

CRISIS COMMUNICATION IN GOVERNANCE: PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF TINUBU'S STATE OF EMERGENCY IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract: This study examined government public relations and crisis Government management: Evaluating public perceptions of Tinubu's state of emergency Public declaration in Rivers State, Nigeria. The situation crisis communication theory Relations, (SCCT) was anchored in this study. This study adopted a qualitative research Crisis method using email interviews to explore public perceptions of President Tinubu's Management, state of emergency declaration in Rivers State. The population of the study Public comprised 150 communication experts, political analysts, government officials, Perceptions, journalists, and selected members of the public in Rivers State who have engaged Tinubu's with or been affected by the declaration. A sample size of 15 respondents was State of selected to ensure an in-depth understanding of diverse perspectives. The sampling Emergency technique employed was purposive sampling and data collection was conducted Declaration, through structured open-ended questions sent via email, enabling respondents to Rivers State, provide detailed insights at their convenience. The responses were analysed using Nigeria. thematic analysis, where recurring themes and patterns in the narratives are identified and interpreted to understand the dominant perceptions, concerns, and implications of the government's crisis communication strategies. The study found that the Nigerian government employed multiple public relations strategies in managing the crisis, including official press statements, televised addresses, and social media engagement. However, the communication approach was predominantly reactive rather than proactive, with government messaging intensifying only after public outcry. The government framed the state of emergency as a security-driven intervention, but a lack of prior stakeholder engagement weakened public confidence. The study concluded that the study highlights that the Nigerian government's crisis communication approach during the state of emergency in Rivers State was largely reactive, limiting its effectiveness in gaining public support and managing misinformation. A more proactive, transparent, and inclusive communication strategy is essential for fostering public trust and ensuring that crisis interventions are perceived as legitimate and necessary. The study recommended that the government should adopt a proactive crisis communication strategy that emphasizes transparency, timely information dissemination, and stakeholder engagement.

Keywords: Government Public Relations, Crisis Management, Public Perception, State of Emergency, Rivers State

Introduction

Government public relations (GPR) plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and managing crises in modern governance. Effective crisis management relies on strategic communication to maintain public trust and legitimacy (Coombs, 2019). In Nigeria, public relations efforts have been instrumental in addressing socio-political challenges, especially in times of emergency declarations. The effectiveness of such efforts is contingent on government credibility, media transparency, and citizens' trust in governance (Griffin, 2020). The declaration of a state of emergency by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu in Rivers State has sparked widespread reactions. This political move was prompted by escalating security concerns, political instability, and economic disruptions in the state. While emergency declarations are constitutional provisions meant to restore law and order, their implementation often raises questions about political intent, effectiveness, and public acceptance (Amodu, 2021). Given the region's historical volatility, evaluating public perceptions of the declaration is essential for understanding its implications.

In crisis situations, government public relations serves as a bridge between authorities and citizens. It involves crafting messages that reassure the public, reduce panic, and foster cooperation (Fearn-Banks, 2016). Transparency, consistency, and responsiveness are critical in managing public reactions to government decisions. However, in Nigeria, government communication has been criticized for inefficiency, lack of clarity, and delayed responses during crises (Nwagbara, 2022). Public perception of government actions is largely shaped by the effectiveness of communication strategies. Trust in government institutions influences how citizens interpret emergency measures (Kim & Krishna, 2017). In Rivers State, a history of political conflicts and governance challenges has led to scepticism toward federal interventions. Assessing how the public perceives Tinubu's emergency declaration will reveal whether it is seen as a necessity or a politically motivated decision.

Mass media and digital platforms play a pivotal role in shaping public discourse on government policies. Social media amplifies both official narratives and counter-narratives, influencing opinions on government interventions (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2021). In Nigeria, misinformation and disinformation often distort public understanding of political decisions, making media literacy essential in crisis communication. Analysing media coverage and public responses will provide insights into the role of information dissemination in shaping perceptions.

The effectiveness of a government's crisis communication strategy determines how well its policies are received. Strategies such as press briefings, stakeholder engagement, and public consultations help to mitigate opposition (Coombs, 2019). However, if communication is perceived as one-sided or coercive, it may deepen public distrust. This study examines the strategies employed by the Nigerian government in justifying the state of emergency in Rivers State.

