because of their commitment to the spreading of the good news. Health workers use interpersonal communication to advocate this. Radio and television media use commentaries and jingles; newspapers and magazines use features and articles and posters are placed at strategic places where people can easily see and read. All these are to enlighten mothers that 'exclusive breastfeeding is the best for a new baby.

This study, therefore, examines mothers' response to the campaigns for exclusive breastfeeding, factors that influence such responses and subsequently finding out the solution to the problem confronting both the sender and receiver in appropriate interpretation of development project.

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