

Abstract

To stabilise Uganda's fast-growing population, the government has positioned media and communication strategies as a primary means of informing and persuading the populace about modern family planning products and services. While this has increased awareness about contraceptives, the uptake of contraception remains persistently low. This qualitative study adopted perspectives of health communication to explore the causes of the disparity between high awareness of and low uptake of contraceptives among women and men of reproductive age in Uganda. It sought to establish how to enrich media and communication strategies for family planning programming to enable the delivery of appropriate information, improved acceptance and consistent use of contraceptives.

This study applied framing, social ecology, and encoding and decoding theories to examine the framing of family planning in selected print media stories (n=47) and communication campaign messages (n=9). It further explored how audience members (n=187) targeted by the campaigns interpreted family planning messages and what factors in their socio-ecological environment influenced their interpretations. Thematic analysis of data from qualitative content analysis, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews revealed how problem-based frames majorly characterised print media reporting of family planning. Low prominence metrics, limited and lopsided coverage also represented media reporting on family planning. The findings further disclosed the intersubjective audience interpretations of the gain-framed and loss-framed campaign messages promoting modern family planning. The study also established an in-depth perspective of how information transmission approaches led to unintended campaign effects at an individual, interpersonal and community level. Consequently, there was a boomerang effect in the audiences' interpretation of the campaign messages.

The study concludes that Uganda's media should practice more enterprise and interpretive journalism in reporting family planning to amplify its significance to the public. Likewise, future family planning communication campaigns must adopt audience-centred messaging approaches responsive to the emerging information needs and socio-ecological contexts of different audience segments. Ultimately, this should contribute to the country's target of ensuring universal access to modern family planning services by 2030 as stipulated in the National Development Plan III and Sustainable Development Goal 3.