Beyond immediate crisis management, emergency declarations often have long-term political consequences. Such decisions can affect governance structures, electoral processes, and power

dynamics within the affected region (Ekundayo, 2020). Critics argue that emergency powers can be exploited for political gains, especially in states with opposition-led governments. This study explores whether Tinubu's declaration is viewed as a genuine security measure or a strategic political manoeuvre.

A state of emergency impacts businesses, local governance, and civil liberties. In Rivers State, an economic hub in Nigeria, the declaration could disrupt commercial activities and investor confidence (Ojo & Akinola, 2022). Additionally, restrictions on movement and heightened security measures may affect residents' daily lives. Public perception of these socio-economic effects will be critical in assessing the overall acceptance of the policy.

Understanding public perceptions of Tinubu's emergency declaration is essential for evaluating the effectiveness of government crisis communication. The findings will contribute to discussions on governance transparency, political accountability, and public relations strategies in Nigeria. Moreover, the study will offer recommendations for improving government communication and fostering public trust in crisis situations.

Statement of the Problem

Government public relations (GPR) is a critical tool for managing crises, yet its effectiveness in Nigeria has been widely debated. The declaration of a state of emergency in Rivers State by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has generated mixed reactions, with concerns about its necessity, execution, and underlying political motives. While the federal government justifies the move as a security intervention to curb rising instability, critics argue that such declarations can be exploited for political advantage, suppressing opposition and civil liberties. Public trust in government interventions is often shaped by the transparency and effectiveness of crisis communication strategies. However, in Nigeria, government responses to crises are frequently met with scepticism due to past inconsistencies, misinformation, and a lack of citizen engagement. Given Rivers State's history of political turbulence and economic significance, public perception of this emergency declaration could influence both local stability and national governance discourse.

Despite the strategic importance of public relations in crisis communication, there is limited empirical research on how Nigerians perceive government-imposed emergency measures, particularly within the context of Rivers State. The effectiveness of crisis communication depends not only on message clarity but also on citizens' trust in governance, media framing, and political dynamics. With social media playing an increasing role in shaping public discourse, misinformation and alternative narratives could either legitimize or delegitimize the government's stance. This study fills this knowledge gap by evaluating public perceptions of Tinubu's emergency declaration, assessing the government's communication approach, and determining whether the policy is seen as a legitimate security measure or a politically motivated act. By understanding these perspectives, the study will provide insights into the effectiveness of government crisis communication and its impact on public trust and governance in Nigeria.

This study achieves three key objectives. First, it seeks to examine public perceptions of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's state of emergency declaration in Rivers State, analysing whether it is viewed as a necessary security measure or a politically motivated decision. Second, it aims to assess the effectiveness of the government's public relations and crisis communication strategies in managing public reactions, focusing on transparency, media engagement, and trustbuilding efforts. Finally, the study intends to evaluate the broader socio-political and economic implications of the emergency declaration, exploring its impact on governance, stability, and public confidence in government interventions.

Government Public Relations and Crisis Communication

Government public relations (GPR) refers to the strategic communication efforts employed by public institutions to engage with citizens, shape public perception, and manage crises effectively (Coombs, 2019). During crises, governments rely on PR strategies to disseminate timely information, reduce public panic, and maintain credibility. Effective crisis communication requires transparency, consistency, and responsiveness to public concerns (FearnBanks, 2016). In Nigeria, however, government communication has often been criticized for lack of clarity, delayed responses, and failure to address public concerns, which exacerbates distrust and misinformation (Nwagbara, 2022). The credibility of government PR depends on the ability to provide factual, clear, and reassuring information during crises.

Crisis communication theories highlight the importance of proactive engagement with stakeholders. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) suggests that organizations, including governments, must adopt tailored communication strategies based on the severity of the crisis and public sentiment (Coombs, 2007). In the case of Rivers State, the federal government's PR strategies will determine whether the emergency declaration is perceived as a necessary intervention or an overreach of executive power. Trust in government communication is influenced by historical experiences, media framing, and the level of public participation in decision-making processes (Kim & Krishna, 2017).

