

Utilisation of Social Media for the Promotion of Exclusive Breastfeeding among Nursing Mothers in Rural Communities in Akwa Ibom State



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Abstract

It is common knowledge that social media has undoubtedly changed the communication landscape of society and the information-seeking behaviour of humans. This study examines the utilization of social media for promoting exclusive breastfeeding among nursing mothers in rural communities in Akwa Ibom State. Studies have reported the use of social media for breastfeeding support, especially in the Western world; however, there is a paucity of research on the use of social media for promoting exclusive breastfeeding among nursing mothers, particularly in rural communities in Akwa Ibom State. This study addressed this gap by assessing the utilisation of social media for the promotion of exclusive breastfeeding among nursing mothers in rural communities in Akwa Ibom State, ascertain the social media platforms which serves as a source of promotion on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among nursing mothers in rural communities in Akwa Ibom State, the extent to which social media can be used to enlighten nursing mothers on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding in rural communities in Akwa Ibom State, etc. This study is framed around Social Cognitive Theory and draws on a survey of 390 nursing mothers in 3 communities: Obong Ntak, Okorombokho, and Ibiaku Uruan. The results of this study, among others, indicate that nursing mothers in rural communities in Akwa Ibom State were on a few social media platforms; had exposure to exclusive breastfeeding promotion messages via these platforms, especially Facebook, identified some possible strategies for the utilisation of social media as promotion platforms for exclusive breastfeeding to include offer of incentives (e.g. airtime) for engaging in exclusive breastfeeding, use of local languages, among others. The study concludes that the use of social media for the promotion of exclusive breastfeeding will enhance the practice among rural nursing mothers. It is recommended that stakeholders should push their promotions and campaigns more on

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Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube, and provide support while promoting exclusive breastfeeding.

Keywords: *Utilisation, social media, exclusive breastfeeding, nursing mothers, rural communities, Akwa Ibom State.*

Introduction

Social media are interactive technologies that facilitate the creation, sharing, and aggregation of content, ideas, interests, and other forms of expression through virtual communities and networks. They are known by some scholars as "participative Internet" (Jones & Fox, 2009), which are becoming important platforms for the sharing of health information, in health and wellbeing (George et al., 2016; Abedin et al., 2017), opening new vistas for public health communication, especially as global Internet penetration deepens (Jane et al., 2018). Social media are forms of electronic communication which enhanced users' interactivity and collaborative content sharing, producing Internet-based social networking services such as Facebook, Instagram, Myspace, WhatsApp, Wikis, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter, Snapchat, TikTok, among others, for collaborative content development, blogs, and two-way mobile messaging platforms that connect people via cell phones and personal digital assistants (Korda & Itani, 2013).

Social media has become a major source in promoting health messages, considering its wide reach, low cost, previous success, and increased sustainability (Jin, Phua & Lee, 2015). A Pew Research study reported that eight in 10 Internet users in America access online for health information, the third most common use of the Internet (Fox, 2011). Currently, there are 38.7 million active Facebook users in Nigeria (Statista, 2025), Tik Tok has 37.4 million, WhatsApp has over 51 million daily active users, YouTube 27.0 million, SnapChat 19.6 million, LinkedIn 11.0 million, Instagram 9.90 million and Twitter (X) has approximately 7.57 million daily active users as at first quarter of 2025 (Statista, 2025). The number of social media users is expected to see significant growth, with projections indicating that users could reach 103 million by 2026, and the number of smartphone users, which is a key driver of social media usage, is projected to reach 100.21 million by 2029. This growth is propelled by increased internet penetration, especially in rural areas, and the use of mobile internet subscribers (Statista, 2025). Out of these figures, the female folk distributed across race, education, and income constitute 38.6% of social media users in Nigeria (Statista, 2025); an indication that social media holds great potential as a facilitator to health support and promotion among women.

Social media may be considered effective in accessing new mothers since they often report high levels of loneliness, and technology may be their only source of socialisation and entertainment during nocturnal cluster feeds (Lee, Vasileiou & Barnett, 2017). A greater number of new mothers now use social media to seek advice and believe they are beneficial forms of support during the transition to parenthood (Baker & Yang, 2018). It has been stated that face-to-face breastfeeding support is an important facet of best practice, which poses questions over how social media can be best used (Cleminson, Oddie, Renfrew, & McGuire, 2015; McFadden et al., 2017). However, the way social media function and how they are used have changed considerably in recent times. As online breastfeeding support has become more widespread and accessibility has improved, mothers are engaging with it and reporting benefits (Morse & Brown, 2021).

