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Appraisal of Crisis Communication on National Security in Nigeria: A Conceptual Gap Analysis

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Abstract
This study examines crisis communication strategies in managing national security challenges in Nigeria. The country has experienced persistent security threats, including insurgency, terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, communal conflicts, and civil unrest. Effective crisis communication is essential in such contexts to maintain public trust, reduce misinformation, and enhance coordinated security responses. Using a qualitative analytical approach, this paper evaluates existing communication frameworks, identifies key challenges, and assesses their implications for public perception and national stability. The study integrates theoretical perspectives, including Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), Image Restoration Theory, and Agenda-Setting Theory, to analyse Nigeria's crisis communication practices. Findings reveal that while official communication structures exist, issues such as delayed information dissemination, lack of transparency, inconsistent messaging, and weak inter-agency coordination undermine effectiveness. This study employs a qualitative research design that relies on secondary data sources, including academic journals, policy documents, media reports, and government publications. Analytical and descriptive methods are used to evaluate patterns in crisis communication practices in Nigeria. The paper recommends establishing a centralised crisis communication framework, enhancing transparency, improving spokesperson training, strengthening inter-agency collaboration, and strategically using digital media. Strengthening these areas is vital for improving national security governance and rebuilding public trust.

Keywords: Crisis Communication; National Security; Nigeria; Public Trust; Media; Security Agencies; Misinformation; Government Communication.

Introduction

An essential part of national security governance is crisis communication. The capacity of government institutions to communicate effectively during crises has a substantial impact on national stability, public trust, and crisis outcomes in governments that frequently face security challenges. The Boko Haram insurgency, banditry in the North-West, farmer-herder disputes, militancy in the Niger Delta, and civic unrest like the #EndSARS rallies are just a few of the security issues Nigeria has seen.

Nigeria is a bilingual country with state administrations in each of its geographical zones and a federal government at the national level. The Hausas in the north, the Igbos in the east, and the Yorubas in the west are its three main ethnic groupings. Even though almost 500 languages are spoken there. At the same time, English has been recognised as a universal language of communication, meaning that all citizens must be able to speak and use it, regardless of their native tongue.

Aside from English being the official language, it is spoken less frequently among those with lower levels of education and those living in rural areas. Other prominent languages spoken are Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Fulfulde, Ibibio, Kanuri, and Tiv.

Communication tactics are just as important as military and intelligence actions in influencing public opinion, controlling panic, dispelling false information, and encouraging collaboration between the people and the government, as they are in handling security concerns. Recurring disputes over government comments made during emergencies, however, point to flaws in Nigeria's crisis communication system. Recurrent crises have exposed delays, contradictions, and credibility gaps in official communications despite the existence of institutional communication channels within Nigeria's security architecture. Government initiatives are frequently hampered by conflicting reports from agencies, a lack of openness, and the quick dissemination of false information via digital channels. The impact of these communication gaps on national stability and public trust has not been sufficiently empirically examined.

Nigeria's peace and security issues, which have gained international attention, continue to draw attention. However, the nation survives thanks to the influence and power of communication, which has been utilised in part to safeguard its citizens' lives and property. Using a communication instrument affects credibility, clarity, and interpersonal connections.

The communication tools, through their model, provide a simplified overview of their main components and their interactions, using a coding system to convey information to security operatives for the protection and benefit of Nigerians.

Nigerians, as of today, are doing a lot to ensure that their peace and security are not affected; they ensure they are connected to sources of information, where timely and accurate communication is made available to them as a priority, aided by subscription to platforms that provide up-to-date information.

Even amid the frenzy of social media, one would discover that security information is constantly shared on platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, and

Facebook, among others. (Pop messages and ads are used to disseminate information to its users in the country at large. (Pop messages and ads are used to disseminate information to its users in the country at large. The majority of Nigerians use their phones to read or listen to news or watch entertainment videos on platforms they subscribe to, which supports the affordability and accessibility of communication in the nation.