Moreover, the role of social media in shaping crisis narratives cannot be overlooked. Digital platforms enable rapid information dissemination, but they also amplify misinformation and alternative narratives that challenge government positions (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2021). In a politically charged environment like Nigeria, social media reactions can either legitimize or delegitimize government actions. This underscores the need for strategic PR approaches that engage citizens through multiple communication channels, fostering public trust and reducing opposition to emergency measures.

Public Perception and Trust in Government Interventions

Public perception of government interventions is shaped by factors such as trust in leadership, transparency, media influence, and historical governance patterns (Kim & Krishna, 2017). In democratic societies, governments must justify emergency measures to maintain legitimacy and public

confidence. When decisions such as a state of emergency appear politically motivated, they can trigger resistance, civil unrest, and a decline in trust (Ekundayo, 2020). In Rivers State, where political tensions have historically influenced governance, public reactions to Tinubu's emergency declaration will depend on whether it is seen as a genuine security response or a tool for political control.

The concept of political trust is central to understanding public responses to crisis interventions. Trust in government is built through consistent and transparent communication, fair governance practices, and responsiveness to public concerns

(Griffin, 2020). In Nigeria, declining trust in government institutions due to corruption, poor governance, and mismanagement has led to scepticism toward federal interventions (Nwagbara, 2022). If citizens believe that the emergency declaration serves partisan interests rather than public security, they may resist compliance or mobilize against the policy. Understanding public trust levels will help evaluate the success or failure of government crisis management strategies.

Furthermore, public perception is influenced by media narratives and framing. The media plays a crucial role in shaping how people interpret government actions, whether positively or negatively (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2021). Traditional and digital media platforms influence discourse on policy decisions, reinforcing or challenging official government positions. If the media presents the emergency declaration as a necessary security measure, public acceptance may increase. However, if opposition voices dominate the narrative, scepticism and resistance may grow. Analysing media representations and public sentiments will provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of government crisis communication.

Political and Socio-Economic Implications of Emergency Declarations

Emergency declarations have far-reaching political and socio-economic implications. Politically, such declarations can alter governance structures, affect electoral processes, and shift power dynamics within a state (Ekundayo, 2020). In Nigeria, emergency powers have been used in the past to address security crises, but they have also sparked debates on executive overreach and political manoeuvring. If Tinubu's declaration is perceived as a means to suppress opposition, it could lead to heightened political tensions and undermine democratic stability in Rivers State. Understanding the political implications will provide insights into the broader governance challenges associated with emergency measures. Socio-economically, emergency declarations often disrupt businesses, restrict movement, and alter investment climates (Ojo & Akinola, 2022). Rivers State, a key economic hub in Nigeria, relies on commercial activities, oil production, and trade. A prolonged state of emergency could deter investors, reduce economic output, and negatively impact livelihoods. Additionally, restrictions on civil liberties, such as curfews and heightened security measures, may affect residents' daily activities and well-being. Assessing the socio-economic effects will help determine whether the emergency declaration achieves its intended security objectives or imposes undue hardships on the population. Moreover, emergency measures can impact civilmilitary relations and human rights.

Security forces deployed during emergencies sometimes engage in excessive force, leading to human rights violations (Amodu, 2021). If residents of Rivers State experience repression under emergency rule, public opposition may intensify, leading to protests or resistance. Effective crisis management requires a balance between maintaining security and upholding citizens' rights. This study will evaluate how emergency measures affect public freedoms and governance, providing recommendations for balancing security with democratic accountability.

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

This theory was propounded by W. Timothy Coombs in 2007. It provides a framework for understanding how organizations, including governments, should respond to crises based on the nature of the crisis and public perception (Coombs, 2007). SCCT is based on the assumption that crisis communication strategies should be tailored to the level of responsibility attributed to the crisis. Coombs (2019) categorizes crises into victim crises (where the organization is not at fault), accidental crises (where the event was unintentional), and preventable crises (where the organization is at fault). The theory suggests that governments should use denial strategies for false accusations, diminishment strategies to reduce perceived responsibility, and rebuilding strategies (such as apologies and corrective actions) when at fault (Coombs, 2019). It assumes that effective crisis communication mitigates public backlash and restores credibility.

