

Frequency of Social Media Use and Health-Seeking Behaviour of Pregnant Women in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of participation in online pregnancy-related interactions on the health-seeking behaviour of pregnant women in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study examined how engagement in online pregnancy forums, social media platforms, maternal health discussion groups, and other digital support networks influences antenatal care utilization, healthcare decision-making, maternal health awareness, and overall health-seeking behaviour among pregnant women. Extant literature were reviewed in line with online pregnancy-related interactions. The study was anchored on the Health Belief Model, which explains health-related actions based on individuals' perceptions of susceptibility, severity, benefits, barriers, and cues to action. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The target population comprised pregnant women attending antenatal clinics in selected healthcare facilities within Calabar Metropolis. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to respondents selected through an appropriate sampling procedure. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviation, were used to analyze the data, while inferential statistical techniques were employed to test the study hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that participation in online pregnancy-related interactions significantly enhances maternal health awareness, promotes timely utilization of antenatal care services, improves knowledge of pregnancy danger signs, and positively influences healthcare-seeking decisions among pregnant women. The study concludes that online pregnancy-related interactions constitute an important source of maternal health information and support, contributing significantly to improved health-seeking behaviour among pregnant women in Calabar Metropolis. The study recommended amongst others that: Healthcare institutions, maternal health professionals, and public health agencies should intensify the dissemination of accurate maternal health information through social media platforms in order to positively influence pregnant women who frequently use social media for health-related purposes.

Keywords: Online pregnancy-related interactions, health-seeking behaviour, pregnant women, maternal health, antenatal care utilization, digital health communication, Calabar Metropolis

Introduction

In the contemporary digital age, social media has emerged as a transformative force in how people interact, communicate, and access information, including healthcare-related content. Social media utilization refers to the active, purposeful use of web-based platforms (such as Facebook, LinkedIn, TikTok, X, Instagram, YouTube, Whatsapp, etc.) to create, share and exchange information, content and ideas within virtual communities. It involves two-way, real-time communication for socialization, professional networking, education and content creation.

(Katharine, 2026). These platforms have become central to everyday life, offering users interactive spaces to share experiences, seek real-time advice, and consume vast amounts of multimedia content (Adeleye, 2020). Globally, the use of social media for health communication has been growing, particularly among women of reproductive age, who use these platforms to learn about fertility, pregnancy, childbirth, and child care. The widespread availability of smartphones and internet access has enabled billions of users to engage with social media in various ways, including health monitoring, teleconsultation, and peer support (Ventola, 2014; Ikpi, 2019).

Health-seeking behaviour refers to the decisions and actions undertaken by individuals to maintain, attain, or regain good health (Bakar & Rosbi, 2020). For pregnant women, this includes decisions to attend antenatal clinics, seek advice from trained professionals, adhere to medical prescriptions, and prepare adequately for delivery and postpartum care. The importance of health-seeking behaviour in pregnancy cannot be overemphasized as it is directly linked to maternal and neonatal outcomes (O'Donnell, 2007). Positive health-seeking behavior such as early registration for antenatal care, skilled birth attendance, and adherence to recommended practices, has been shown to reduce maternal and child mortality (Afolabi & Adesanya, 2022). Conversely, delayed or inappropriate health-seeking behaviour can lead to complications such as eclampsia, obstructed labour, and stillbirths, especially in resource-limited settings like Nigeria (WHO, 2023). Health-seeking behaviours can be proactive (planned clinic visits, inquiries from professionals) or reactive (emergency visits, self-medication based on symptoms). These behaviours are influenced by socio-economic factors, cultural beliefs, prior experiences, education, and increasingly, by digital media exposure.

The internet and social media provide alternative sources of health information, potentially complementing or substituting direct consultations with healthcare providers (O'Cathain et al., 2019). As such, digital engagement may play a critical role in shaping how, when, and where pregnant women seek care. Pregnant women increasingly use social media to access information on symptoms, medications, hospital options, dietary advice, delivery techniques, and postnatal care. These platforms also foster online communities where women share pregnancy journeys, ask questions, and receive feedback from peers or healthcare providers (Pate et al., 2021). In developed countries, mobile health (m-Health) interventions using social media and apps have been integrated into maternal health programs, improving access to timely information and support. However, in developing countries like Nigeria, where misinformation is prevalent and regulation is minimal, the effects of social media on maternal health outcomes remain ambiguous (Olaniran et al., 2021).

