

## **Influence of Information Sources on Purchase Decisions of Organic Skin Lightening Products among Female Civil Servants in South-East Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Organic skin-lightening products have gained access to different public domains like the mainstream and various social media platforms. Mix method design such as, survey and in-depth interview was used. The purpose of the study was to investigate the influence that Information sources have on the purchase decisions of organic skin-lightening products among female civil servants in southeast Nigeria. The specific objectives are: To identify the preferred sources of skincare information among female civil servants in southeast Nigeria. And to examine how skincare information sources, influence the purchase decisions of the female civil servants in southeast Nigeria concerning organic lightening skincare products. Using the sample sizes as worked out by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) for different population ranges, a sample of 609 female civil servants was drawn from different ministries, departments and agencies in the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The study was anchored on the Social Cognitive Theory. The findings of the study revealed that the most influential information sources for female civil servants when making purchase decisions for organic skin-lightening products were family and friends, followed by social media advertisements. The study also found that respondents' purchase decisions are majorly influenced by convictions through referrals and recommendations from family, friends/associates, and also through online testimonials. It concludes that female civil servants' purchase decisions are influenced by their preferred sources which are; family/friends and then social media platforms. This study, however, recommends that both the online and offline information sources should be censored, this is necessary to help checkmate products' false claims that could endanger consumers' lives and expose them to health risks.

**Keywords:** Influence, information sources, purchase decisions, organic, skin-lightening.

### **Introduction**

In recent years, the beauty industry has witnessed a paradigm shift towards products that embrace natural and organic formulations (Sommerlad, 2021), paralleling a global trend of heightened awareness about ingredients and their potential impact on health (Faronbi, Oyediran, Adebisi, Adereti, Faronbi, & Famakinwa, 2018). Within this broader movement,

organic lightening skincare products have garnered attention for their promise of luminous skin without harsh chemicals commonly associated with conventional skin-lightening practices (Amberg & Fogarassy, 2019).

Against this backdrop, the study sets out to explore the pivotal role played by skincare information sources in shaping the choices and attitudes of female civil servants in Southeast Nigeria towards organic lightening skincare products (Cutili, 2010, as cited in Yilma, Inthiran, Radpath, & Orimaye, 2017). These women, occupying influential roles within the administrative machinery of the region, bear the dual responsibility of upholding professional excellence while navigating the societal expectations that define beauty norms (Ahmad & Omar, 2018).

By scrutinizing the influence of information dissemination through various channels, from traditional media and social networks to contemporary digital platforms, the study seeks to discover the motives and considerations that drive these women to embrace or reject organic lighting solutions.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The importance of beauty, especially to every woman is non-negotiable (Watson, 2021, p.1). Put differently, unlike their male counterparts, women pay so much attention to how they look. Interestingly, beauty is not just a wish, it is a calculated plan, carefully directed towards improving the overall looks of a woman. For a woman to be beautiful, many regimens (skin products) are applied to leave the skin glowing and radiant. One such regimen that has received global acceptance is “organic skin products” Anecdotal evidence has demonstrated in recent times that most women today depend so much on organic skin products to enhance their overall beauty (Liu, 2022, Hoang, Moon & Chulee 2021; Sidra, Hammad & Hira, 2021; Savannah, 2019). This therefore explains the reason for the present rise in global demand for organic lightening skincare products (Atta, Abbas & Uddin, 2021, p.12). It is also as a result of the foregoing that there is an increased consumer knowledge of organic personal care products, including skincare, hair care, oral care, body care and cosmetics (Grandviewresearch.com 2019).

Today, the use of skin-lightening products has reached epidemic levels in many nations around the globe, including many African nations (WHO, 2023). Interestingly, these products have gained access to different public domains like the Internet and various social media platforms (Mahtab, Mah, Haniya, Haleema, Ayesha, Ayesha, Saba, 2024).

However, in present-day Nigeria, there are thousands of organic lightening skincare information on both the online and the mainstream media that promote this elusive beautiful image to women of all ages, shapes, and sizes by placing photo-shopped and computer-enhanced models in advertisements (Esiti & Governor, 2020). These organic lightening skincare products are advertised and presented in such a manner that women who feel left out develop a feeling of inadequacy (Esiti & Governor, 2020). Consequently, the strong conscious desire to improve and maintain a flawless appearance and image without damaging the skin, makes these women seek chemical-free skincare products such as organic skin/hair care products at all costs to enhance their physical appearance (Putri, & Tiarawati, 2021). This is given that organic skin/hair care products, according to Kapogianni, (2015), as cited in Ahmed & Karaduman, (2021) are to a certain degree free from chemical substances and somewhat less harsh when compared to conventional lightening cosmetic products.

Meanwhile, brands that advertise their skincare products through social media are required to obtain the approval of NAFDAC before such adverts are placed on a social media platform in Nigeria. (Banwo & Ighodalo, 2021). Sadly however, the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) which is the agency responsible for the formulation of public policy regarding the control of dangerous skincare products in Nigeria, appears to focus more attention on the legalization of business enterprises willing to sell cosmetics rather than ensuring the safety of consumers (Ojonugwa & Gwom, 2021) – the above, therefore, poses a huge concern as the genuineness of such sensitive cosmetic products is not given enough attention.

Against the foregoing therefore, it becomes increasingly important to identify the preferred sources of skincare information among the female civil servants, and how these sources, influence the purchase decisions of the female civil servants in southeast Nigeria

concerning organic lightening skincare products. This work therefore sought to investigate these concerns with the view of identifying if actually, skincare information sources influence the purchase decisions of organic lightening skincare products among female civil servants in Southeast Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study's general objective was to examine the influence of information sources on purchase decisions of organic skin-lightening products among female civil servants in southeast Nigeria. In precise terms, the study pursued the following specific objectives:

1. To identify the preferred sources of skincare information among female civil servants in southeast Nigeria.
2. To examine how skincare information sources, influence the purchase decisions of the female civil servants in southeast Nigeria concerning organic lightening skincare products.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the preferred sources of skincare information among female civil servants in southeast Nigeria?
2. How do information sources influence the purchase decisions of female civil servants in southeast Nigeria concerning organic lightening skincare products?