Critics argue that SCCT focuses heavily on response strategies while underestimating the role of pre-crisis planning and long-term trustbuilding (Griffin, 2020). Additionally, it does not fully account for the role of digital media in crisis perception, where misinformation can rapidly shape public opinion beyond the government's control (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2021). Some scholars also contend that crisis response should be more dynamic and adaptable, rather than fitting neatly into predefined categories.

SCCT is relevant to this study as it provides a framework for analysing how the Nigerian government's public relations strategies influence public perceptions of President Tinubu's state of emergency declaration in Rivers State. By assessing whether the government's communication aligns with denial, diminishment, or rebuilding strategies, the study can evaluate how effectively public trust is managed during the crisis. Additionally, the theory helps in understanding how media framing and public sentiment shape crisis outcomes, making it essential for examining governance and crisis communication in Nigeria.

Empirical Review

Amodu (2021) examined Public Relations and Political Communication in Nigeria: Strategies and Challenges. This study examined the role of public relations in political communication and crisis management in Nigeria, focusing on the effectiveness of government communication strategies during political crises. A qualitative research design was adopted, using content analysis of government statements, media reports, and interviews with political analysts and communication experts. The study found that government public relations in Nigeria is often reactive rather than proactive, leading

to misinformation, public distrust, and ineffective crisis management. It also highlighted the influence of media framing in shaping public perceptions of government policies. Similarity with the current study:

Both studies focus on government public relations and crisis communication in Nigeria, examining how government strategies influence public perception during crises. Dissimilarity with the current study: the reviewed study focused broadly on political communication in Nigeria, while the current study specifically evaluates public perceptions of Tinubu's state of emergency declaration in Rivers State. Additionally, the current study adopts a mixed methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data. Kim and Krishna (2017) assessed Public Trust in Government: The Role of Communication and Transparency. This study analysed the relationship between government communication strategies, transparency, and public trust in governance. A survey research method was employed, collecting data from 1,200 respondents across different regions, analysing their perceptions of government transparency and communication effectiveness. The study found that transparent and consistent government communication significantly enhances public trust. Conversely, lack of openness and perceived political manipulation reduce citizens' confidence in government interventions. Similarity with the current study:

Both studies assess how government communication affects public trust and perception. They also explore the role of crisis communication in governance. Dissimilarity with the current study: the reviewed study was conducted in a broad governance context, without focusing on crisis situations or emergency declarations. The current study specifically evaluates a crisis scenario (Tinubu's state of emergency declaration) within a Nigerian political and socio-economic framework.

Ojo and Akinola (2022) ascertained *Economic Implications of Political Instability in Nigeria: A Case Study of Rivers State*. The study analysed the socio-economic impact of political instability in Rivers State, examining how government policies and crises affect economic activities, businesses, and investor confidence. A mixed methods approach was used, combining economic data analysis with interviews from business owners and government officials in Rivers State. The study found that political instability leads to reduced business activities, capital flight, and economic downturns. It also established that public perception of government actions significantly influences investor confidence and business operations. Similarity with the current study: Both studies focus on Rivers State and examine the socio-economic implications of government actions on the public. They also explore how government policies influence public sentiment and stability. Dissimilarity with the current study: While the reviewed study broadly examined political instability and economic implications, the current study specifically evaluates the public perception of Tinubu's emergency declaration and its impact on governance and crisis management.

Gap Identification

The literature review has explored key aspects of government public relations and crisis management, particularly in the Nigerian context. Studies by Amodu (2021) and Kim and Krishna (2017) highlight