The contrast between what is experimentally observed or practised in Nigeria's national security setting and what is theoretically known about crisis communication is examined through conceptual gap analysis. Identifying these gaps helps focus research on topics that need theoretical refinement, policy intervention, and real-world application.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To critically evaluate crisis communication strategies in Nigeria's national security management.
2. Examine existing crisis communication frameworks.
3. Assess their effectiveness during major security crises.
4. Identify structural and operational challenges.
5. Evaluate media influence on public perception
6. Propose policy-driven recommendations.

Crisis Communication and National Security Fundamentals:

Frameworks for comprehending strategic responses to disasters and re-establishing public trust are offered by crisis communication theories, including Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Image Restoration Theory (Coombs, 2007; Benoit, 1997). According to these beliefs, timely, precise, and crisis-specific communication is essential.

With strategic, timely, and accurate information dissemination to the public, stakeholders, and international partners during emergencies to maintain public order, ensure the continuity of government, and protect national interests, it is a fundamental pillar of a resilient, informed nation in an era of rapid information flow and emerging digital threats.

SCCT emphasises matching response strategies to the level of responsibility and public perception. provides a framework for protecting an organisation's reputation by matching crisis response strategies to the level of responsibility and public perception. The core premise is that the reputational threat posed by a crisis is determined by the extent to which stakeholders attribute responsibility to the organisation.

Government Communication Strategies in Nigeria's Security Sector:

According to Garba (2024), Nigeria's official security-related communication methods are frequently disjointed, inconsistent, and opaque, which erodes public trust during the country's post-crisis recovery efforts. This paper highlights the necessity of comprehensive public relations strategies tailored to Nigeria's socio-political environment. (journals.aphriapub.com).

To fight terrorism, misinformation, and insecurity, government communication strategies in Nigeria's security sector emphasise the use of strategic information, public education, and media cooperation. One of the most important strategies is the 2019 National Security Strategy (NSS), which combines public participation, interagency information exchange, and strategic communication to build trust and refute extremist propaganda.

Cultural Influences on Crisis Communication:

According to Aruku et al. (2024), cultural factors such as social identity, power distance, and collectivism shape how crisis communication is perceived and understood in Nigeria. Cultural influences influence audiences' expectations and level of confidence in government messages. (ympn.co.id).

By influencing how communications are written, understood, and received across various civilisations, cultural factors directly impact reputation and trust, which in turn shape crisis communication. Key factors include high/low context, power distance, and collectivism, which dictate the level of directness, reliance on authority, and focus on group harmony versus individual responsibility.

Security Communication in Conflict Zones:

Stressing the importance of public relations and community relations in peacebuilding, Modeyin, Oisamoje, and Asemah (2025) discovered that crisis communication tactics used during communal conflicts in North Central Nigeria facilitate conflict mediation and de-escalation. (Uir.ac.id/journal).

To ensure safety in conflict areas, security communication requires proactive, redundant, and encrypted systems, as well as highly skilled, impartial, and empathetic personnel. To enable safe, quick responses, key practices include establishing robust, pre-planned communication procedures, utilising encrypted tools, conducting in-depth, on-the-ground risk assessments, and fostering trust through community engagement.

Social and Traditional Media Framing:

Through media framing analysis, Chioma and Olusegun (2015) show how the government's response to the Boko Haram insurgency is framed differently by domestic and foreign media, thereby influencing public perceptions of the government's competence and credibility. SingaporeanJBEM.com.

Framing in social and traditional media refers to the process of selecting, highlighting, and presenting particular facets of reality to influence public opinion. Social media provides a variety of real-time, user-generated frameworks that can either contradict or magnify the conflict-oriented, authoritative, and organised narratives that are frequently used in traditional media (TV, newspapers). Rapid, participatory communication is made possible by this digital transition, yet there is a greater chance of false information.

Public Relations and Digital Technology:

Eke and Adeyemi (2025) investigate how public relations and digital technology may work together to address insecurity issues. They demonstrate the importance of digital platforms for disseminating official information and countering misinformation during emergencies. (topjournals.org).