Exclusive breastfeeding is a practice whereby the infants receive only breast milk and no other food or liquid, not even water, tea, or herbal preparations during the first six

months of life, except for vitamins, mineral supplements, or medicines (Federal Ministry of Health, 2021). Exclusive breastfeeding is both beneficial to the child and the mother: it saves mothers from the risk of diabetes, osteoporosis, ovarian and endometrial cancers; facilitates healing after delivery; avoids post-partum bleeding (WHO, 2023); supports infants' immune systems and may protect them later in life from chronic conditions such as obesity and diabetes. Yet, despite all the potential benefits, less than 1 in 2 (48 per cent) infants 0–5 months of age worldwide are exclusively breastfed (WHO, 2023). Considering its benefits to both mother and child, exclusive breastfeeding should be encouraged (Kyei-Arthur, Agyekum & Afrifa-Anane, 2021). As veritable tools for collaborative learning, a good source of enlightenment and promotion (Ansari & Khan, 2020); information and tools for public health promotion, it is imperative to ascertain the utilisation of social media for the promotion of exclusive breastfeeding among nursing mothers in rural communities of Akwa Ibom State.

Statement of the Problem

Breastfeeding is known to decrease the risk of infant diseases such as respiratory tract infections and diarrhea, lower risks of asthma, food allergies, type 1 diabetes, and leukemia, as well as improve cognitive development and decrease the risk of obesity in adulthood (Loof-Johanson, Foldevi, & Rudebeck, 2016). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2023) reports that across the world, 46% of newborns are put to the breast within an hour of birth – leaving far too many newborns waiting too long for this critical contact with their mothers. This practice varies widely among regions. Feeding newborns anything other than breast milk has the potential to delay their first contact with their mother and can make it more difficult to establish breastfeeding. Yet, one in three newborns still receives food or liquids in the earliest days of life, when their bodies are most vulnerable. Exclusive breastfeeding promotion has been identified as one of the interventions with the highest life-saving potential globally, and if all children were optimally breastfed, this could save 13% of child deaths worldwide (Chola, Chiotu and Nlumanze, 2021).

Despite efforts to promote and facilitate effective practice of optimal breastfeeding, such as development and operationalisation of several national policies and guidelines to provide information and guidance on Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF), counseling and support available in many health centers, there is still a low practice of optimal breastfeeding (UNICEF 2023).

In Nigeria, malnutrition among infants and children is still a serious health challenge. It contributes significantly to both infant and child mortality and morbidity. This has been attributed to low levels of breastfeeding practices among nursing mothers (Nigeria Bureau of Statistics, 2022). There could also be a low level of awareness of exclusive breastfeeding practices among nursing mothers in Akwa Ibom State, especially in the rural communities. Thus, to what extent can social media be utilised for public promotion of exclusive breastfeeding among nursing mothers in rural communities in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria?

Research Questions

The following research questions were generated to serve as a guide for the study.

1. are nursing mothers in rural communities in Akwa Ibom State on social media platforms?

2. do nursing mothers in rural communities in Akwa Ibom State access exclusive breastfeeding promotion messages on social media platforms?
3. which of the social media platforms serves as a source of promotion on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among nursing mothers in rural communities in Akwa Ibom State?
4. to what extent can social media be used to enlighten nursing mothers on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding in rural communities in Akwa Ibom State?
5. what are the possible challenges faced by nursing mothers in the utilisation of social media as promotion platforms for exclusive breastfeeding in rural communities in Akwa Ibom State?

Theoretical Framework

This study relied on social cognitive theory (SCT). Proposed by Albert Bandura, the social cognitive theory started as the social learning theory in the 1960s and developed into the SCT in 1986. The theory explains that learning occurs in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment, and behaviour. The unique feature of SCT is its emphasis on social influence and its emphasis on external and internal social reinforcement. The theory considers the unique way in which individuals acquire and maintain behaviour, while also considering the social environment in which individuals perform the behavior, as well as a person's past experiences, which factor into whether behavioural action will occur. These past experiences influence reinforcements, expectations, and expectancies, all of which shape whether a person will engage in a specific behaviour and the reasons why a person engages in that behaviour.

The Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) finds expression in the promotion of health advocacy because it focuses on how individuals, their environment, and health behaviour interact. This specific chain of interaction is termed reciprocal determination, which is well emphasized by the theory. The theory also highlights that an individual's or group's environment has to change to support new behaviours. This change can only come when the needed information is made available and utilized too. Nursing mothers are expected to engage in exclusive breastfeeding after receiving beneficial information. The basic tenets of this theory are reciprocal determination, facilitation, and observational learning constructs.

The reciprocal determination is when an interaction between an individual and his or her environment results in a change in the behaviour of the individual. It could be measured by the level of information and awareness gained by nursing mothers through various social media platforms on breastfeeding mounted by various stakeholders that should trigger (change in behaviour) exclusive breastfeeding initiation and continuation. Facilitation entails providing the needed resources and tools to make the change possible and easier too. It would help in finding out whether nursing mothers who participated in the various sensitization programmes were given necessary support, like one-on-one expert counseling, scheduled visits by health workers, and materials like flyers, handbills, breast pumps, etc. Being practically equipped with these resources will enhance their breastfeeding initiation and help them overcome known or perceived challenges, and of course, continue breastfeeding up to the recommended period of at least six months. Observational Learning implies learning a new behaviour by exposure

to interpersonal or media displays of the new behaviour. Dramatising of the intended behaviour is also encouraged through peer modeling (Wallace, Brown, & Hilton, 2015).

Review of Related Literature

Social Media

Scholars have identified some social media common features: social media are interactive web 2.0 Internet based applications; user generated content such as text posts or comments, digital photos or videos and data generated through all online interactions – is the lifeblood of social media; users create service-specific profiles for the website or app that are designed and maintained by the social media organisation; social media help the development of online social networks by connecting a user profile with those of other individuals or groups (Obar & Wildman, 2015; Aichner, Grünfelder, Maurer & Jegeni, 2021).

From Facebook and Instagram to X platform (formerly Twitter) and YouTube, there has been a steady increase in the number of adults accessing social media network sites, with Facebook topping the chart as the most used platform (Data Reportal, 2023). Literature on the use of social media and social networking sites indicates the frequency of social media use across different demographics, including parents (Pew Research Center, 2018). These electronic services provide highly interactive platforms in which individuals, communities, and organizations can share, co-create, discuss, participate, and modify user-generated or self-curated content posted online (Schivinskiv et al., 2020). Users engage in an array of human experiences and daily interactions, such as providing and receiving support (Duggan et al., 2016). Social media platforms are sources of parenting information and advice, with mothers indicating that they receive support from their friends and social media. This suggests that social media may help mothers at various stages of parenting, from early postpartum and infant feeding, through later stages of child rearing (Holtz, Smock, & Reyes-Gastelum, 2015).

Exclusive Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is feeding a child with human breast milk. The American Academy of Pediatrics (2017) encourages the use of human breast milk for all infants. Exclusive breastfeeding is ideal nutrition, and it is sufficient to support optimal growth and development for the first six months after birth (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2017). It reduces infant mortality caused by common childhood illnesses such as diarrhea or pneumonia and helps to hasten recovery during illness, reduces the risk of ovarian cancer and breast cancer, helps to space children, contributes to the health and well-being of mothers, and increases family as well as national resources. It is recommended that breastfeeding continues for at least 12 months, and thereafter for as long as mutually desired (Shiel, 2018).

Research has shown that mothers and other caregivers require active support for establishing and sustaining appropriate exclusive breastfeeding practices (Sankar et al., 2015). WHO and UNICEF launched the Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative in 1992 to strengthen maternity practices to support exclusive breastfeeding. They developed the 40-hour Breastfeeding Counselling: A Training Course and, more recently, the five-day Infant and Young Child Feeding Counselling. It is an integrated Course to train a cadre of health workers that can provide skilled support to breastfeeding mothers and help

them overcome problems. It is evident in the literature that exclusive breastfeeding for six months is the optimal way of feeding infants; after which infants should receive complementary foods with continued breastfeeding up to two years of age or beyond (UNICEF, 2023).

