

Rethinking Approaches to National Development: The Crisis Communication Management Option

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Abstract

This study investigates the place of crisis communication management in addressing the problem of national development in Nigeria. Using survey research method, 100 copies of the questionnaire were administered to purposively selected respondents in Nsukka, Enugu State. The Guttman scale was used to determine the reliability of instrument and this yielded 0.90 which was considered high. Findings showed significant relationship between crisis communication management and national development. Result further showed, among others that the factors that can make or mar the effectiveness of crisis communication are: Leadership style; political will; how knowledgeable in communication those involved are; finance and media of communication involved and willingness of the general public. This result is relevant to researchers and other stakeholders who are interested in national development. Based on this result, the researcher argues that one of the best options in the quest for national development is crisis communication management and that its effectiveness or otherwise has a link with national development. The researcher recommends, among others that, government should formulate a policy setting up a crisis communication management team with the sole mandate addressing national development issues.

Keywords: National development, crisis communication management, option.

Introduction

One of the popular concepts in public domain is national development. Nations, regions and continents consistently seek national development. In its broadest sense, national development covers all spheres of societal development. This includes politics, the economy and education. Others are science and technology, cultural values, social landscape among others. It is perhaps in pursuance of national development that National Policy on education (2004) section 1 (3) identified the five national goals of Nigeria thus: A free and democratic society, a just and egalitarian society, a united, strong and self-reliant nation a great and dynamic economy and a land full of bright opportunity for all citizens. The realization of these national objectives indicates a total state of national development. But is this the reality on ground? Nigeria is today plague in a state of what can best be described as national crises. From political turmoil occasioned by legislative indecency to communal crisis among others. Nigeria's economy is not in good condition either. Gever (2013) avers that attention has now been shifted to entrepreneurship as a panacea for economic rejuvenation and that entrepreneurship is closely related to nation development. Other areas of national crises are human insecurity such as the Boko Haram threats in the north, whose activities have devastating effects. The Institute for Economic and Peace (2014) in a global survey ranked Nigeria 4th on the 2013 Global Terrorism index while Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan came first, second and third, in that order. The report equally ranked Nigeria 151st out of 161 countries on global peace ranking index. According to the report, only in 2013, Nigeria recorded 303 bomb blasts, 1, 826 fatalities and 457 injured. All these constitute crises and should be managed properly through effective crisis communication management strategies. Crisis communication is a planned communication approach which aim is to promote peaceful coexistence and avoid damage. This could be before, during and after crisis. Ezeah and Asogwa (2014) note that the concept of crisis communication is rooted on the dialogue between an organizational and its publics before, during and after a negative occurrence. The concept of crisis communication is simply, the use of communication as a tool in crisis resolution. A crisis is any unforeseen and unfortunate situation. Crises are diverse and come in different ways. Crises also have different consequence on the society and effective crisis communication management approach remains a must do. This study investigates national development and crisis communication in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

For some time now, Nigeria has been struggling to address the problem of national development. Previous attempts to address this through government programmes like the Structural Adjustment programme (SAP), Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) among several others appear not to have been successful as evidenced in the myriads of problems facing the Nigerian State. While different people seek solutions to this problem of national development in different ways, it is not clear how crisis communication management approach could be a better option. The problem of this study posed as a question is, how can crisis communication management promote national development? The general purpose of this study is to investigate the place of crisis communication management in national development. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the relationship between crisis communication management and national development.
2. Ascertain the appropriate crisis communication strategies that can enhance national development.
3. Ascertain how crisis communication can lead to national development.
4. Determine the factors that can enhance or limit the effectiveness of crisis communication for national development.

Research Questions

The following research questions guides the study:

1. What kind of relationship exists between crisis communication management and national development?
2. What are the appropriate crisis communication strategies that can enhance national development?
3. How can effective crisis communication management lead to national development?
4. What are the factors that can enhance or limit the effectiveness of crisis communication management for national development?

Research Hypotheses

This study testes the following hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance

Ho₁ There is no significant relationship between crisis communication management and national development

Ho₂ The extent effective crisis communication management can influence national development will not be large if calculated contingency coefficient is less than 60%

Literature Review

Crisis Communication Management

Communication is a central pillar that holds all living things. Without communication, there will be chaos. For human beings, the centrality of communication can better be described as the oxygen of human existence. Akinfeleye (2008, p.11) corroboratively notes “the role of communication in any society institution is that of being on the continuum whether in a democratic or authoritarian system of government. Communication touches every sphere of human activity. This therefore means that communication also touches crisis and national development. A crisis is any unforeseen situation that negates the principle of peaceful coexistence. A crisis situation is a threat to national development. Abimbola (2008) in Abimbola (2014) observes that crisis is precipitated by unreserved conflicts and conflicts are caused by unreserved issues. Abimbola adds that issues when not properly addressed lead to conflicts and conflict not properly managed show ball into crisis. The import of Abimbola’s assertion to this study is the fact that the researcher stress crisis management as a way of preventing chaos. Bernstein (2013) assertion of what crisis is fits into this study. According to Bernstein perspective, crisis can negatively affect national development, hence, the need for effective crisis communication management approach.