### **Literature Review**

#### **Information sources: An overview**

Information sources are the various channels by which skincare information is recorded for use by individuals. (Akpan, 2017). These sources provide knowledge about different skincare products and their benefits. One of the most important factors that influence consumers' purchase decisions is the source of information. Some of the popular information sources, therefore, include online media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, LinkedIn, YouTube and Twitter) conventional mass media (e.g., magazines, newspapers, television, and radio), people (e.g., friends and experts), sellers (e.g., stores, sales representatives, catalogues, and advertisements), and personal experiences such as observation and product trials (Olatunji, Popoola, Olusola & Ayandele, 2019).

In today's world, consumers have access to a vast amount of information to help them make informed decisions when purchasing skincare products (Adinde, 2018). With the advent of the internet, consumers from all over the world can share and obtain information about various products. Organic skin-lightening vendors provide a lot of information about their online stores and products in their advertisements, hoping to influence the purchase decisions of online shoppers. (Gill & Kanai, 2019).

The use of social media for sourcing information on lightening skincare products has been increasing (Wong, Ho, Olusanya, Antonini, & Lyness, 2021). Women of different age groups therefore use social media for various purposes due to the availability of diverse information, such as news updates, tutorials, and knowledge acquisition in areas such as healthcare, skincare, and organic lightening skincare products. Physical appearance, as we all know, is an integral aspect of one's identity; and its relation to an individual's self-perception begins early in life (Walker, Krumhuber, Dayan & Furnham, 2019). In light of this fact, it is only natural that people search for inspiration and solutions concerning their appearance on the most influential tool in this day and age – social media.

According to the Pew Research Center, in 2020, the most popular social media platform was YouTube (81.0 %), followed by Facebook (69.0 %), Instagram (40.0 %), Pinterest (31.0 %), LinkedIn (28.0 %), Snapchat (25.0 %), Twitter (23.0 %), TikTok (21.0 %), and Reddit (18.0 %). Social media is quickly becoming the foremost tool for gathering and sharing information, social and professional networking, and communication regarding, skincare and health topics (Militello, Yang, Anderson, Szeto, Presley & Laughter, 2021).

In a study conducted among patients at Derma Clinic in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, it was found that the number of participants who knew about their dermatologists from social media (Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, and Telegram) was 9.7 times higher than those who knew them from traditional sources (newspaper, radio, and TV) (Albeshri, Alharithy, Altalhab, Alluhayyan & Farhat, 2020).

According to a study conducted by Skoloda in 2009 and cited in Hassan et al. (2021), women tend to check the internet for reviews from other women about different skincare products. Online communities have become the most reliable source of reviews for women.

They trust the opinions of other consumers in such communities for unbiased and accurate information about skincare products (Prasanna, 2019). That is why Clinique and Estée Lauder provide space for customer reviews on their websites, including both positive and negative comments, which makes the reviews more believable.

Another study conducted among Indonesian men found that consumers considered skincare brand advertisements that they have seen on social media more trustworthy (Sanny, Arina, Maulidya & Pertiwi, 2020). This makes social media's influence on an individual's skincare choices evident. As members of online forums frequently consult social media for dermatologic information, advice posts may become more influential in the decision-making style of dermatologic patients (Prasanna, 2019).

Lee (2020) suggests that influencers have a significant ability to influence the purchasing decisions of other customers. This is because they are seen as trustworthy and knowledgeable sources of information who can engage with their peers effectively. Influencers also have a higher potential to shape the attitudes and actions of others.

Numerous research has been conducted to investigate the role of influencer marketing. Chapple (2017), for example, pointed out that cosmetic and skincare industry influencers positively impact consumers' purchase intention, specifically for luxury brands. It indicates that consumers deliberately absorb their product recommendation by trying out the product themselves and suggesting it to others. Example shows how these influencers favourably influence consumers' purchasing intentions, particularly for premium items. It implies that when influencers recommend products, consumers may internalize these recommendations by trying or purchasing the product themselves (Castillo, Jaramillo & Leonard, 2022, p. 181).

Informational influence, however, also plays a significant role in consumer behaviour. People often rely on recommendations from friends or acquaintances who have tested a product or service and had a positive experience. This saves the consumer time and effort in searching for information and reduces the risk of dissatisfaction with the quality or

durability of the product, so, word-of-mouth communication, especially from trusted sources like friends or relatives, is highly valued by consumers. Therefore, making personal experience-based recommendations, have a potent impact on consumer behaviour. (Chen, Teng, Yu, & Yu, 2016, p.468).

Word-of-mouth as asserted by Indrawati, Yones, and Muthaiyah, (2022), is traditionally a form of direct communication between peers about brands or products without any commercial intention. Word-of-mouth (WOM), however, has become a powerful tool of social influence in consumer behaviour. Consumers share their opinions and experiences about purchased products, recommending them to potential buyers, which significantly affects the acceptance or rejection of products, brands, and services. The advent of the Internet has led to the evolution of WOM into electronic word-of-mouth, also known as EWOM. (Cheung & Thadani, 2016).

Erkan and Evans, (2018), posit that EWOM can take place in different forms and settings, like, blogs, social media, discussion forums, and review websites. Because consumer reviews represent personal experiences, EWOM is, however, perceived as more influential. Findings by Miremadi and Haghayegh, (2022), have also shown that EWOM is highly related to consumer purchasing decisions and has helped in lowering purchase decision risks.

### **Concept of Organic Skincare**

According to Barros and Guilhen (2020), organic skincare products are made of natural ingredients without any chemical elements. The ingredients used are organically farmed and do not contain genetically modified materials, synthetic residues or chemicals. Furthermore, these authors pointed out that at least 95% of the natural substances of plants and animal origin and of derived natural substances contained in the product must have organic certification or be from wild collection.