For mothers to establish and sustain exclusive breastfeeding for six months, UNICEF (2023) recommends that mothers should initiate breastfeeding within the first hour of life, and engage in exclusive breastfeeding - where infant only receives breast milk without any additional food or drink, not even water, as well as often as the child wants, day and night, and no use of bottles, teats or pacifiers.

Social Media and Social Support for Breastfeeding

Previous literature on breastfeeding support focused on support received in person via phone (McFadden et al., 2017). However, scholars in the lactation field have also emphasized the use of social media to support breastfeeding mothers, a push to adapt to the changing landscape of how mothers exchange support and information (Audelo, 2014; Wolynn, 2016). The Surgeon General's 2011 report calls to action to support breastfeeding, which was the use of new media and forms of electronic communication to reach young women and their families (Britton, McCormick & Renfrew, 2012).

The extant literature has identified the use of social network sites for informational needs, building skills for breastfeeding (Asiodu, Waters, & Dailey, 2015; Bridges, 2016), and overcoming social isolation among lactating mothers (Kim, Fiese & Donovan, 2017). In a study with African American mothers, participants reported that they preferred social media as channels for obtaining important information during the antepartum and postpartum periods. Mothers who engaged in exclusive breastfeeding said Facebook was invaluable in providing support (Asiodu, Waters & Dailey, 2015). Studies have also shown that, in addition to providing support for breastfeeding mothers, the use of social media may influence breastfeeding attitudes, norms, and self-efficacy for breastfeeding. It is reported that exposure to informational messages on breastfeeding pages on Facebook led to pro-breastfeeding attitudes (Jin, Phua & Lee, 2015). Media exposure to breastfeeding improves self-efficacy and may also shift breastfeeding norms (Tuan et al., 2014; Gross et al., 2015).

Social Media and Exclusive Breastfeeding

Extant health communication and breastfeeding literature have interrogated the relationship between media (mainly mainstream media) campaigns and an increase in breastfeeding (exclusive or just normal breastfeeding) (Nguyen et al., 2016; Sharmin et al., 2016). Social media has also been studied to look specifically into breastfeeding in general and exclusive breastfeeding in particular (Alianmoghaddam, Phibbs and Benn, 2019; Robinson *et al.*, 2019). A study that experimented with the impact of user-generated content and online popularity of a pro-breastfeeding community Facebook page on female college students' breastfeeding-related attitude and behaviour reported that popular pages elicited significantly higher breastfeeding intention and breastfeeding self-efficacy. The study suggested that the interplay of message style, message valence, and online page popularity on pro-breastfeeding attitudes strongly demonstrates the potential of social media as a novel vehicle for health campaigns (Jin, Phua, & Lee, 2015).

Previous studies have also found that mothers frequently used social media while breastfeeding and social media platforms in general and Facebook in particular were

sought for communication, entertainment, and advice, among other reasons, and that lactating mothers need reliable online infant feeding information, smartphone applications, and access to information via Facebook (Robinson et al., 2019). Mothers received the highest amount of breastfeeding support from Facebook support groups, compared to other sources of support, and Facebook support significantly correlated with intended breastfeeding duration. Breastfeeding support received within Facebook groups may compensate for inadequate support received within mothers' networks (Robinson et al., 2019). Social media support helped lactating mothers to increase their duration of breastfeeding. Studies advocated aggressive utilisation of social media to promote and support exclusive breastfeeding practice (Tomfohrde & Reinke, 2016; Alianmoghaddam, Phibbs, & Benn, 2019).

Social media has a role to play in creating awareness about issues and drawing attention to whatever threatens human well-being. Traditional media such as radio had since been a longstanding major means for accessing health information in rural communities, but new information and communication technology media, particularly video and mobile phone are steadily complementing and sometimes replacing these as the recognised, preferred or used media for accessing and disseminating such information (Odesanya, Hassan & Olaluwoye, 2015; Adjei & Ankrah, 2018).

However, Nwafor and Akubue (2008) identify the problems hindering women's use of social media to include: time constraint, poor network connection, poor condition of available devices, and lack of money for regular subscription, among others. Notably, social media remains a key component and veritable tool in the campaign toward sustainable health development in Nigeria. This is so because through adequate health communication and campaigns on issues of health, such as drug abuse, vaccine/immunizations, maternal healthcare, family planning programmes, exclusive breastfeeding, prevention practices, cure and eradication of diseases, etc., we are pressing on toward sustainable health care (Odorume, 2015).