Public relations is now a real-time, interactive, data-driven field instead of a one-way, traditional one, thanks to digital technologies. Modern PR leverages social media, artificial intelligence, and SEO to enable real-time interaction, targeted messaging, and accurate campaign measurement. Building genuine relationships, communicating during a crisis, and maintaining one's online reputation all depend on it.

Public Relations and Community Perceptions (#EndSARS Case):

Strategic public relations initiatives during the #EndSARS protests varied in their success in controlling crisis perceptions, according to Balaleye & Adelakun (2024). They highlight the need for stronger digital communication strategies and greater community involvement. (lcu.edu.ng/journals).

The 2020 #EndSARS protests in Nigeria represented a crisis in public relations between the state/police and citizens, driven by systemic brutality and poor crisis communication. The movement mobilised quickly on social media, and trust in the government eroded amid allegations of a harsh response.

Security Threats and Communication Challenges:

Government crisis communication efforts are made more difficult by Boko Haram and ISWAP's use of misinformation and digital narratives for propaganda, according to research on the impact of disinformation in extremist recruitment. (Konfrontasi.net).

Malicious software, phishing, and man-in-the-middle assaults are among the security risks and communication difficulties of the digital era that jeopardise system availability, data integrity, and privacy. Protecting cloud infrastructure, controlling internal threats, safeguarding remote work, and ensuring secure, authenticated, and encrypted communication channels are among the major obstacles.

Strategic Communication and Security Operations:

The contested information space in national security crises is highlighted by the strategic communication activities of the Nigerian Armed Forces and extremist organisations, which influence local and international narratives regarding counterinsurgency. (www.stratcomcoe).

The deliberate use of information, actions, and communication to change perceptions, further national interests, and support security goals in times of peace, crisis, and conflict is known as strategic communication in security operations. It is an essential instrument for combating misinformation, bolstering public support, and organising reactions to security risks. Strategic communication serves as a "soft power" instrument that is vital to national stability and extends beyond public affairs.

Concept of Crisis Communication

To minimise harm and preserve credibility, crisis communication involves systematically disseminating information before, during, and after a crisis (Coombs, 2015). Timeliness, correctness, consistency, empathy and community engagement are highlighted.

An organisation's strategic, quick, and open sharing of information to manage, safeguard, or defend its operations and reputation in the face of unforeseen, high-stakes events is known as crisis communication. It involves organising messages to stakeholders, including employees, clients, and the media, to maintain trust and minimise harm during incidents such as data breaches, legal actions, or product recalls.

Conflicting information from security services and a generally fragmented and reactive approach to crisis communication on national security in Nigeria frequently increase public anxiety and erode trust. Although new, integrated hubs and digital innovations are taking shape, the system often lacks speed and transparency, making it challenging to manage insecurity effectively and to leverage strategic communication.

National Security and Information Management

According to Buzan (1991), national security is the defence of the country's institutions, sovereignty, people, and territorial integrity against both internal and external threats. Crisis communication is operationalised primarily by government communication departments, security services, and the media.

The classic definition of national security is the defence of a country's borders, people, and interests against outside threats. Modern perspectives have broadened this idea to encompass a broader range of issues, including social well-being, environmental preservation, and economic stability (Williams, 2020).

According to Walter Lippmann, national security is attained when a country upholds its fundamental principles even in the face of opposition and does not have to compromise them to prevent conflict. This emphasises the crucial importance of protecting a country's values and way of life to ensure its security (Lippmann, 2020).

National security in Nigeria entails dealing with a wide range of intricate dangers, such as economic instability, ethnic conflicts, and terrorism. Scholars emphasise that Nigeria's national security must take into account the country's diverse, multi-ethnic composition, as well as the socioeconomic disparities that can fuel unrest and conflict (Alao, 2021).

National security encompasses information management and psychological stability in addition to military defence (Buzan, 1991). Societies can be stabilised or destabilised by information during times of crisis. The public interest includes security, and those who work in the mass media need to care about people genuinely. According to Gambo (2021), the primary focus of mass media is on topics that benefit the general public and support justice, fairness, national cohesion, and international collaboration.