Anucha (2023) asserts that organic lightening skincare products are made from natural ingredients that can also brighten one's skin. He however pointed out, that consumers believe it is more beneficial for the skin as it is presumed there are little or no harsh chemical ingredients in them. Organic skincare is packaged in the form of body lotions,

sunscreens, face creams, soaps, moisturizers, cleansers, bath scrubs, lip balms etc. (Gamalathge, & Azhar, 2022).

In Nigeria, we have many online and offline vendors and producers of organic skin glowing products. And because of the belief that anything 'organic' is good for one's health, these vendors through their online platforms showcase the organic lightening ingredients used for such creams to lure prospective buyers. This is to say that organic lightening products are unbelievably popular in Nigeria (Adinde, 2018).

Many of the so-called 'organic' and 'natural' skin care products in Nigeria according to Anyaogu (2023) contain high levels of chemicals with mercury levels of more than 1 parts per million. The latest trend is that producers of these products mix triple action creams with infant's 'natural' products thereby causing a lot of harm to the users' skin through recurrent skin infections which can lead to deadly skin infections and organ failures (Fakorede, 2022). Producers and roadside vendors of organic lightening products in Nigeria use formulations that will lighten the skin in seven days. They do not follow the right standards, this is why a good number of them abuse the process, using chemicals containing cortisol steroids to get fast action. (Archibong, 2019).

### **Attributes of Information Sources that would help influence Consumers' Purchase Decisions**

Attributes listed by Ismagilova, Slade, Rana, & Dwivedi (2019), are:

- **Credibility of source**

The credibility of information determines how much the receiver of this information learns from and adopts the received information: if the received information is perceived as credible, the receiver will have more confidence to use it for the purchase decision (Sussman & Siegal, 2003, as cited in Ismagilova et al., 2019). Taking into consideration that online information exchanges occur between people who may have no prior relationship, it is essential to consider how the perceived credibility of information influences consumer behaviour. Some studies have examined the relationship between source credibility and purchase intention (Koo 2016; Teng et al. 2017; Wang et al. 2015). For example, Koo (2016) surveyed 302 students from South Korea and found source credibility has a

significant positive effect on the purchase intention of airline tickets, meals at a family restaurant and a skin care service.

Source credibility, therefore refers to consumers' overall perception regarding the credibility of sources rather than the content of the message. This means that source credibility, however, influences consumers' purchase decisions of organic lightening products. Several studies have explored the relationship between source credibility and purchase intention (Yang et al. 2015; Zhang et al. 2014). For example, by conducting surveys with 378 respondents from China, Yang et al. (2015) found that information coming from a source perceived as credible positively affects the intention to buy.

- **Usefulness of information**

Information sources can influence product evaluation, making information helpful for purchase decisions (Davis, 1989, as cited in Ismagilova et al., 2019).

- **Trust in Message**

Trust in a message refers to an individual's perception that the information in the message can be trusted (Ismagilova et al., 2019). Studies conducted by Yao and Huang (2017) and Saleem and Ellahi (2017) found a connection between trust in a message and purchase intention. When buyers doubt the credibility of the source of information, they tend to see it as unreliable. The source of skincare information is considered trustworthy if the statement is beyond a reasonable doubt valid and truthful. Moreover, Saleem and Ellahi (2017) in their study found that the trustworthiness of the message provider affects the buying intention on social media websites in the context of fashion products.

- **Perceived Ease of Use of the Online Channel**

The concept of "perceived ease of use" in online shopping refers to the level of effort the consumer believes is required to shop online. According to a study by Frassetto, Ruiz-Molina, & Molla-Descals (2015) based on 1533 retail shoppers in the UK and Spain, there is a significant positive correlation between the perceived ease of use of the online channel and purchase intention. Therefore, it can be concluded that the perceived ease of using online sources has a direct or indirect impact on consumers' purchase of organic skin-lightening products.

### **Empirical literature**

Many kinds of literature abound which proves that information sources influence consumers' purchase of organic lightening skin lightening products.

Gani, Roy, Rahman, Faroque, Gupta, and Prova (2023) investigated how social media and consumer engagement reinforce interest and influence consumer purchase intention of organic beauty products. The study found that consumers' purchase decision for organic products is influenced by social media. Additionally, it presents a fresh perspective on the organic beauty industry through the lenses of social influence theory and calls for further research into the new paradigm of social media influence on the consumption of organic beauty products.

Yusuf, Olowo, Abdulquadri, and Bankole (2022). also evaluated the influence of celebrity endorsement on the patronage of skin care products by female lecturers in Federal Universities in South-East Nigeria using age as a base. Findings from the study revealed that celebrity endorsement influences patronage of skincare products by female lecturers in Federal Universities in Southeast Nigeria, and that age was not a source of significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) difference in the mean ratings of female lecturers' responses on the influence of celebrity endorsement on their patronage of skin care products.

Hafeez, Ahmad, Malik, Niazi, Ishfaq, and Sheikh (2022) conducted a descriptive, Cross-sectional study to investigate the frequency of influencing factors on the use of skin whitening creams. The study, therefore found that the frequency of influencing factors for the use of skin whitening creams was as follows; television commercials in 108 (25.71%), print media/magazines in 61 (14.52%), friends 131 (31.19%), spouse 48 (11.43%), beauticians 42 (10.0%) and self-desire 30 (7.14%) patients. The study conclusively showed that friends and television commercials are the main influencing factors for the use of skin-whitening creams.

In a related study, Zhang (2021) investigated how the media strategically employs advertising appeals and cultural values to influence consumers' purchase intentions and skin-whitening behaviour. findings revealed that recommendations from friends, peers, and family remain the most credible form of advertising despite consumers relying on different sources for information verification.

Ahmed and Karaduman (2021) examined the effect of source credibility factors like trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness on the information adoption and its reflection on the purchase intention of beauty products. The study found that there is a significant effect of the above-mentioned factors on the information adoption of vlogs of beauty content and its effect on the purchase intention of beauty products.

Vijayalakshmi and Anuradha (2020) however, explored the role played by TV advertisements in the case of cosmetic consumption and also other factors that influenced consumers towards cosmetics consumption. Findings from the study showed that majority of the participants (82%) watch cosmetic advertisements on television which shows that television as a medium has a wider reach. There are some other factors which influence their purchase behaviour such as friends, cost, offers, and family members; Also, the study found that the beauty perception of cosmetics advertisements also has a strong significant association at (0.02) which means that television cosmetics advertisements effectively influence the perception of the consumers towards cosmetics and beauty concepts.