National Development and the Nigerian State.

National development refers to the ability of a nation to improve the lives of its citizens. Measures of improvement may be material, such as an increase in the gross domestic product, or social, such as literacy rates and availability of healthcare. Lukpata (2013) notes that the term national development is used to refer to a state

of maturity which characterizes a nation-state. This maturity results from the interplay of modern political, economic and social forces and processes which transform diverse people, shaping a common geographical area, from acceptance and allegiance to and participation in a transitional policy to the acceptance and creations of and participation in a modern nation-state. With the situation in Nigeria, can the country said to be witnessing national development? According to the 2014 world development indicators released by the World Bank shows that 63.1% of Nigerians population live below \$1.25 a day while 83.1% live below \$2 a day. The result further showed that only 28% of Nigerians have access to improved sanitation facilities and 64% have access to improved water source. The implication of this result is that, 72% of Nigerians do not have access to improved sanitation and 36% do not have access to improved water source. This is not cheering news at all. Equally disturbing is the fact that the carbon dioxide emission in Nigeria stands at 78.9 million metric tons while electricity production is recorded at 27.0 billion kilowatt hours. It should be noted that carbon dioxide emissions are primary source of greenhouse gases which contribute to global warming, threatening human and natural habits. On the other hand, the use of energy is vital in improving people's standard of living. Another shocking finding of the World Bank is that Nigeria's high technology exports, that is percentage of manufactured and exported technology in Nigeria is 1.9%. It should be noted that the method for determining high-technology exports was developed by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development in collaboration with Eurostat. (World Bank 2014). It takes a product approach" (rather than a sectoral approach) based on research and development intensity (expenditure divided by total sales). In simple terms, high-technology and development intensity such as in computers, pharmaceuticals, scientific instrument and electrical machinery. In summation therefore, the state of national development in Nigeria vis-à-vis the economy, technology, social welfare, security, infrastructural development et al calls for worry as the country is far from getting it right.

Theoretical Framework

This study considered and applied the development media theory. The theory was propounded by McQuail in 1987 (Asemah, 2011). According to the theory, the media are expected to promote development related issues. The underlying fact behind the genesis of this theory was that there can be no development without communication. Under the four classical theories, capitalism was legitimized, but under the development communication theory, or Development Support Communication as it is otherwise called, the media undertook the role of carrying out positive developmental programmes, accepting restrictions and instructions from the State. The media subordinated themselves to political, economic, social and cultural needs. Hence the stress on "development communication" and "development journalism". (Surest 2003). Based on this theory therefore, effective crisis communication management presents an avenue through which national development can take place. It should be noted that the media of communication for development must not necessarily be a mass one.

Methods

The research method for this study was survey. Survey was applied because the nature of the study calls for the need to solicit people's opinion which Gever (2013) observes is the hall mark of survey. The instrument of data collection was the questionnaire. The questionnaire copies were administered by the researcher. The target population of this study was all communication experts and public affairs analysts who were well informed on the issues of national development. This made it difficult for the researcher to describe the population in numbers. Consequently, purposive sampling technique was adopted to enable the researcher get people who had knowledge on both issues of communication and national development. Commenting on purposive sampling, Wimmer and Dominick (2011, p.94) writes "purposive sampling includes respondents, subjects, or elements selected for specific characteristics or qualities and eliminates those who fail to meet these criteria." Through a judgmental sampling procedure, 100 copies of the questionnaire were administered to purposively selected respondents in Nsukka, Enugu state. The Guttman scale of coefficient of reproducibility was used to measure reliability of consistent of the instrument and this yielded 0.90 which was considered high. The analysis of data for the study, chi-square, coefficient contingency and Likert scale were used. The Statistical package for Social Science (SPSS) was applied in the analysis.

Results

Out of the 100 copies of the questionnaire administered to respondents, 94(94%) were filled and returned but only 88(88%) were found useful. To determine if effective crisis communication management can lead to national development, the below table was computed

	Frequency	%
Yes	72	81.8
No	16	18.2
Total	88	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2015

The result from table I above shows that 81.8 percent of the respondents reported that effective crisis communication management can lead to national development while 18.2 percent reported that it cannot. To determine the appropriate crisis communication strategies, table II was computed.

Table II: What are the appropriate crisis communication management strategies that can enhance national development?

S/N		\bar{X}	DECISION
1	Communication pending crisis to the appropriate people	3.2	Accepted
2	Being sincere during crisis situations	3.2	Accepted
3	Involving stakeholders in the crisis being managed	2.9	Accepted
4	Continuous communication with the warring factions	3.0	Accepted
5	Avoiding bias against any group or persons	3.1	Accepted
6	Communicating the solutions to crisis to appropriate authorities	3.3	Accepted
7	Preaching peace even after crisis.	3.0	Accepted

Source: Field survey, 2015 (n=88)

It should be noted that hence this is a four point scale, the baseline for accepting or rejecting any statement was 2.5. Consequently, all the statements presented in the above table were accepted as strategies towards adopting crisis communication management approach in addressing national development issued. To determine how effective crisis communication management approach can lead to national development, table III was computed.