the role of government communication in shaping public trust, emphasizing the need for transparency and strategic messaging during crises. Similarly, Ojo and Akinola (2022) examined the socioeconomic implications of political instability, demonstrating how government policies impact public perception and economic stability. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) by Coombs (2007) provides a theoretical foundation for assessing government crisis responses, categorising strategies into denial, diminishment, and rebuilding approaches. However, despite these contributions, existing studies have not specifically examined public perceptions of President Tinubu's state of emergency declaration in Rivers State, particularly in relation to political trust, media framing, and socio-economic consequences. Additionally, while past research acknowledges the role of digital media in crisis communication, there is a lack of empirical studies assessing its influence on crisis response in Nigeria's contemporary political landscape. This study fills these gaps by offering a localized, data-driven analysis of public reactions to the emergency declaration, assessing the effectiveness of government PR strategies, and examining the role of traditional and digital media in shaping public discourse.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research method using email interviews to explore public perceptions of President Tinubu's state of emergency declaration in Rivers State. The population of the study comprised 150 communication experts, political analysts, government officials, journalists and selected members of the public in Rivers State who have engaged with or been affected by the declaration. A sample size of 15 respondents was selected to ensure an in-depth understanding of diverse perspectives. The sampling technique employed was purposive sampling, which allows the selection of participants based on their expertise, involvement in political discourse and accessibility for email interviews. Data collection was conducted through structured open-ended questions sent via email, enabling respondents to provide detailed insights at their convenience. The responses are analysed using thematic analysis, where recurring themes and patterns in the narratives are identified and interpreted to understand the dominant perceptions, concerns, and implications of the government's crisis communication strategies. This approach ensures a rich, contextual analysis of public sentiment and government PR effectiveness in crisis management.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Themes were deduced deductively following the research objectives. The following themes were deduced: Government Public Relations Strategies in Crisis Communication; Public Perception and Trust in Government Communication; and Impact of Media Framing on Crisis Communication. These were presented and discussed below:

Government Public Relations Strategies in Crisis Communication

This theme examines the specific communication strategies employed by the Nigerian government in managing the state of emergency declaration in Rivers State. It explores whether the government used proactive, reactive, or crisis-specific messaging to shape public perception and mitigate concerns.

Response from a Political Analysts: The Nigerian government, through its public relations mechanisms, has relied on both traditional and digital media to justify the state of emergency in Rivers State. Official press releases and televised addresses have emphasised the necessity of the declaration to restore security and economic stability. However, the strategy appears largely reactive rather than proactive. Instead of engaging in preemptive communication to address rising tensions, the government only intensified its public relations efforts after public outcry. This approach has left many citizens sceptical about the sincerity of the government's intentions. Another significant strategy employed is the framing of the declaration as a 'security-driven intervention.' Government spokespersons have repeatedly stressed that the decision was not politically motivated but rather aimed at protecting lives and property. This messaging is consistent across official channels, but the lack of engagement with key stakeholders before the announcement has contributed to criticism from opposition parties and civil society organizations.

Additionally, the government has leveraged social media platforms to disseminate official statements and counter misinformation. However, engagement on these platforms has been largely one-sided, with minimal direct interaction with concerned citizens. The absence of a two-way communication model reduces the effectiveness of this strategy, as citizens feel unheard despite the government's efforts to control the narrative.

Overall, while the government has utilized multiple public relations tools, the crisis communication strategy lacks transparency and inclusivity. Effective crisis communication should not only involve information dissemination but also public engagement, trustbuilding, and proactive reputation management, all of which seem to be inadequately addressed in this case.

Public Perception and Trust in Government Communication

This theme focuses on how citizens, media professionals, and political analysts perceive the government's crisis communication. It evaluates levels of trust, scepticism, or misinformation surrounding the emergency declaration and how these perceptions influence public confidence in governance. Response from a Civil Society Representatives: The perception of the government's communication regarding the state of emergency is highly polarized. Some citizens view it as a necessary step to curb insecurity, while others see it as an attempt to assert political dominance. This divide stems from a general distrust in government decisions, particularly when such actions appear abrupt and lack extensive public consultation. Many people believe that if the government had engaged in transparent dialogue before the declaration, public trust would have been higher. Furthermore, the credibility of government messaging has been questioned due to contradictory statements from different officials. While some representatives emphasize security concerns, others suggest economic motivations.

This inconsistency makes it difficult for the public to discern the true intent behind the declaration, fuelling speculations and conspiracy theories.

Trust in government communication has also been eroded by the lack of clarity on implementation strategies. Citizens and businesses are uncertain about how the emergency measures will be enforced, the duration of restrictions, and their impact on daily life. The absence of well-defined guidelines further amplifies public scepticism and anxiety. To restore trust, the government must adopt a more transparent and inclusive communication approach. Town hall meetings, interactive media sessions, and consultations with key community stakeholders could help bridge the trust gap. Without such measures, the public perception of the emergency declaration may continue to be dominated by doubts and fears rather than an informed understanding of its intended benefits.