In Nigeria, particularly among urban populations, the adoption of social media for health-related purposes is becoming widespread. Platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook are used by pregnant women to join groups moderated by midwives, discuss birth plans, and share medical advice. Some even attend online antenatal sessions or follow influencers and health workers who post content on pregnancy-related matters (Ndukwe & Emeh, 2023). Yet, the quality and accuracy of such information remain inconsistent, and many women still rely on anecdotal content or unverified sources. Trust in digital information, frequency of use, diversity of platforms, and level of participation all influence whether online content translates into improved maternal health behaviours or worsens outcomes due to misinformation and delay in seeking clinical care (Abang & Nnadi, 2022).

In Calabar Metropolis, comprising Calabar South Local Government Area and Calabar Municipal Local Government Area, urbanization, increasing smartphone ownership, and youth

digital literacy have led to high rates of social media engagement among women. Despite the growing use of social media among pregnant women in Nigeria and Calabar Metropolis specifically, research remains limited in documenting the specific ways that social media affects maternal health-seeking behaviour. Most existing studies have focused on general digital health, youth behaviour, or social media and lifestyle changes. There is a significant gap in empirical data concerning how frequent pregnant women in urban Nigerian settings utilize different social media platforms, what level of trust they place in the information obtained, and whether this influences their decisions to seek timely and appropriate healthcare (Bassey & Ubi, 2022; Eyo & Inyang, 2023). This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring the extent to which the frequency of social media use influence health-seeking behaviour among pregnant women in Calabar Metropolis.

Statement of the problem

Social media platforms have emerged as alternative sources of health education, support, and consultation for expectant mothers, especially in countries where access to traditional health infrastructure is limited. Research in countries like India, the United States, and the United Kingdom shows that pregnant women often turn to Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and online forums to seek advice, share experiences, and validate symptoms (Lupton, 2016; Ahmed et al., 2019). In Nigeria, studies have also shown that maternal mortality remains the highest globally, with an estimated 512 deaths per 100,000 live births (NPC & ICF, 2019). Despite multiple intervention programmes, health-seeking behaviour remains suboptimal, especially in semi-urban and urbanizing areas. The penetration of social media in Nigeria, fueled by smartphone accessibility and internet affordability has significantly altered how women approach healthcare.

However, in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State, health infrastructure is relatively more developed than in many rural parts of Nigeria, yet many pregnant women still exhibit irregular antenatal visits and preference for home births or traditional alternatives. With rising internet and smartphone penetration, pregnant women in Calabar are increasingly utilizing platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp groups, and online pregnancy apps to guide their decisions. This raises questions about the role these platforms play in influencing timely antenatal bookings, selection of birth plans, and adherence to medical advice.

No known localized study has yet empirically measured the frequency of these digital interactions on the health-seeking behaviour of pregnant women in Calabar, creating a knowledge gap this study seeks to fill. Thus, the problem this study intends to expose is the need for a nuanced understanding of how frequent pregnant women in Calabar metropolis utilize social media for health-related decisions, whether such usage supports or undermines health-seeking behaviour. By shedding light on patterns of use, this study aims to guide stakeholders in developing better maternal health communication strategies through social media, while emphasizing the need for digital health literacy among expectant mothers in Cross River State.

Research Question

To what extent does the frequency of social media use influence the health-seeking behaviour of pregnant women in Calabar Metropolis?

Objectives of the study

The primary objective of this study was to examine the frequency of social media use and health-seeking behaviour of pregnant women in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State, Nigeria. The study will also identify the different types of social media platforms utilized by pregnant women for health-seeking.

Statement of Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were posed to guide this study.