Odorume (2015) describes the role of social media in health promotion for sustainable health development as vital and lists such a role to include helping health promoters and stakeholders to communicate health information, monitor, and coordinate health activities in various countries of the world. Social media not only informs individuals about health issues, but its messages can also be used to influence individuals to action (Nelson, 2015). Since social media creates awareness and draws attention to whatever portends a threat to our well-being (Odesanya, Hassan & Olaluwoye, 2015), its strategies can be used to set an agenda, bridge the gap in knowledge between people who reside in rural and urban settings, as well as remind people about issues of their health (Nelson, 2015). Meanwhile, Adjei and Ankrah (2015) also argue that health promotion via direct and remote health information dissemination and education is essential in order to adequately equip communities with information and advice needed to improve their health.

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was used for this study. The questionnaire was the data-gathering instrument employed in the study. The questions asked by the questionnaire were closed-ended, using variations of the Likert scale. The study drew its sample from among nursing mothers' residents in rural communities in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Akwa Ibom State has a 2025 projected population of 6,497,967 residents^[1]. The Australian

sample size calculator, developed by the National Service of Australia, was used to draw a sample size of 400 for the study from the study population.

The 400 subjects who formed the sample size of the study were drawn using the multi-stage cluster sampling design. The state was clustered along three senatorial districts, namely: Akwa Ibom North-West, Akwa Ibom East, and Akwa Ibom South. Considering the potential difficulty in studying all the local government areas in the three districts, the simple random sampling through balloting was used to select a local government area from each of the districts. A list of all the local government areas in the districts was made, put into three separate containers, mixed properly, and handpicked. From this exercise, Uruan (Akwa Ibom North-East), Etim Ekpo (Akwa Ibom North-West), and Eastern Obolo (Akwa Ibom South) Local Government Areas were picked to represent each of the senatorial districts. From the Local Government Areas selected, the same balloting process was followed using the list of villages in the area as contained in the Akwa Ibom State gazette (2019). Ibiaku (Uruan), Obong Ntak (Etim Ekpo), and Okorombokho (Eastern Obolo), emerged from this exercise.

To ensure that copies of the questionnaire were evenly distributed to the three communities selected for the study, the Bowley (1926) calculation technique was used to determine the accurate number of copies of the questionnaire assigned to each of the three communities.

The formula is $nh (Nh/N) xn$.

Where nh is the sample size for strata h

Nh is the population stratum h

N is the total population size, while n is the total sample size.

Community	Population	No of Respondents per LGA	Percentage (%)
Ibiaku Uruan	168,300	148	37
Obong Ntak	151,800	136	34
Okorombokho	85,800	116	29
Total		400	100

To administer the questionnaire to the respondents, the 400 copies were divided proportionately among the three communities selected, which resulted in Ibiaku Uruan having 148 copies, Obong Ntak 136, while Okorombokho had 116 copies. Accordingly, the accidental sampling technique (Asemah, 2012) was used in the administration of the instrument to individual respondents. This implies that copies of the questionnaire were administered (through the help of four trained research assistants) on the availability of respondents (nursing mothers) at the point of administration. The exercise lasted for three months.

Out of the 400 copies of the questionnaire administered, 390 copies were retrieved. The 390 copies yielded a return rate of 97% and were used for analysis. Data were analysed using descriptive statistical tools such as tables, percentages, frequencies, and score ratings/weighted mean.

Result and Discussion of Findings

The data obtained from the study are presented below

Table 1: Social media platforms of nursing mothers in rural communities of akwa ibom state

Social Media Platform	SA	A	D	SD	Total	WMS	Remarks
WhatsApp	39	240	83	28	1070	2.74	Accepted
Facebook	75	251	42	22	1159	2.97	Accepted
Snapchat	41	105	185	59	908	2.32	Rejected
X (Twitter)	22	42	280	46	820	2.10	Rejected
Telegram	40	46	291	13	893	2.28	Rejected
Instagram	20	26	300	44	802	2.05	Rejected
YouTube	44	159	160	22	995	2.55	Accepted
Wikis	23	90	233	44	872	2.35	Rejected
TikTok	61	139	140	50	991	2.54	Accepted
Total mean score						2.43	Negaitve

Table 1 shows that respondents were mainly on Facebook (2.97), WhatsApp (2.74), YouTube (2.55) and TikTok (2.54). Other social media platforms receive weighted mean score of less than 2.50 which indicate that they were not optimally used by respondents.