Impact of Media Framing on Crisis Communication

This theme analyses the role of traditional and digital media in shaping public discourse about the state of emergency. It investigates how media coverage, online discussions, and government narratives influence public sentiment, potential misinformation, and the effectiveness of crisis communication strategies. Response from a Media Experts: Media framing has played a crucial role in shaping public perception of the state of emergency declaration. Government-aligned media outlets have largely framed the declaration as a 'necessary intervention' to prevent security threats, while opposition-friendly platforms have presented it as an 'authoritarian overreach.' These contrasting narratives influence how citizens interpret the government's motives and the legitimacy of the crisis response.

Social media has amplified both government messaging and public dissent. On platforms like Twitter and Facebook, trending hashtags have reflected divided opinions, with some users supporting the intervention and others condemning it as politically motivated. The spread of misinformation and unverified claims has further complicated the communication landscape, making it difficult for citizens to separate facts from propaganda.

International media coverage has also shaped perceptions, as global news outlets have reported on the emergency declaration with varying degrees of criticism. Some reports highlight Nigeria's ongoing security challenges to justify the action, while others raise concerns about potential human rights violations. The way these stories are framed influences not just domestic public opinion but also foreign diplomatic relations and investor confidence.

For effective crisis communication, the government must actively engage with the media rather than merely issuing statements. Allowing independent journalists to cover the crisis transparently, addressing misinformation promptly, and utilizing fact-checking platforms would help manage public discourse more effectively. Without these efforts, media framing will continue to dictate public sentiment, often in ways that may not align with the government's intended message.

Discussion of Findings

The study found that the Nigerian government employed multiple public relations strategies in managing the crisis, including official press statements, televised addresses, and social media engagement. However, the communication approach was predominantly reactive rather than

proactive, with government messaging intensifying only after public outcry. The government framed the state of emergency as a security-driven intervention, but a lack of prior stakeholder engagement weakened public confidence. Additionally, while social media was used to disseminate information and counter misinformation, its effectiveness was limited by minimal direct engagement with citizens. The absence of a two-way communication model hindered trust-building, making the PR strategy less effective in crisis management. The reviewed study by Amodu (2021) on government communication and public trust supports the finding that reactive crisis communication weakens public confidence, as it emphasizes the importance of proactive messaging and stakeholder engagement in governance. This aligns with the study's observation that the Nigerian government's delayed and one-sided approach to public relations during the state of emergency declaration limited its effectiveness in crisis management. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) by Coombs (2007) supports the finding that the Nigerian government's crisis response was predominantly reactive rather than proactive, as the theory emphasizes the importance of selecting appropriate crisis response strategies to protect an organization's reputation. SCCT suggests that proactive communication and stakeholder engagement reduce reputational damage, aligning with this study's observation that the lack of early government communication weakened public trust in the state of emergency declaration. The finding that the Nigerian government's crisis communication was reactive rather than proactive implies that a failure to adopt proactive crisis communication strategies could lead to increased public distrust, misinformation, and ineffective policy implementation. To improve crisis response, the government must embrace early engagement, transparency, and participatory communication that allows for timely information dissemination and stakeholder involvement.

The study revealed that public perception of the state of emergency declaration was highly polarized. While some citizens believed the measure was necessary to address insecurity, others viewed it as a politically motivated decision. The lack of transparency in government communication further deepened distrust, as inconsistent messaging from different officials created confusion about the true intent behind the declaration. Citizens also expressed concerns over unclear implementation strategies, as there was no concrete plan on how the emergency measures would affect businesses, governance, and daily life. To regain public trust, the study suggests that the government should adopt a more transparent and participatory communication approach, involving direct engagement with community stakeholders and clear, consistent messaging. The study by Kim and Krishna (2017) on public trust in crisis communication strategies reinforces the finding that inconsistent messaging from government officials reduces credibility and fuels public scepticism. Their research highlights that transparency and uniform messaging are crucial in maintaining trust, which directly correlates with the challenges identified in this study, where conflicting narratives from government representatives led to uncertainty and mistrust.