Similarly, Wiwatanaput (2017) conducted a study in Thailand to answer two main questions on the factors that influenced consumers' purchase of organic skin and personal care products and also the factors that caused a person not to buy or stop buying organic products. Findings from the study showed that the reason why current users were motivated to use organic products for the first time was that they believed in the high quality, which had USDA organic certification. On the other hand, the reason why the non-users did not change to use organic products was that these products were difficult to buy. The two major factors that significantly affected the purchasing intention therefore were consumer value and the consumer profile.

Osman and Osman (2017) conducted a study in Sudan to investigate the impact of product attributes, media and self-image on consumer behaviour as well as the impact of consumer attitude and normative influence on purchase intention among females in the University of Khartoum. Findings from the study showed that traditional media has no impact on consumer attitudes towards the use of whitening products but instead, normative influence and behavioural control have a significant impact on purchase intention towards skin whitening products.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is based on Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), proposed by Albert Bandura. SCT emphasizes the reciprocal interaction between personal factors, environmental influences, and behaviour, which are relevant to understanding the influence of skincare information sources on the purchase decisions of organic lightening skincare products among female civil servants in southeast Nigeria. This theory provides a comprehensive framework for examining the cognitive, social, and environmental factors that shape individuals' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours regarding skincare practices.

**Observational Learning:** Observational learning is a key component of SCT, suggesting that individuals learn through observing others' behaviours and the consequences of those behaviours. In the context of skincare information sources, female civil servants in southeast Nigeria may observe others, such as influencers or peers, using organic lightening skincare products based on the information they gather from various sources. The observed behaviours and outcomes can influence their own beliefs and subsequent decisions to use these products.

**Self-Efficacy:** Self-efficacy is a central concept in SCT, referring to an individual's belief in their ability to perform specific actions and achieve desired outcomes. Skincare information sources can impact self-efficacy by providing information, testimonials, and success stories of others who have used organic lightening skincare products. If female civil servants perceive that others have achieved desirable outcomes, their self-efficacy to use these products may increase, leading to a higher likelihood of product adoption.

**Outcome Expectations:** Outcome expectations refer to an individual's beliefs about the anticipated outcomes or consequences of their behaviour. Skincare information sources can shape female civil servants' outcome expectations regarding the use of organic lightening skincare products. Positive portrayals and testimonials in these sources may create expectations of achieving lighter skin tones, improved complexion, and increased attractiveness. Conversely, negative portrayals or information about potential risks and side effects may affect outcome expectations, leading to cautious or hesitant behaviour.

**Reinforcement:** Positive and negative reinforcement plays a significant role in SCT. Skincare information sources can reinforce social approval, praise, or validation of using organic lightening skincare products. Positive reinforcement, such as compliments or admiration from others, may strengthen the motivation to continue using these products. Conversely, negative reinforcement, such as societal criticism or beauty standards favouring lighter skin tones, may perpetuate the use of these products as individuals seek to avoid negative judgments.

**Environmental Factors:** SCT recognizes the influence of environmental factors on behaviour. Skincare information sources serve as a critical environmental influence, providing cues, norms, and social comparisons that shape individuals' beliefs and behaviours regarding organic lightening skincare products. These sources can perpetuate cultural beauty standards, societal ideals, and norms that prioritize lighter skin tones, influencing the choices and preferences of female civil servants in southeast Nigeria.

Overall, Social Cognitive Theory provides a theoretical lens to understand the complex interplay between personal cognitive processes, environmental influences, and behaviours related to the use of organic lightening skincare products among female civil servants in southeast Nigeria. By considering observational learning, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, reinforcement, and environmental factors, this theoretical framework helps elucidate the underlying mechanisms and processes through which skincare information sources influence individuals' decision-making and behaviours in this context.

## Method

The design which allows for both qualitative and quantitative approaches in the investigation of a phenomenon (Babbie, 2007, p.113; Creswell, 2012) will be adopted in this study. It entails the use of a survey research design and In-depth Interviews since in a study of this nature the opinions of people would contribute to the primary data collection. According to Ohaja (2003), “Whenever the major source of primary data for a study would be the views of any particular group a survey will be called for” (p.74). Also, Wimmer and Dominick (2011) posit that: “a descriptive survey attempts to describe or document current conditions or attitudes – that is, to explain what exists at the moment (p.185). On the other hand, an in-depth interview provides detailed background about the reasons respondents give specific answers (Osuala, 1987; Ohaja, 2003; Wimmer& Dominick, 2011). Here, the researcher produces elaborate data concerning respondents’ opinions, values, motivations, recollections, experiences and feelings about a given phenomenon. It allows for lengthy observation of respondents’ non-verbal responses.

## Population of Study.

The population of this study was all state female civil servants in different ministries, departments and agencies in the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2017), the total number of state female civil servants in the South East is 67,738 (sixty-seven thousand seven hundred and thirty-eight).

## Sampling Frame

The study used the list of all the employed female state civil servants in South-East Nigeria according to each state as the sampling frame.

**Table 1: Sampling Frame**

S/ N	State	Population of Female State Civil Servants
1.	Abia State	13,104

2.	Anambra State	14,625
3.	Ebonyi State	10,430
4.	Enugu State	12,455
5.	Imo State	14, 124
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>67, 738</b>

*Source: Offices of Head of Service of Respective States*

### Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The sample size for the survey was determined by referring to the sample sizes as worked out by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) for different population ranges.

**Table 2: Krejcie and Morgan (1970) for different population ranges.**

Population Size	Error Margin = 5%	
	95% Confidence Level	99% Confidence Level
100	80	87
500	217	285
1, 000	278	399
10, 000	370	622
100, 000	383	659
500, 000	384	663
1 million and above	384	663

Given that the researcher's population is 67, 738 (i.e. up to 10, 000 but less than 100, 000), she settled for a sample of 622 for a 99% confidence level and 0.05 error margin. Thus, the sample size was 622.