Table 2: Respondents access to exclusive breastfeeding promotion messages on social media platforms

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	WMS	Remarks
I belong to a breastfeeding support group on Facebook	30	160	170	30	970	2.48	Rejected
I receive breastfeeding tips on my Facebook page	30	177	143	40	977	2.51	Accepted
My WhatsApp group share breastfeeding messages regularly	51	180	111	48	1014	2.60	Accepted
I have seen on my social media platforms mothers practicing exclusive breastfeeding	24	180	152	34	974	2.49	Rejected
I have watch and read on social media platforms about mothers being rewarded for practicing exclusive breastfeeding	60	131	135	64	967	2.47	Rejected
I have seen Images on social media being used to explain the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding and practical tips	80	152	125	33	1059	2.71	Accepted
My WhatsApp group use automated messaging tools to send weekly exclusive breastfeeding tips	60	159	139	32	1027	2.63	Accepted
Total mean score						2.55	Positive

Table 2 shows that the respondents 2.51, 2.60, 2.63 and 2.71, respectively, had access to exclusive breastfeeding promotion messages on their social media platforms.

Table 3: The social media platform which serves as a source of promotion on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among nursing mothers in rural communities in Akwa Ibom State

Social Media Platforms	SA	A	D	SD	Total	WMS	Remarks
WhatsApp	65	149	121	55	1004	2.57	Accepted
Facebook	61	165	115	49	1018	2.61	Accepted
Snapchat	21	128	197	44	906	2.32	Rejected
Wikis	22	26	131	211	639	1.63	Rejected
Telegram	44	46	187	113	801	2.05	Rejected
X (Twitter)	43	52	180	115	803	2.05	Rejected
YouTube	61	161	120	48	1015	2.60	Accepted
Instagram	18	104	130	138	782	2.00	Rejected
TikTok	38	96	128	128	824	2.11	Rejected
Total mean score						2.21	Negative

From Table 3 it is shown that respondents 2.61, 2.60 and 2.57 respectively, claimed that Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp were the social media platforms which served as sources of promotion on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding.

Table 4: How to use social media as promotion platforms for exclusive breastfeeding in rural communities in Akwa Ibom State

Possible Strategies	SA	A	D	SD	Total	WMS	Remarks
Ensure content is optimized for low-end smartphones and low-bandwidth connections	85	142	119	44	1048	2.68	Accepted
Use local languages, voice notes, and visual content to overcome literacy barriers	92	143	115	40	1067	2.73	Accepted
Share stories from local mothers who practice exclusive breastfeeding	100	150	100	40	1.090	2.79	Accepted
Use images to explain the benefits of EBF and practical tips	98	150	114	28	1098	2.81	Accepted
Use WhatsApp voice notes to deliver key messages	102	136	110	42	1078	2.76	Accepted
Host live Facebook sessions with nurses or midwives to answer breastfeeding	100	149	96	45	1084	2.77	Accepted

questions							
Use village level WhatsApp group to share breastfeeding info regularly	90	149	102	49	1060	2.71	Accepted
Offer little incentives (eg airtime) for engaging with EBF content or quizzes	136	130	98	26	1156	2.96	Accepted
Use automated messaging tools (Like WhatsApp bots) to send weekly breastfeeding tips	94	130	130	36	1062	2.72	Accepted
Total mean score						2.77	Positive

Table 4 shows the possible strategies to the utilisation of social media as platforms for the promotion of exclusive breastfeeding among nursing mothers in rural communities in Akwa Ibom State. The majority of the respondents agree to all the strategies listed. Of all the strategies stated, offer of incentives (e.g. airtime) for engaging in exclusive breastfeeding content or quizzes receives 2.96 weighted mean score.