1. There is no significant relationship between the frequency of social media use and the health-seeking behaviour of pregnant women in Calabar Metropolis.
2. There is a significant relationship between the frequency of social media use and the health-seeking behaviour of pregnant women in Calabar Metropolis.

Literature Review

The frequency of social media use is a crucial determinant in understanding its role in shaping health-seeking behaviours among pregnant women. Social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube have transformed into major sources of health information for millions of women globally. The constant accessibility of these platforms means that women can repeatedly interact with pregnancy-related information, peer experiences, and expert advice. Research indicates that individuals who access social media more frequently are more likely to use the information they encounter in making health-related decisions (Ventola, 2014). This has significant implications for maternal health because pregnancy is a period characterized by heightened information-seeking behavior (Chukwu & Agbo, 2022).

Social media use refers to the act of engaging with various social media platforms to create, share, and exchange content with others. This concept has become a defining feature of modern communication, significantly influencing how individuals connect, consume information, and interact with brands (Mass Media & Society, 2026). Globally, studies have shown that pregnant women who frequently use social media tend to rely heavily on the platforms for health information. For example, Lupton (2016) found that women in high-income countries often logged into pregnancy forums on Facebook, Twitter and X, or social media groups multiple times daily to obtain advice about symptoms, nutrition, and labour preparation. The more frequently these women engaged with digital communities, the more they reported relying on online guidance as a supplement to professional antenatal care. This reflects a trend where repetition and exposure to content drive behaviour modification in maternal health. However, health-seeking behaviour refers to the actions individuals take to maintain, restore, or improve health, including seeking professional care, adhering to treatments, and attending preventive health services (O'Donnell, 2007). Among pregnant women, health-seeking behaviour is particularly significant because it directly impacts maternal and neonatal outcomes. Frequent use of social media influences these behaviours by shaping awareness, beliefs, and attitudes toward antenatal care (Effiong & Bassey, 2023). For instance, exposure to posts encouraging early registration for antenatal care or reminders about clinic appointments can promote positive health-seeking actions (Bennett et al., 2018).

According to Zajonc's (2001) mere exposure effect, repeated exposure to a stimulus increases its acceptance and influence. Pregnant women who frequently encounter social media posts about maternal nutrition or antenatal care are therefore more likely to adopt such behaviours. Conversely, if misinformation is frequently consumed, it may normalize unsafe practices such as home births or herbal remedies over professional care (Swire-Thompson & Lazer, 2020). Thus, frequency of use amplifies both positive and negative influences. In many African

settings, frequent social media use by pregnant women is motivated by the need for real-time, peer-based reassurance. Oduyemi and Bolarinwa (2020) note that women often check platforms several times daily during pregnancy to confirm whether their symptoms are normal or require medical attention. This repetitive engagement creates a feedback loop that can either encourage timely clinic visits or delay professional consultation if peers dismiss symptoms as insignificant. Frequency, therefore, has a direct bearing on the urgency and appropriateness of health-seeking behaviour.

Within the Nigerian context, several empirical investigations have established a significant relationship between social media usage frequency and maternal healthcare behaviour. Olaniran et al. (2021), in a study conducted among pregnant women in Lagos State, discovered that women who spent more time accessing maternal health information through digital platforms were more likely to adopt positive healthcare-seeking behaviours. The study found that frequent users of social media were more knowledgeable about immunization schedules, antenatal appointments, and dietary recommendations during pregnancy. The researchers further reported that social media served as a complementary source of maternal health education alongside traditional healthcare services. Nonetheless, the study identified concerns regarding the circulation of inaccurate health information online, especially within informal pregnancy discussion groups where unverified advice was frequently shared. Nwagwu and Ajama (2011) argue that the more often individuals are exposed to online communities, the more likely they are to trust information shared in those spaces. For pregnant women in Calabar, daily engagement with WhatsApp or Facebook pregnancy groups may build trust in peer advice, sometimes at the expense of professional medical guidance. Trust built through frequency can therefore influence whether women adopt safe or unsafe health practices during pregnancy. Frequent social media use can further provide psychosocial benefits. Participation in digital communities offers emotional support and reduces feelings of isolation during pregnancy (Lupton, 2016). Women who log in regularly may feel empowered, better informed, and more connected, which can motivate them to pursue antenatal care more consistently. In Calabar, anecdotal evidence suggests that frequent use of WhatsApp support groups has encouraged women to share clinic experiences, thereby motivating others to attend (Eteng & Nkoyo, 2022). This illustrates the positive reinforcement that frequency can generate. On the other hand, excessive frequency can lead to information overload. Pregnant women who constantly browse social media may be overwhelmed by conflicting advice, which can increase anxiety and indecision (Swire-Thompson & Lazer, 2020).