The multi-stage approach which involves following a series of logical steps in selecting sample units was used. Hence, the researcher conducted the sampling in four stages as detailed below.

- i. **First Stage (State Level):** The first stage involved selecting three states from the five states in the South-East zone of Nigeria, which formed the study area. Three states equal 60% of the states in the zone; in the researcher's opinion, this is a fair representation. Of the five states, three states were randomly selected. The five states were written out in alphabetical order, and then using a table of random digits, three were selected. Hence, Anambra, Ebonyi and Imo were the selected states.
- ii. **Second Stage (Ministries/Departments/Agencies Level):** The second stage involves selecting five clusters from the ministries, departments and Agencies of the state secretariat of each of the three selected states. The researcher made this decision for the convenience of sampling given that duty posts of civil servants are scattered across the local governments and towns of each state. Concentrating on state secretariats will make for a more definite frame of reference in conducting the sampling. Besides, the bulk of the civil servants for each state are concentrated in the state secretariat. The randomly selected clusters are:

**Anambra State:** (1) Ministry of Housing & Urban Renewal, (2) Ministry of Information & Culture, (3) Office of the Head of Service, (4) Ministry of Environment, Beautification and Ecology, and (5) Ministry of Health

**Ebonyi State:** (1) Ministry of Health, (2) Rural Water & Sanitation Agency, (3) Ministry of Information & State Orientation, (4) Ministry of Agricultural and Natural Resources, and (5) Ebonyi State Scholarship Board

**Imo State:** (1) Ministry of Justice, (2) Imo State Orientation Agency, (3) Ministry of Finance, (4) Imo State Hospital Management Board, and (5) Ministry of Agricultural and Natural Resources

iii. Third stage (Selection of female civil servants from the ministries/departments/agencies)

In the third stage, the researcher selected the sample units (i.e. individual staff members). The list of female civil servants was obtained for each ministry, departments and agencies. Then, a table of random numbers was used to select and assign numbers from each category. The following formula was adopted to determine the number of sample units assigned to each civil servant from the ministries, departments and agencies in the three selected states. the total number to be selected from each state was arrived at using the following computation:

$$X = \frac{n}{N} \times \frac{622}{1}$$

Where X = number selected from a state

n = population of the female civil servants of the state

N = Total population of female civil servants in the 3 selected states

E.g.

$$3917 = \frac{14625}{3917} \times \frac{622}{1} = 230$$

$$3917 = \frac{10430}{3917} \times \frac{622}{1} = 168$$

$$3917 = \frac{14124}{3917} \times \frac{622}{1} = 224$$

The number of female civil servants selected across the states is shown in the Table below.

**Table 3: Sample Distribution**

S/ N	State	Number of Units Selected
1.	Anambra State	230
2.	Ebonyi State	168
3.	Imo State	224
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>622</b>

#### iv. Stage four (random selection of sample units from each of the clusters)

Sample units were selected through the cluster sampling procedure. This procedure is usually suitable when members of the population exist in homogenous clusters (Asika, 2010). The number allotted to each state was distributed evenly across the three clusters (ministries/departments/agencies) selected. Where there were remainders, the cluster(s) to which they would be allocated were decided using a random procedure. The researcher distributed 622 questionnaires but recovered only 609.

### Analysis

**Table: 4 Demographic Variables**

Variables	Items	Frequency	Percentage
Age Bracket	25 – 30 years	182	29.9%
	31 – 40 years	305	50.1%
	41 – 50 years	72	11.8%
	51 and above	50	8.2%
<b>Total</b>		<b>609</b>	<b>100%</b>
Marital Status	Single	86	14.1%
	Married	392	64.4%
	Divorced	90	14.7%

	Widowed	27	4.4%
	Separated	14	2.4%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>609</b>	<b>100%</b>
Highest Educational Qualification	First School Living Certificate	30	4.9%
	SSCE/Equivalent	100	16.4%
	OND/NCE	170	27.9%
	B.SC/HND	259	42.5%
	MSC/PhD	50	8.3%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>609</b>	<b>100%</b>
Religion	African Traditional Religion	80	13.2%
	Christianity	524	86%
	Islam	5	0.8%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>609</b>	<b>100%</b>
Grade Level	Level 1 – 6 (Junior Cadre)	129	21.2%
	Level 7 – 14 (Senior Cadre)	388	63.7%
	Level 15 and above (Managerial cadre)	92	15.1%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>609</b>	<b>100%</b>
Resident states	Anambra	275	45.1%
Resident states	Anambra	275	45.1%
	Ebonyi	225	37%
	Imo	109	17.9%
<b>Total</b>		<b>609</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: field survey (2023)

The result in Table 4 is on the demographic details of the respondents. From the section on the age of respondents, the result reveals that respondents with an age range of 31 – 40

years ranked highest with 305 (50.1%) respondents. This is followed by those between 25 – 30 years with 182 (29.9%) and those between 41 – 50 years recording 72 (11.8%). At the bottom of the table in this section are respondents with an age range of 51 – and above recording 50 (8.2%). Hence, most of the respondents were under the age of 31- 40, while about half were 25 – 30 years, indicating an average young group.

As regards marital status, there is a preponderance of married respondents with 392 (64.4%) followed by those who are single with 86 (14.1%) and those divorced recording 90 (14.7%). At the bottom of that section of the table are respondents who are widowed 27 representing (4.4%) and those that are separated 14 representing (2.4%). Furthermore, regarding educational qualification, most of the respondents 259 (42.5%) had B.Sc./HND, 170 (27.9%) had OND/NCE, 100 (16.4%) had SSCE/equivalent, 50 (8.3%) respondents had MSC/PhD, while 30 (4.9%) had first school leaving certificate. Hence, holders of B.Sc./HND constituted the bulk of the respondents. The result in the section on religion reveals that most of the respondents 524 (86%) are Christians, 80 (13.2%) are Traditionalists and the remaining 5 (0.8%) are Muslims. Regarding grade level, 21.2% of the respondents were between levels 1-6 (Junior cadre), 63.7% were between levels 7- 14(senior cadre) and 15.1% were between levels 15 (managerial cadre) and above (managerial cadre). Thus, senior workers who were still below the rank of deputy director to the permanent secretary (managerial cadre) constituted the largest group. Finally, 45.1% of the respondents live in Anambra, 37% live in Ebony and 17.9% of the respondents live in Imo state.