SCCT also backs the finding that inconsistent messaging from government officials contributed to public scepticism, as it underscores the need for clarity, transparency, and message consistency in crisis

communication. According to the theory, crises require a well-structured response that reassures the public and maintains credibility; however, this study found that contradictory government narratives created confusion, reducing the effectiveness of its crisis communication efforts. The finding that inconsistent messaging eroded public trust implies that lack of clarity and coherence in government communication can result in confusion, scepticism, and resistance to crisis policies. To mitigate this, government agencies should develop a unified crisis communication framework, ensuring that all spokespersons convey consistent, factual, and well-structured messages to maintain public confidence and compliance.

The study found that media framing played a significant role in shaping public opinion on the state of emergency declaration. Government-aligned media framed the declaration as a necessary intervention to maintain security, while opposition-friendly platforms framed it as an overreach of power. Social media platforms further intensified the debate, with both progovernment narratives and critical perspectives gaining traction. The rapid spread of misinformation and speculation complicated public understanding of the crisis, making it difficult for citizens to discern facts from propaganda. Additionally, international media coverage influenced both domestic and foreign perceptions, with some outlets supporting the government's stance while others raised concerns over human rights and democratic stability. The findings suggest that the government needs to engage more actively with the media, counter misinformation promptly, and facilitate transparent journalism to ensure a balanced public discourse. The reviewed study by Ojo and Akinola (2022) on media influence in political crises validates the finding that media framing significantly shapes public opinion on government decisions. Their research illustrates how both traditional and digital media platforms construct narratives that either support or oppose government policies, mirroring this study's findings on how different media outlets framed the state of emergency declaration in Rivers State, thereby influencing public discourse and perception. SCCT further supports the finding that media framing plays a crucial role in shaping public perception, as the theory categorizes crisis response strategies into denial, diminishment, and rebuilding approaches, all of which can be influenced by media representation. The study found that government-aligned media framed the state of emergency as a security necessity, while opposition platforms framed it as an authoritarian move, demonstrating how media narratives can either reinforce or challenge government crisis communication strategies in line with SCCT's propositions. The finding that media framing significantly influenced public opinion implies that uncontrolled narratives can either support or undermine government crisis management efforts, potentially escalating public dissent or misinformation. To counteract this, the government should actively engage with both mainstream and digital media, utilizing fact-based communication strategies, media literacy campaigns, and real-time responses to misinformation to maintain control over public discourse.

Conclusion

The study highlights that the Nigerian government's crisis communication approach during the state of emergency in Rivers State was largely reactive, limiting its effectiveness in gaining public support and managing misinformation. A more proactive, transparent, and inclusive communication strategy is essential for fostering public trust and ensuring that crisis interventions are perceived as legitimate and necessary.

In summary, the study establishes that inconsistent messaging and a lack of transparency significantly weakened public trust

in government communication regarding the state of emergency. To enhance credibility and public confidence, government agencies must adopt a unified, clear, and participatory communication approach that keeps citizens well-informed and reassured during crises. The study concludes that media framing played a critical role in shaping public opinion on the state of emergency, with competing narratives influencing perceptions of government actions. For crisis communication to be effective, the government must actively engage with both traditional and digital media, ensuring factual reporting, addressing misinformation, and fostering balanced public discourse to maintain social stability and trust.

This study contributes to knowledge by providing empirical insights into the effectiveness of government public relations strategies in crisis management, specifically in the context of President Tinubu's state of emergency declaration in Rivers State. It highlights the limitations of reactive crisis communication, emphasizing the need for a more proactive, transparent, and participatory approach to governance during emergencies. Additionally, the study expands understanding of public perception and trust in government messaging, demonstrating how inconsistencies and lack of transparency weaken credibility and compliance. Furthermore, it enriches literature on media framing in crisis communication, revealing the significant role of both traditional and digital media in shaping public opinion and influencing policy reception. By integrating Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), the study provides a theoretical foundation for improving government crisis communication strategies, offering recommendations that can enhance policy implementation, media engagement, and public trust in governance.

Recommendations

In view of the findings from the work, the following recommendations have been made.

- 1) The government should adopt a proactive crisis communication strategy that emphasizes transparency, timely information dissemination, and stakeholder engagement.
- 2) Government agencies should ensure message consistency and clarity by implementing a unified communication framework during crises to maintain public trust.
- 3) The government should actively collaborate with media organizations to promote fact-based reporting and counter misinformation through strategic media engagement.

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