In Calabar, traditional beliefs about pregnancy remain strong, but frequent exposure to digital stories of safe medical deliveries can help counter harmful cultural myths. Ekpenyong and Orok (2022) observe that, frequent WhatsApp use has gradually shifted some women away from reliance on traditional birth attendants. This illustrates how repetition through digital platforms can challenge entrenched norms and reshape maternal health behaviour. While evidence highlights both benefits and risks, few empirical studies in Nigeria have specifically examined the relationship between frequency of social media use and health-seeking behaviour among pregnant women. Empirical evidence from sub-Saharan Africa highlights the importance of frequency of social media use in shaping maternal health outcomes. For instance, Afolabi and Adesanya (2022) conducted a mixed-methods study in Lagos, Nigeria, to assess the influence of daily WhatsApp and Facebook use on antenatal care compliance. Their findings showed that women who accessed maternal health groups on social media at least once a day were more likely to attend four or more antenatal visits compared to those with infrequent or no exposure. Effiong and Bassey (2023) surveyed 300 pregnant women across government-owned health facilities in the metropolis and observed that women who reported frequent (daily) use of social

media for pregnancy-related information were significantly more likely to initiate antenatal care in the first trimester.

Most existing studies focus broadly on social media and health communication (Olaniran et al., 2021; Ezeah et al., 2020), leaving a research gap in understanding how frequent exposure specifically shapes maternal health decisions in local contexts like Calabar. This gap justifies the present study. Basically, frequency of social media use is a powerful variable that significantly influences pregnant women's health-seeking behaviour. Frequent engagement can enhance awareness, reinforce positive behaviours, and foster peer support. However, it can also normalize misinformation, cause information overload, and encourage substitution of online advice for professional care. The extent to which these dynamics play out among pregnant women in Calabar Metropolis remains insufficiently documented, underscoring the need for systematic research to provide context-specific insights. Empirical evidence from different parts of the world has consistently shown that the frequency with which pregnant women engage with social media platforms significantly affects their maternal healthcare behaviour and healthcare decision-making processes. A study conducted by Namey, et al., (2020) in the United States revealed that pregnant women who accessed social media several times daily demonstrated higher levels of maternal health awareness and were more likely to comply with antenatal healthcare recommendations than women who rarely used digital platforms. The researchers observed that frequent social media exposure increased women's access to information regarding prenatal nutrition, danger signs in pregnancy, childbirth preparation, breastfeeding practices, and infant care. Another empirical study conducted by Bassey and Ubi (2022) in Cross River State examined the influence of social media exposure on maternal healthcare awareness among women of reproductive age. The findings revealed that frequent social media use significantly increased women's awareness regarding modern maternal healthcare practices and encouraged timely healthcare-seeking during pregnancy complications.

Theoretical framework

Health Belief Model (HBM):

The Health Belief Model (HBM), first developed in the 1950s by Rosenstock and colleagues, is a psychological model that attempts to explain and predict health behaviours by focusing on individuals' attitudes and beliefs. It is based on the assumption that individuals will take health-related action if they believe that a negative health condition can be avoided, if they expect that taking the recommended action will avoid the negative condition, and if they believe that they can successfully take the recommended action (Rosenstock, 1974). This makes the model highly relevant in understanding how pregnant women in Calabar Metropolis utilize social media in their health-seeking behaviours. A central construct of the HBM is perceived susceptibility, which refers to an individual's assessment of their risk of contracting a condition. Pregnant women who perceive themselves as being vulnerable to complications such as pre-eclampsia, gestational diabetes, or miscarriage may be more motivated to actively seek health information. Social media platforms serve as readily available sources of knowledge, offering both professional and peer-shared information that reinforces their awareness of vulnerability (Carpenter, 2010). In Calabar, women may turn to WhatsApp forums or Facebook pages when they feel susceptible to pregnancy risks due to prior experiences, limited access to antenatal services, or heightened anxiety.