Table 5: The Possible challenges faced by respondents in the utilisation of social media as promotion platforms for exclusive breastfeeding in rural communities in Akwa Ibom State

Possible Challenges	SA	A	D	SD	Total	WMS	Remarks
Limited internet access	100	136	129	25	1091	2.79	Accepted
Low smartphones penetration	104	132	120	14	1066	2.73	Accepted
Low digital literacy	124	150	50	66	1112	2.85	Accepted
Cost of data	121	164	81	24	1162	2.97	Accepted
Lack of access to electricity	121	154	91	24	1152	2.95	Accepted
Language barriers	110	140	94	46	1094	2.80	Accepted
Misinformation	110	151	89	40	1111	2.84	Accepted
Lack of spousal or family support	105	144	94	47	1087	2.78	Accepted
Workload and responsibilities	99	41	130	120	899	2.30	Rejected
Total mean score						2.77	Positive

Table 5 shows the possible factors militating against nursing mothers in rural communities in the utilisation of social media as platforms for the promotion of exclusive breastfeeding. The majority of the respondents agree to all the factors listed except workload and responsibilities. Of all the factors, the cost of data receives 2.97 weighted mean score.

Discussion of Findings

Exclusive breastfeeding is the right nutrition and it is adequate to support optimal growth and development of a child for the first six months after birth. Therefore, this study assessed the utilisation of social media in the promotion of exclusive feeding among nursing mothers in rural communities of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Finding from the study showed that the overall negative weighted mean score of 2.43 indicated that nursing mothers in the rural communities of Akwa Ibom State were on a few social media platforms as stated in Table 1. As indicated in the Table, 2.97 nursing mothers were on Facebook, 2.74 on WhatsApp, 2.55 on YouTube and 2.54 on TikTok, respectively. It is established in the literature that from Facebook to X platform (formerly Twitter) and YouTube, the number of adults engaging in social media network sites has steadily increased, with Facebook remaining the most widely used platform (Data Reportal, 2023). Literature on the use of social media and social networking sites have indicated the popularity of social media across diverse demographics, including parents (Pew Research Center, 2018). The female folk distributed across race, education and income constitute 38.6% of social media users in Nigeria (Statista, 2025). This suggest that social media hold great potential as a facilitator to health support and promotion among women. Social media may be particularly effective in reaching new mothers since it may be their only source of socialisation and entertainment during nocturnal cluster feeds (Lee, Vasileiou & Barnett, 2017). During such a time, most new mothers use social media to seek advice and believe they are beneficial forms of support during the transition to parenthood (Baker & Yang, 2018).

Finding obtained from this study revealed that the respondents 2.51, 2.60, 2.63 and 2.71, respectively, in one way or the other had access to exclusive breastfeeding promotion messages on their social media platforms. This result aligns with the report that social media are the preferred mechanism for obtaining important information during the antepartum and postpartum periods, influence breastfeeding attitudes, norms, and self-efficacy for breastfeeding (Tuan et al., 2014; Gross et al., 2015). Exposure to informational messages on breastfeeding pages on Facebook led to pro-breastfeeding attitudes (Jin, Phua & Lee, 2015). Social media have become veritable tools for collaborative learning, good source of enlightenment and promotion (Ansari and Khan, 2020); information and tools for public health promotion. This assertion apparently points to the role of social media in health reporting, especially in promoting health related messages (Odorume, 2015). It is established in the literature that across the globe, the social media have the potential to influence health-related behaviours and perceptions. The interplay of message style, message valence, and online page popularity on pro-breastfeeding attitudes strongly demonstrate the potential of social media as a novel vehicle for health campaigns' (Jin, Phua, & Lee, 2015). Studies have postulated that social media inform individuals about health issues, influence individuals to action; generate awareness and call attention to whatever constitutes threat to our wellbeing (Odesanya, Hassan & Olaluwoye, 2015); setting agenda, bridge the gap in knowledge between people who resides in the rural and urban settings, as well as remind people about issues of their health (Nelson 2015). The Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) finds expression in promotion of health advocacy because it focuses on how individuals, their environment, and health behaviour interact.

We found that among the various social media platforms respondents 2.61, 2.60 and 2.57 respectively, claimed that Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp were the social media

platforms which served as sources of promotion on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding. However, using these social media platforms as sources of promotion was generally low as indicated by the overall negative score rating of 2.21. This result of the study aligns with previous studies which found that mothers frequently used social media while breastfeeding; and Facebook in particular were sought for communication, entertainment, and advice, among other reasons', and that lactating mothers need reliable online infant feeding information, smart phone applications, and access to information via Facebook (Robinson et al., 2019). Mothers received highest amount of breastfeeding support from Facebook support groups, compared to other sources of support, and that Facebook support significantly correlated with intended breastfeeding duration. That breastfeeding supports received within Facebook groups may compensate for inadequate support received within mothers' networks (Robinson et al., 2019). Among exclusively breastfeeding mothers, Asiodu, Waters and Dailey (2015) described Facebook as invaluable in providing support.