Emerging experiences around the world demonstrate that information management supported by ICT can have a long-lasting impact. However, this requires visionary leadership, as well as sound management systems and tools, to translate principles into practical actions that

ultimately produce the desired results in national security. It is thus essential to engage well-trained individuals with the skills and vision to create a new niche in the public sphere that aggregates views on standards and fosters an enlightened citizenry reflective of the social mix within individual societies.

Dimension:

The conceptual divide between national security and crisis management arises from the fact that the former has its roots in civic protection and emergency management. In contrast, the latter has its roots in external defence. This disparity appears in the contemporary, intricate risk environment across several crucial areas, including the types of threats, the scope of responses, and the roles of stakeholders.

Time horizons and operational tempos, scope of duty, risk perception and management, legal and institutional frameworks, and conventional versus current term definitions are all included in the dimensions.

Theoretical Expectation

Theoretically, there should be a conceptual divide between crisis management and national security because of their different histories: national security has historically dealt with long-term, strategic, and existential threats to the state, whereas crisis management frequently concentrates on operational, short-term, and organisational responses to threats. This disparity makes it more difficult to foresee complex, hybrid, and non-traditional threats.

The "Formal Doctrine" vs "Practice" Gap: The literature on crisis management is grounded in procedures, formal structures, and institutionalised methods. The "State-Centric" vs. "Human Security" Gap, where national security has traditionally concentrated on defending the state against foreign military aggression and maintaining territorial integrity; the "Predictive" vs. "Uncertainty" Gap, where traditional national security frequently depends on intelligence, strategic forecasting, and logical decision-making, assuming that threats can be anticipated; The "Strategic" vs. "Operational" Disconnect: Whereas crisis management frequently concentrates on tactical, immediate, and operational responses, national security entails high-level strategic planning. The "Information" vs "Information Warfare" Gap: Traditional security focuses on safeguarding tangible borders and assets.

Observed Practice in Nigeria

According to Section 305 (1) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN) 1999 (as amended), crisis response and management are primarily the responsibility of the various levels of government until they are transferred to a higher authority or a presidential declaration is made. In Nigeria, there is a clear, substantial, and adequate connection between national security and crisis management.

In Nigeria, the National Security Council is responsible for managing national crises through security and intelligence institutions legally authorised to perform specific tasks. Early warning, intelligence collecting and analysis, strategic decision-making, early and practical

actions, as well as effective leadership and coordination, are some of the ways that authorised agencies contribute to the broader national crisis and emergency response and management system, (NCTC).

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

According to SCCT, as developed by Coombs (2007), crisis response plans ought to be aligned with the level of accountability assigned to the company. Perceived government accountability affects public response in Nigeria.

The framework calls on security institutions to reconstruct their approach, minimise the gravity of the crisis, and not neglect their duties. Nigerians are now aware that, thanks to the influence of communication tools, security and preventive measures are at the forefront and have been prioritised for successful peace and security responses.

One of the most significant aspects of the digital age, according to Hofstede (2002), is the development of digital citizenship through the use of new communication tools. Conflicts between digital individuals, groups, and nations still occur, even though cultures can influence the usage of new media to promote strong partnerships across online communities both within and between societies.

According to Ibrahim Saleh (2009), effective crisis communication management in Nigeria could be a haven for peace and security by embracing participatory governance principles on the one hand, and by implementing user-friendly, harmonised, effective, and efficient tools and mechanisms on the other. New media could help citizens in many ways, such as appreciating their diversity, solving their problems, sharing their experiences, and voicing their salient issues without worries and shame.

Image Restoration Theory

According to Benoit (1997), organisations can safeguard their reputation in times of crisis by employing tactics such as denial, avoidance of accountability, or corrective action.

In any crisis involving the public and national security, institutions should make an effort to rebuild credibility by an apology, remedial action, or explanation.

Theory of Agenda-Setting

According to McCombs and Shaw (1972), the media shape public opinion by selecting which topics to cover. Public discourse is greatly influenced by media framing during security emergencies.