Pregnant women in Calabar may face barriers such as poor internet access, misinformation on digital platforms, distrust of online sources, or financial constraints in implementing recommended practices. The HBM posits that health behaviour occurs when perceived benefits

outweigh perceived barriers (Glanz et al., 2015). Therefore, the extent to which social media use influences health-seeking behaviour depends on the balance between credible benefits and real or perceived obstacles. The model also introduces cues to action, which are triggers that motivate people to take health-related steps. For pregnant women, cues can include reminders from antenatal clinic staff, alerts from health-focused mobile applications, or testimonials from online pregnancy groups. In Calabar, WhatsApp group messages that emphasize the importance of routine antenatal check-ups can serve as cues that propel women to visit health facilities (Janz & Becker, 1984). These cues illustrate how digital interactions directly activate health-seeking behaviours. Another construct within the HBM is self-efficacy, defined as confidence in one's ability to take necessary health actions. Pregnant women with high digital literacy who can effectively navigate social media platforms may feel more empowered to make health decisions. Conversely, those with low digital literacy may feel overwhelmed, reducing their confidence in implementing health knowledge obtained online (Bandura, 1997). Thus, self-efficacy moderates the link between social media use and health-seeking behaviours in the study population.

From a public health perspective, the HBM provides a framework for designing interventions that promote healthier behaviours. By emphasizing perceived susceptibility and benefits, health educators can tailor social media campaigns that resonate with pregnant women in Calabar. Interventions can also work to reduce barriers, such as misinformation or fear, while enhancing cues to action through digital reminders and success stories (Glanz et al., 2015). This highlights the utility of HBM in guiding social media-based maternal health interventions. Importantly, the HBM is dynamic rather than static, meaning perceptions can change over time. A woman may initially distrust online platforms but gradually shift towards increased reliance as she observes positive results in her peers. Conversely, exposure to misinformation or negative experiences can heighten barriers and reduce trust. The Health Belief Model provides a comprehensive theoretical basis for analyzing how pregnant women perceive risks, benefits, barriers, and motivations when engaging with social media for maternal health purposes. Its constructs allow for an in-depth exploration of the ways digital interactions shape health-seeking behaviours and inform policy and practice in maternal health.

Methodology

This study utilized a survey research design, which was considered appropriate for social science research focusing on human behaviour and social interactions. The survey research design allowed for the systematic collection of data from a sample of the population, with the aim of describing the nature, frequency, and patterns of social media utilization and how it affects health-seeking behaviour among pregnant women. Unlike experimental designs that manipulate variables, the survey design is more concerned with capturing the realities of respondents' experiences, perceptions, and practices as they occur in natural settings. The target population of this study comprised pregnant women residing in Calabar Metropolis. This group was chosen because they are active users of social media platforms and are also directly involved in health-seeking decisions during pregnancy. Based on projections from NPC (2006) and health facility records, thousands of pregnant women seek antenatal care annually within Calabar Metropolis. For the purpose of this study, the accessible population was pregnant women attending antenatal clinics in selected healthcare facilities across Calabar South and Calabar Municipality.

The sample size for this study was 250 respondents (pregnant women). This was determined by purposive sampling technique. The sample was considered adequate to ensure representativeness and generalizability of the findings to the larger population of pregnant women in Calabar Metropolis. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed in this study

to ensure representativeness across different segments of pregnant women in Calabar Metropolis. Data for the study were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The main instrument used for quantitative data collection was the structured questionnaire titled “Social Media Utilization and Health-Seeking Behaviour of Pregnant Women Questionnaire (SMUHSBPWQ). The questionnaires were administered by the researcher with the assistance of two trained research assistant familiar with antenatal settings in Calabar Metropolis. Prior permission was sought from health facility managements, and the instruments were distributed systematically to pregnant women attending antenatal clinics. The researcher explained unclear items to respondents where necessary to ensure accuracy in responses.