**Table 5: Respondents preferred information sources on organic lightening skincare**

Information sources	Frequency	Percentage
Family/friends	278	46%
Television	20	3.3%
Newspaper/Magazine	10	1.6%
Social media platforms	299	49.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>609</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: field survey (2023)

Table 5 indicates that the majority 49.1 % of respondents get organic lightening skin care information from social media platforms, closely followed by 46% of respondents whose choice of information source is family and friends, 3.3% source from the television while 1.6% of respondents source information from newspapers and magazines. The import here simply means that the majority of the selected respondents source information on organic lightening skin care products from the internet precisely social media due to its unprecedented level of interconnectivity and global networking. This however agreed with the finding of De Jong et al. (2020) that consumers of organic skincare products in a bid to get credible information as regards these products are always on the internet to see what other women are saying about different Organic skincare products. Furthermore, looking closely at the result in this table, one will also notice that a large chunk of 46% of respondents also prefer getting organic lightening skincare information from family and friends probably because they consider information from these groups more reliable.

**Table 6: Social media platforms where respondents get organic lightening skincare information.**

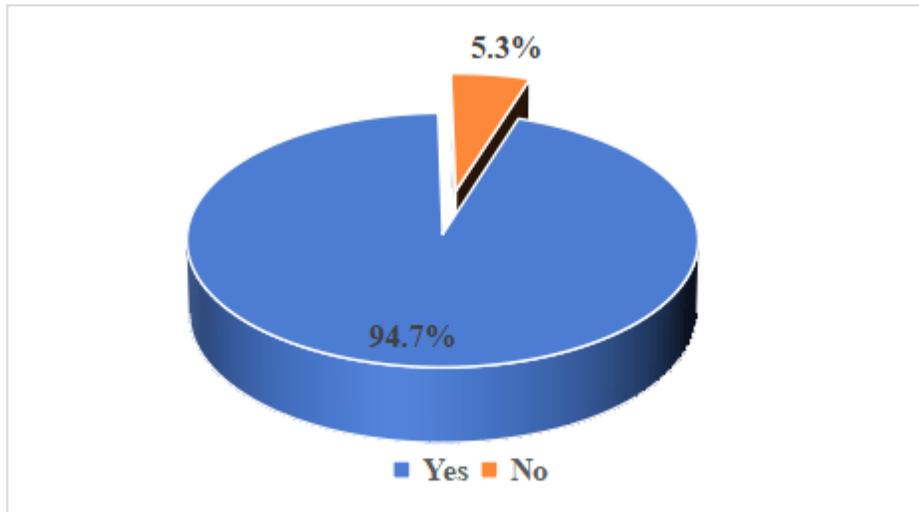
Internet sources	Frequency	Percentage
Instagram	200	32.8%
Tiktok	53	8.7%
Facebook	96	15.8%
You Tube	100	16.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>609</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: field survey (2023)

This table shows social media platforms through which respondents' source organic lightening skin care information. The above table shows that majority 32.8% of respondents source organic lightening skincare information from Instagram, 16.4% from YouTube, 15.8% from Facebook and 8.7% of respondents source information from TikTok. This to a large extent has shown that Instagram is the most used in the sourcing of organic lightening skin care information. This agrees with the finding by Casalo et al., (2018) that

consumers use Instagram to gain information from influencers on organic lightening skincare products to make purchase decisions. This therefore raises concerns about the accuracy and reliability of the information available on these platforms.

**Figure 1: Influence of skin care information sources on respondents' organic lightening products use.**



Source: field survey (2023)

On whether skincare information sources influence respondents' use of organic lightening products, the Majority 94.7% of the respondents said yes, which means exposure to information on these products influences their use of organic lightening products. This however agrees with the assertion by Schmidt and Eisend (2015), that when the information about a brand is exposed to the consumer at different times, it increases the awareness, which eventually influences the purchase behaviour. while a meagre 5.3% of respondents said skincare information sources do not influence their use of organic lighting products.

**Table 7: Skincare information sources that influence respondents' organic lightening product choice**

	Instagram?	Facebook?	Tiktok?	YouTube	Personal network	
			EWOM			
Always	75.8%	7.7%	17.8	5.9%	4.6%	84.7%
	N = 462	N = 47	N=109	N = 36	N=28	N = 516

Occasionally	16.4% N = 100	66.3% N = 404	82% 52.3% N=500	66.0% N=402		14.7% N = 90
Never	7.7% N = 47	20.7% N = 126	0% N=0	7.4% N = 45	43.1% N=263	0.5% N = 3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b> <b>N = 609</b>	<b>100%</b> <b>N = 609</b>	<b>100%</b> <b>100%</b> <b>N = 609</b>	<b>100%</b> <b>N=609</b>		<b>100%</b> <b>N = 609</b>

Source: field survey (2023)

Table 7, aimed to find out the skin care information sources that influence respondents' organic lightening product choices. The majority 84.7% of respondents said that personal network influences their choice decisions always, 82% are occasionally influenced through TikTok, while 43.1% of respondents have never been influenced by any skincare information source. On skincare information sources that majorly influence the purchase decisions of organic lightening products among female civil servants in south-east Nigeria, the data above shows that it is a personal network.

**Table 8: How skincare information sources influence respondents' organic lightening skincare purchase decisions**

	Frequency	Percentage
Advertisements	86	14.1%
Online Photoshopped images/videos	39	6.4%
Conviction through Referrals/recommendations	335	55.0%
On-line testimonials	149	24.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>609</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: field survey (2023)

Table 8, was targeted to find out how skincare information sources influence respondents' organic lightening product purchase decisions. Majority 55.0% of respondents said that conviction through referrals and recommendations from family, friends and associates influences their organic lightening products purchase decisions, 24.5% are influenced by online testimonials, 14.1% through advertisements while 6.4% of respondents affirmed being influenced through online photoshopped images and videos of product users. On how skincare information sources majorly influence the purchase decisions of organic lightening products among female civil servants in Southeast Nigeria, the data above shows it is by conviction through referrals and recommendations by family, friends and associates.