Linking the study area to the decision-making process is a top priority to bring about change peacefully, with a progressive view of human rights and peace as a means of regaining African pride and identity.

Existence of structured communication channels

Our daily lives now involve technology-based communication, which constantly impacts us. As technology advances, new communication trends emerge, such as machine learning and artificial intelligence, which have a significant impact on communication.

To ensure clarity, efficiency, and reduced ambiguity, structured communication channels are organised, methodical, and frequently predetermined pathways for information sharing within an organisation. Their adherence to established rules, such as lines of command or specific digital platforms, sets them apart from casual, impromptu exchanges.

Structured communication channels are organised, systematic, and often predefined pathways for sharing information within an organisation, ensuring clarity, efficiency, and reduced ambiguity. They are distinct from informal, spontaneous interactions by following established protocols, such as chains of command or designated digital platforms.

The channels could be in form of Downward Communication: where information flows from management to employees (e.g., policy manuals, official memos, newsletters), or Upward Communication: where information travels from subordinates to leaders, essential for feedback and reporting (e.g., performance reports, suggestion boxes, grievances), or Horizontal/Lateral Communication: which occurs between peers or departments at the same level to coordinate efforts, and Diagonal Communication: which cuts across different levels and departments, boosting efficiency in matrix organisations.

Security outfits in Nigeria, recognising the role of the Public Relations unit, have used social media to reach a larger audience as quickly as possible. Information now travels faster with the structured communication channels.

Regular press briefings

Frequent news conferences provide organisations, governments, and businesses with substantial operational, strategic, and reputational advantages. They enable organisations to effectively distribute information, manage their public image, and cultivate stakeholder confidence by offering a reliable communication channel.

Controlled communication and narrative management, operational efficiency, consistency and reliability, relationship building, maximising media impact, direct interaction and clarification, transparency and public confidence, and cost-effective promotion are all facilitated by regular press briefings.

Increased use of digital platforms

From serving as a supplementary tool to becoming an essential part of defence plans, the use of digital platforms for national security objectives has grown significantly. Artificial intelligence (AI), big data analytics, and cloud platforms are being integrated by governments to monitor threats, secure vital infrastructure, and process information in real time.

In the digital age, defence and security rely on a multi-tiered infrastructure owned by corporations. It is referred to as "the stack" in the business world and consists of networks, hardware, cloud platforms, and application ecosystems. However, these layers are frequently owned, operated, and controlled by international businesses whose interests may not coincide with those of the state, unlike traditional defence assets.

Because nations must bargain with external players over access, security, and continuity, the stack makes sovereignty more challenging to understand. Instead of having unilateral power, control over data centres, network routing, and software updates becomes a question of diplomatic leverage.

Cyber Defence & Infrastructure Protection, Information Control & Counter-Disinformation, Military & Tactical Operations, and Intelligence Gathering & Surveillance are all enhanced by greater use of digital platforms for national security.

Interaction with conventional media

When discussing national security issues with conventional media (print, radio, and television), there is a complex and often tense interplay between protecting information freedom and public safety.

Traditional media serves as a crucial, trusted source for disseminating accurate, vetted security updates, helping to counter misinformation and panic in crises. However, this role is frequently challenged by government censorship, the need for, and risks of, embedding journalists with security forces, and the pressure to balance timely reporting with the potential to jeopardise operational security (Agbo, 2024).

CHALLENGES

Delayed information dissemination: because of a delay in data transmission to recipients, which is frequently brought on by network restrictions, infrastructural limits, or node mobility. Propagation delays in social networks considerably slow the overall spread and reduce the likelihood of an unexpected "outbreak" of information, even though they may lower the transmission threshold.

Inconsistent messaging. This happens when a company, brand, or person uses many channels (such as social media, sales, and marketing) to convey contradictory, ambiguous, or misaligned messages. Confusion results, confidence is damaged, and brand credibility is hampered.

Politicisation of communication: This entails the use of messaging by stakeholders, politicians, and the media to polarise opinions, raise the profile of particular topics, and alter power relations. This technique, which frequently uses social media, propaganda, and strategic branding, transforms impartial facts, laws, or crises into contentious political instruments, shaping public opinion and agenda-setting to achieve specific ideological objectives.