Retrieved data were coded and analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize demographic data and responses to questionnaire items. Inferential statistics was employed to test the hypotheses using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to determine the relationship between social media utilization and health-seeking behaviour. Hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance. Ethical clearance was obtained from relevant research ethics committee in Calabar Municipality Local Government Area. Permission was also sought from the management of selected healthcare facilities. Respondents selected for this study were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the administration of instruments, and data was used strictly for academic purposes.

Analysis and Discussion

A total of 250 copies of the questionnaire were distributed across eleven selected Primary Health Centres in Calabar Metropolis. The respondents consisted of pregnant women attending antenatal clinics in the selected health facilities. Data collected were coded, organized, and analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages, while the hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) at 0.05 level of significance. The selected health centres used for the study included PHC Anantigha, PHC Ewa Ekeng, PHC Mayne Avenue, PHC Moore Road, PHC Atu, PHC Nkonib-Ikot Ansa, PHC Kasuk, PHC Ediba, PHC Wapi, PHC Effangha Mkpa, and PHC Obutong. These health facilities were selected because they record consistent antenatal attendance and serve diverse populations of pregnant women within the metropolis.

Research question one:

To what extent does frequency of social media use influence the health-seeking behaviour of pregnant women in Calabar Metropolis?

Table 1: Mean analysis of the Frequency of Social Media Use (N = 250)

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev	Decision
1	I frequently use social media to obtain pregnancy-related health information	132	81	24	13	3.33	0.79	Accepted
2	Social media helps me understand the importance of antenatal care attendance	141	72	26	11	3.37	0.76	Accepted
3	Frequent exposure to maternal health information online influences my healthcare decisions	126	88	23	13	3.31	0.78	Accepted
4	I often rely on social media reminders for antenatal appointments and medications	109	91	32	18	3.16	0.86	Accepted
5	Regular use of social media increases my awareness of pregnancy complications	137	74	27	12	3.34	0.77	Accepted
	Grand Mean					3.26		Accepted

Source: Field survey, 2026

The above table presents the mean analysis of respondents' opinions regarding the influence of frequency of social media use on the health-seeking behaviour of pregnant women in Calabar Metropolis. The findings reveal that respondents strongly agreed that they frequently use social media to obtain pregnancy-related health information, with a mean score of 3.33. This finding suggests that social media platforms have become important sources of maternal health information among pregnant women in Calabar Metropolis.

The respondents also agreed that social media helps them understand the importance of antenatal care attendance, as reflected by the high mean score of 3.37. Another important finding is that frequent exposure to maternal health information online influences healthcare decisions, with a mean score of 3.31. The respondents further agreed that they often rely on social media reminders for antenatal appointments and medication adherence, with a mean score of 3.16. Furthermore, the result shows that regular use of social media increases awareness of pregnancy-related complications, with a mean score of 3.34. Overall, the findings demonstrate that frequent use of social media significantly influences the health-seeking behaviour of pregnant women in Calabar Metropolis.

Test of hypothesis

- H₀: There is no significant relationship between the frequency of social media use and the health-seeking behaviour of pregnant women in Calabar Metropolis.
 H_i: There is a significant relationship between the frequency of social media use and the health-seeking behaviour of pregnant women in Calabar Metropolis.

The above hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) statistical technique at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 2: Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between frequency of social media use and health-seeking behaviour of pregnant women (N = 250)

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Dev	r-value	p-value	Decision
Frequency of Social Media Use	250	3.28	0.81			
				0.742	0.000	Significant
Health-Seeking Behaviour	250	3.35	0.77			

Source: Field survey, 2026.