#### Demographic Distribution of In-Depth Interview (IDI) Respondents

State	Designation	Gender	Age	Grade Level
Anambra	Respondent 1	Female	42	5
	Respondent 2	Female	38	10
	Respondent 3	Female	50	15
	Respondent 4	Female	37	6
Ebonyi	Respondent 5	Female	40	7
	Respondent 6	Female	42	9
	Respondent 7	Female	49	16
	Respondent 8	Female	38	6
Imo	Respondent 9	Female	41	5
	Respondent 10	Female	50	15
	Respondent 11	Female	54	16

Respondent 12

Female

46

10

#### 4.2.3. Preferred sources of skincare information among female civil servants in south-east Nigeria

Research Question One measured skincare information sources through which the Respondents are exposed to organic lightening product information. The Respondents were asked three questions to ascertain the preferred sources through which they are exposed to information on organic lightening products, the sources they consider trustworthy for skincare information, and Whether the Respondents considers such sources as credible. All respondents mentioned their preferred sources however, Respondent 6 submitted thus:

I get skincare information from friends and associates who have used the skin care products and can attest to its efficacy (Female, 42yrs, Ebonyi, GL)

Respondent 4 submitted:

My preferred source of organic lightening skincare information is Word of Mouth. Testimonies of my friends and associates are a better source than any other. At least you see the results of such products on them. Though I occasionally source information on different social media platforms, I don't see many of those messages as reliable because I know the producers of such products are out to sell and can make claims just to make sales (Female, 37yrs, Anambra, GL 6).

Significantly, all the respondents agreed that their preferred source of organic lightening product information is referral. Referral is based on testimonials of those that have used such organic products, however, Respondents 12 and 10 combined referrals, with the mass media and the Internet as their preferred sources.

Respondent 12 said:

As a civil servant, my preferred source of organic lightening product information is through social media. Instagram to be precise. There is no type of organic lighting products information you will not see on that platform, though sometimes I also source information from family, friends and colleagues (Female, 45yrs, Imo, GL10).

Respondent 10 said:

For me, my preferred sources are the internet, television and referrals but referrals as a source, are the best. Because you will hear from others who have used and testified to the efficacy of such lightening products (Female, 50yrs, Imo, GL15).

Further probe on the sources they consider as trustworthy for skincare information, almost all the Respondents 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 11, and 12 were at home with family, friends and colleagues as trusted sources. But Respondents 7,8,9,10 consider the social media such as Tiktok, and Instagram as reliable source, while Respondents 9 sees television as a more reliable source. Respondent 1 Who works in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Renewal indicated thus:

I consider information from family, friends and colleagues more trustworthy. Though some of them tell lies o, while some are deceptive about their organic lightening products regimen, majority of them are truthful. So, for me, family and friends are more trusted sources (Female, 42yrs, Anambra, GL5).

Respondent 10 said:

Tiktok for me is the most reliable. I got information on the organic lightening products I am currently using from TikTok, and I am not regretting it (Female, 50yrs, Imo, GL15).

Respondent 7 submitted thus:

Instagram is more reliable (Female, 49yrs, Ebonyi, GL16).

Respondent 8 submitted thus:

Television for me is the most reliable source of skincare information. I am not a social media person. I scarcely browse for skincare information So you see why it's television for me (Female, 38yrs, Ebonyi, GL6).

On whether they consider the skincare information obtained from those sources as credible, All the Respondents affirmed.

Respondent 1:

Yes, I do, if I don't, I wouldn't have said it is a trusted source in the first place (Female, 42yrs, Anambra, GL5).

Respondent 5:

Yes, na, anything trustworthy is believable (Female, 40yrs, Ebonyi, GL7).

Respondent 8:

Yes, I do, (Female, 38yrs, Ebonyi, GL6).

Respondent 8: Sure, I do to an extent! (Female, 50yrs, Imo, GL15).

**How do skincare information sources, influence the organic lightening product purchase decisions of the female civil servants in southeast Nigeria.**

Research Question Two measured the Influence of Skin care information sources on organic lightening product purchase decisions of female civil servants in south East Nigeria. The respondents were asked three questions to ascertain whether their decision to use organic lightening skincare products

was influenced by skincare information sources at their disposal, to find out how the skincare information sources influenced the respondent's organic lightening product purchase decisions, and finally, other factors that influence the respondents organic lightening product purchase decisions aside information sources? Responses among the respondents showed mixed reactions as some Respondents 12, 1, and 6 stated that these sources influence their organic lightening product purchase decisions through online testimonials and adverts. Respondent 9 who disagreed that skincare sources do not influence her purchase decisions argued that anything organic is always expensive as such she does not have the time and resources to waste, all in the name of using organic lightening products.

Respondent 12 stated thus:

These sources influence my purchase decisions. As I mentioned earlier, my preferred source is Instagram. And sometimes family and friends too. In all, these sources determine my organic lightening product decisions especially when they show me what I stand to gain using these products through online testimonials (Female, 46yrs, Imo, GL10).

Respondents 1:

It does. The information I get from family and associates influences my organic lightening product purchase decisions. Most times when I am at a crossroads on what to use, I kind of get help through the information I get from the source I mentioned above. So, in a nutshell, my organic lightening product decisions are influenced by my preferred skincare source (Female, 42yrs, Anambra, GL5).

Respondents 6:

These sources influence my purchase decisions. The images of users I see on social media adverts daily, make me want to buy those products because I want my skin to be as fair and beautiful as theirs. I am a social media freak I source information from Instagram, Tiktok, Facebook, YouTube, just name it! I also belong to the “fairness and beauty” online community (Laughs) (Female, 42yrs, Ebonyi GL9).