Result of the study also showed the possible strategies for the utilisation of social media as platforms for the promotion of exclusive breastfeeding among nursing mothers in rural communities in Akwa Ibom State. The majority of the respondents agree to all the strategies listed in Table 4. Of all the strategies stated, offer of incentives (e.g. airtime) for engaging in exclusive breastfeeding content or quizzes receives 2.96 weighted mean score. To ensure content is optimized for low-end smartphones and low-bandwidth connections received 2.68 weighted mean score. Use of local languages, voice notes, and visual content to overcome literacy barriers 2.73, share stories from local mothers who practice exclusive breastfeeding 2.79, use images to explain the benefits of EBF and practical tips 2.81 while use of WhatsApp voice notes to deliver key messages had 2.76 weighted mean score. This result aligns with the social cognitive theory emphasis on observational learning which implies learning a new behaviour by exposure to interpersonal or media displays of the new behaviours. Dramatising of the intended behaviour is encouraged also through peer modeling (Wallace, 2015). Other strategies respondents attested to include to host live Facebook sessions with nurses or midwives to answer breastfeeding questions 2.77, use village level WhatsApp group to share breastfeeding info regularly 2.71 and use automated messaging tools (Like WhatsApp bots) to send weekly breastfeeding tips 2.72. It is established in the literature that most new mothers now use social media to seek advice and believe they are beneficial forms of support during the transition to parenthood (Baker & Yang, 2018). One of the basic tenets of the social cognitive theory is facilitation which entails providing the needed resources and tools to make the change possible and easier too. Equipping nursing mothers with the necessary resources, will enhance their breastfeeding initiation and help them overcome known or perceived challenges and of course continue breastfeeding up to recommended period of at least six months. Researchers have also called for the use of social media to support breastfeeding mothers, a push to adapt to the changing landscape of how mothers exchange support and information (Audelo, 2014; Wolynn, 2016). The Surgeon General's 2011 report call to action to support breastfeeding, was the use of new media and forms of electronic communication to reach young women and their families (Britton, McCormick & Renfrew, 2012). Previous studies have identified the use of social network sites to meet the unmet informational needs, to build skill for breastfeeding (Asiodu, Waters, & Dailey, 2015; Bridges, 2016) and to overcome social isolation (Kim, Fiese & Donovan, 2017).

The results expressed in Table 5 indicate that there are possible factors militating against nursing mothers in the rural communities of Akwa Ibom State regarding the utilisation of social media as platforms for the promotion of exclusive breastfeeding. All the possible challenges listed received the overall positive weighted mean score of 2.77. The only challenge with negative weighted mean score was workload and responsibility which received a mean score of 2.30. This result corroborates Nwafor and Akubue's (2008) report that some problems militating against women's use of social media include; time constraint, poor network connection and poor condition of available devices and lack of money for regular subscription, among others.

Conclusion/Recommendations

The advent of social media has undoubtedly changed the communication landscape of the society and the information seeking behaviour of humans. The social media bandwagon has spread across diverse demographics, including nursing mothers. This study has established that nursing mothers in rural communities in Akwa Ibom State were on a few social media platforms. They had exposure to exclusive breastfeeding promotion messages via the platforms, especially Facebook, WhatsApp and YouTube. The study also identified some possible strategies for the utilisation of social media as promotion platforms for exclusive breastfeeding to include offer of incentives (e.g. airtime) for engaging in exclusive breastfeeding content or quizzes, use of local languages and visual content to overcome literacy barriers, share stories from local mothers who practice exclusive breastfeeding, among others. Challenges such as limited internet, low digital literacy, cost of data, among others were identified as militating against the use of social media as promotion platforms for exclusive breast feeding among nursing mothers in rural communities of Akwa Ibom State. From the study it could be stated that the use of social media for promotion of exclusive breastfeeding will enhance the practice among rural nursing mothers. It is recommended that stakeholders should push their promotions and campaigns more on Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube, provide some incentives and supports while promoting exclusive breastfeeding. Government at all levels and other stakeholders should continue to intensify sensitization on exclusive breastfeeding with more emphasis on the rural dwellers whose socioeconomic status are low.

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