Table 2 presents the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the relationship between frequency of social media use and the health-seeking behaviour of pregnant women in Calabar Metropolis. The result reveals a correlation coefficient (r-value) of 0.742 with a corresponding p-value of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. The implication of this finding is that there exists a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between frequency of social media use and the health-seeking behaviour of pregnant women in Calabar Metropolis. Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than the significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This means that the frequency with which pregnant women use social media significantly influences their healthcare behaviour during pregnancy.

Discussion of findings

Frequency of Social Media Use and the Health-Seeking Behaviour of Pregnant Women

The findings of hypothesis one revealed that there is a significant relationship between the frequency of social media use and the health-seeking behaviour of pregnant women in Calabar Metropolis. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis produced an r-value of 0.742 and a p-value of 0.000, which was lower than the 0.05 level of significance. This finding implies that frequent use of social media significantly influences maternal healthcare decisions and practices among pregnant women in the study area. The result agrees with the study conducted by Lupton (2016), which found that frequent social media use among pregnant women enhanced access to maternal health information and improved women's confidence in making pregnancy-related healthcare decisions. Lupton argued that pregnant women increasingly rely on digital technologies to obtain information about antenatal care, labour preparation, breastfeeding, and infant care. The present finding supports this assertion by demonstrating that pregnant women in Calabar Metropolis frequently utilize social media platforms for maternal healthcare purposes.

The finding is also consistent with the study by Olaniran and Akande (2022), which reported that regular use of digital platforms among Nigerian women improved awareness of maternal healthcare practices and encouraged healthcare utilization. According to the authors, women who actively engage with online health information are more likely to adopt preventive healthcare behaviours and seek medical assistance during pregnancy complications. The present study corroborates this position by showing that frequent social media use positively influences health-seeking behaviour among pregnant women in Calabar Metropolis.

Conclusion

This study examined social media utilization and health seeking behaviour of pregnant women in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State, Nigeria. The study introduced the background to the research by discussing the growing integration of social media into healthcare communication. It highlighted how pregnant women increasingly depend on platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and X (Twitter) for maternal health information and emotional support. The statement of the problem identified concerns relating to the influence of social media on maternal healthcare behaviour, the spread of misinformation, and the lack of empirical studies focusing specifically on pregnant women in Calabar Metropolis.

The study reviewed the dimensions of social media utilization including frequency of use. Empirical studies relevant to the variables under investigation were reviewed extensively to identify gaps in existing knowledge. The health belief model was adopted as the theoretical foundations for the study. The study employed a survey research design because it allowed the researcher to collect data from respondents at a single point in time and examine the relationship between the variables under investigation. The study area comprised Calabar Municipality and Calabar South Local Government Areas of Cross River State, Nigeria. The population of the study consisted of pregnant women attending primary healthcare centres in Calabar Metropolis. A sample size of 250 respondents was selected using a purposive sampling technique. Data were collected through the use of structured questionnaires administered to pregnant women across selected primary healthcare centres. Based on the findings of the study, the study concluded that frequent use of social media improves pregnant women's exposure to maternal health information and positively influences healthcare-seeking behaviour such as antenatal

clinic attendance, healthcare consultation, and adherence to medical advice. The study also concluded that diversity in social media platforms enhances maternal healthcare awareness and decision-making among pregnant women. Exposure to different online platforms provides opportunities for broader access to maternal health education, peer support, and professional healthcare information, thereby improving maternal health practices and healthcare utilization.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Healthcare institutions, maternal health professionals, and public health agencies should intensify the dissemination of accurate maternal health information through social media platforms in order to positively influence pregnant women who frequently use social media for health-related purposes.
2. Government agencies and healthcare organizations should adopt multi-platform communication strategies by utilizing different social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube for maternal health promotion. This will enable pregnant women to access diverse forms of maternal health information and support services through platforms that are familiar and accessible to them.
3. Healthcare professionals and regulatory agencies should ensure that credible and verified maternal health information is consistently provided on social media platforms. Measures should also be taken to monitor and reduce the spread of misinformation, fake medical advice, and unverified pregnancy-related content online. Pregnant women should equally be educated on digital health literacy to help them identify trustworthy health information sources.

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