Weak inter-agency coordination leads to inadequate communication, information silos, and competition among government agencies, resulting in disjointed responses, wasteful resource use, and an inability to address complex threats. It is caused by a lack of trust, competing missions, and bureaucratic politics, all of which directly impair operational effectiveness, especially in security and crisis management.

Misinformation spreads rapidly on several platforms. Bots, trolls, social media and message boards, even word of mouth, all with the intent of misleading the public.

KNOWLEDGE GAP

The majority of the material currently available on Nigeria's national security focuses on political dynamics and military strategy, with little attention paid to the efficacy of communication. Crisis communication theory is not sufficiently incorporated into Nigerian security studies. This work contributes by connecting national security practice and communication theory.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Create a centralised command centre for crisis communication to facilitate decision-making where coordination, authority, and information come together.
2. Make sure that crises are acknowledged right away. This is the cornerstone of crisis communication, intended to create a sense of control, foster trust, and stop the spread of false information. The idea is to identify the problem as soon as possible, ideally within the first 15 to 20 minutes, known as the "golden hour"—even if the specifics are not yet known.
3. By creating unified, real-time digital platforms, defining precise responsibilities through cooperative Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and conducting frequent cooperative training exercises, the National Security Council can improve interagency communication protocols. To expedite decision-making and close information gaps, key tactics include implementing shared, interoperable technologies, fostering a proactive culture of collaboration, and establishing unified command structures.
4. Professional spokesperson education and training programs for reporters covering national security and security-related topics.
5. Increase accountability and transparency by empowering stakeholders through participatory monitoring, establishing strict, digital, and automated internal control procedures, and cultivating an open culture through accessible reporting.
6. Form alliances with fact-checking groups. To create and provide these training courses, media outlets, journalism institutions, and security specialists should work together.
7. Establish regular crisis communication exercises as a crucial, proactive measure that turns hypothetical emergency plans into actual experiences, guaranteeing that teams can respond to disasters rather than only react to them.
8. Recognise that in order for countries to safeguard digital ecosystems, maximise economic potential, and keep up with the rapid improvements in technology, information and communication technology (ICT) laws must be reformed by the government.
9. Supplying prompt and proactive communication protocols to put early warning systems and quick acknowledgement procedures into place.
10. Existence of Inter-Agency Coordination Frameworks that coordinate messages between the Ministry of Information, DSS, Police, and Armed Forces.
11. To increase grassroots trust on security issues, employ community-centric strategies by incorporating local leaders, civil society, and traditional media.
12. Optimise your digital communication strategy by effectively utilising social media to dispel false information and offer real-time updates.

CONCLUSION

In Nigeria, crisis communication is still an essential but underutilised part of national security management. Despite the existence of institutional frameworks, their efficacy is diminished by operational and structural flaws. Public trust and national resilience will be increased by bolstering strategic messaging, collaboration, and transparency. Improving security governance in Nigeria requires a proactive, coordinated, and theoretically informed communication strategy.

Theoretical best practices in crisis communication and their actual use in Nigeria's national security framework differ conceptually. Even though channels and institutions are in place, they are weakened by inadequate community involvement, poor coordination, delayed responses, and limited transparency. To close these gaps, the National Security Council must integrate theory and practice, strengthen inter-agency frameworks, use digital tools, and prioritise participatory communication strategies. Closing these gaps will strengthen national resilience, reduce disinformation, and increase public trust.

The results show that reputation management often takes precedence over open communication in Nigeria's crisis communication, thereby eroding public confidence.

Public trust and national security control depend on effective crisis communication.

Nigeria's communication tactics frequently fail due to technological challenges, cultural complexity, fragmentation, and inconsistent messaging. Digital media and public relations play increasingly important roles but require strategic integration, while Press coverage and information framing significantly influence public perceptions during security crises. In addition to highlighting the urgent need for research that combines communication theory with Nigeria's security communication practices, this synthesis points out shortcomings in empirical evaluation.

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