Respondents 9:

These sources do not influence my organic lightening product purchase decisions. Shebi is when you have money to buy these products that you will start sourcing information. Organic is so expensive. I am a civil servant and I don't have such money to waste (Female, 41yrs, Imo GL5).

Further probe on other factors that influence the respondent's organic lightening products purchase decisions apart from skincare information sources. Response from the respondents revealed that indeed other factors influence the respondent's organic lightening product purchase decisions like wanting to look beautiful and attract social status, (Respondent 4), getting her desired male partner (Respondent 5) trying to stop her husband from cheating, respondent (Respondent 3) the desire for fair skin (Respondent 2).

Respondent 4 indicated that:

The quest to belong. I found out that fair ladies are favoured more than dark ones in my office. Therefore, I engage in skin lightening because light skin is associated with higher status, privilege, and beauty, so I feel the need to bleach my skin to look beautiful and attract high-status mates. Who no want better thing? (she asked in pidgin English). The above response agrees with the findings of

Fokuo (2009, as cited in Apuke, 2018) (Female, 37yrs, Anambra GL6).

Respondents 5:

The belief is that skin lightening will help me get the desired male partner for marriage. I have been dark for 40 years and am still single. So, I decided to lighten my skin to look attractive and appealing. I will keep trying till it clicks. So, my search for a life partner is what influenced me to use organic lightening products and not skincare information sources (Female, 40yrs, Ebonyi GL7).

Respondents 3:

My husband was always cheating on me with fair ladies. So, I decided to lighten my skin by purchasing organic lightening products to see if he would stop. If not for my predicament, why would I want to bleach my skin? (Female, 50yrs, Anambra, GL 15).

Respondents 2:

Mine was the desire to be fair in complexion. As a kid, I never liked my dark skin colour. So, as I grew up and had something doing, I started toning my skin and today, I am very fair and beautiful. Though I come across skincare information both online and offline, I have never tailored my skincare needs towards any of such information. It's just that I know what is good for me and I go for it. I have never for one used any skincare product based on my exposure to any skincare information sources (Female, 38yrs, Anambra, GL10)

## **Analysis of Research Questions**

The first research question sought to find out the preferred sources through which female civil servants in Southeast Nigeria are influenced to make purchase decisions on organic lightening products. Data in Table 5,6, and Figure 1, indicated that the respondents' preferred sources of organic lightening skincare information are through multiple channels with, family/friends and social media platforms, however, becoming the most recurring at 49.1% and 46% respectively. This was reaffirmed by the In-depth interview which showed that social media was the most recurring preferred source of organic lightening product information, followed by television, newspapers and magazines. Against this backdrop, it is safe to conclude that majority of female civil servants' in southeast Nigeria preferred sources of organic lightening skin care information is family and friends.

In research question two, the researcher sought to determine how information sources influence female civil servants' purchase decisions of organic lightening products. Data in Tables 7 and 8 indicate that majority 55.0% of respondents' purchase decisions are influenced by convictions through referrals and recommendations from family, friends and associates. It was closely followed by 24.5% of female civil servants who said skincare information sources influenced them through online testimonials. The data above shows that consumers are majorly influenced through referrals and recommendations by family, friends and associates.

To probe further into how skincare information sources, influence the purchase decisions of female civil servants in South East Nigeria, the interview was held with 12 selected respondents. The interview revealed that the majority of the interviewees were of the view that their purchase decisions were influenced by social media adverts and testimonials. The study also found during the interview session that other factors such as, quest for higher status, privilege, and beauty, belief that skin lightening will help them get the desired male partner for marriage, and lastly, the desire to be fair in complexion etc. influence female civil servants' purchase decisions.

Therefore, the female civil servants in South East purchase decisions are influenced by convictions, referrals and recommendations by family friends and associates, online testimonials and most importantly through other factors like the belief of attracting high-status mates through skin lightening, to get a desired life partner among many others. The

findings during in-depth interviews therefore agree with the findings of Apuke (2018) that women engage in skin lightening because light skin is associated with higher status, privilege, and beauty, thus, women feel the need to bleach their skin to look beautiful and attract high-status mates.

### **Conclusion**

The study used relevant research questions to establish the influence of information sources on purchase decisions of organic lightening products among female civil servants in southeast Nigeria. It concludes that female civil servants' purchase decisions are influenced by their preferred sources which are; family/friends and then social media platforms. Among the social media platforms, it was discovered that Instagram was used most as also found by (Casalo et al; 2018; Chinedu, Azuh, Osamor & Iweala; 2019) that consumers use Instagram to gain information from influencers on organic lightening skincare products to make purchase decisions. Also, using the in-depth- interview, it was found that purchase decisions are influenced by convictions, referrals and recommendations by family friends and associates, online testimonials and most importantly through other factors like the belief of attracting high-status mates through skin lightening, to get a desired life partner among many others.

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are put forward:

- a. This study, however, recommends that both the online and offline information sources should be censored, this is necessary to help checkmate products' false claims that could endanger consumers' lives and expose them to health risks.
- b. Organic lightening products produced by both companies and roadside vendors should be duly registered with the regulatory agency: National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC). It is not enough to be registered with NAFDAC; there should be periodic monitoring of these products.

The following suggestions are made for future studies on the subject of this study and related subjects:

1. Future repeat of this study may seek to expand the scope in terms of geography, sample size and variables studied. This may not only deepen insight into the subject of investigation but could also possibly bring about more accurate results leading to more proper generalization.
2. This study should be replicated in other geopolitical zones of the country where such a study has not been recently conducted. This will make for a useful comparison of results for more insight into the subject matter.
3. A content analysis version of this study may be important with the objective being to understand the health risks involved in the use of skin-lightening products among women especially female civil servants in South-East Nigeria. Such will further knowledge in the area of behaviour change communication about lightening / bleaching product use.

In the course of the study, the researchers however, faced logistics and welfare challenges during their visits to study areas and were also challenged by time constraints occurring during the distribution and collation of research instruments. This challenge was however resolved by the benevolence afforded the researchers by kindhearted residents in the areas.

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