Table III: How can effective crisis communication management lead to national development?.

S/N		\bar{X}	DECISION
8	Discouraging violence	3.0	Accepted
9	Promoting unity	2.7	Accepted
10	Promoting tolerance	3.0	Accepted
11	Creating awareness on how crisis impedes national development	3.0	Accepted
12	Educating the public on how to handle misunderstandings	2.6	Accepted
13	Drawing attention of appropriate authorities to the crisis	3.1	Accepted

Source: Field Survey

Result from table III above shows that crisis communication management approach can enhance national development through discouraging violence, promoting unity, promoting tolerance, creating awareness on how

crisis impedes national development, educating the public on how to handle misunderstanding and drawing attention of appropriate authorities to crisis. To determine the factors that can enhance or limit the effectiveness of crisis communication management for national development, the following table was computed.

Table IV: What are the factors that can enhance or limit the effectiveness of crisis communication management for national development?

S/N	Items	\bar{X}	DECISION
14	Leadership style	3.1	Accepted
15	Political will	3.1	Accepted
16	literacy level	1.9	Rejected
17	How knowledgeable in communication those involved are.	3.0	Accepted
18	Finance	3.0	Accepted
19	Media of communication involved	3.0	Accepted
20	Willingness of the general public	3.1	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2015

The table above shows that all the factors, but literacy level, presented in the table above can make or mar the effectiveness of crisis communication management.

Test of Hypotheses

The cross tabulation with the use of SPSS 16.0 showed that the result from table I yielded square statistic, $\chi^2 = 35.636$ and p value 0.000 at 0.005 level of significance and 1 degree of freedom. Hence the p value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis- there is no significant relationship between crisis communication management and national development was rejected. We therefore conclude that effective crisis communication management can lead to national development. To determine the extent of the relationship, coefficient contingency which is the measurement of degree was used and this yielded 0.288 interpreted as 28.8% which is considerably low. Based on this, the second null hypothesis- The extent effective crisis communication management can influence national development will not be large if calculated coefficient contingency is less than 60%- was accepted. This means crisis communication management is not the sole factor that propel national development

Discussion of Findings.

The discussion of the findings for this study was done in line with the research questions as shown below:

First Research Question: What kind of relationship exists between crisis communication management and national development? To answer this question, result from table one was used. The result from table one was used to determine the kind of relationship that exists between crisis communication management and national development. This yielded square statistic, $\chi^2 = 35.636$ and p value 0.000 at 0.005 level of significance and 1 degree of freedom. Hence the p value is less than 0.05, an indication of significant relationship between crisis communication management and national development, thus providing answer to the first research question. From the result of this study, the researcher argues that if crisis communication management approaches are adopted, it will translate to national development. The result of this study confirms the assertion by Akinfeleye (2008) on the centrality of communication.

Second Research Question: What are the appropriate crisis communication strategies that can enhance national development? Based on the result of this study, it can be said that the appropriate crisis communication strategies are Communication pending crisis to the appropriate people, being sincere during crisis situations, continuous

communication with the warring factions, involving stakeholders in the crisis being managed, avoiding bias against any group or persons, communicating the solutions to crisis to appropriate authorities and Preaching peace even after crisis.(see table II).The result of this study further gives insight to the development media theory applied in this study. The result of this study is consistent with that of Abimbola (2008)

Third Research Question: How can effective crisis communication management lead to national development? Result from the study revealed that the ways through which crisis communication management can lead to national development are discouraging violence, promoting unity, promoting tolerance, creating awareness on how crisis impedes national development, educating the public on how to handle misunderstanding and drawing attention of appropriate authorities to crisis. The implication is that, crisis communication management approaches must promote development initiatives as advocated for by the development media theory. Whichever approach to be adopted, development must be the driving force. The result of this study is consistent with that of Gever (2015) and his safe Nigeria model.

Forth Research Question: What are the factors that can enhance or limit the effectiveness of crisis communication management for national development? Findings of this study showed that the factors that can make or mar the effectiveness of crisis communication management are Leadership style, political will, how knowledgeable in communication those involved are, Finance, media of communication involved and willingness of the general public. What this means is that there are certain factors that must be in place for crisis communication management to be effective and this has a policy implication. It simply means, appropriate measures must be put in place for crisis communication management to achieve its goals The result runs similar to Bernstein (2013) assertion on how to manage crisis.

Conclusion/Recommendations

Based on the result of this study, the researcher concludes that crisis communication management could be a viable option in rethinking ways of addressing issues of national development. For this objective to be achieved, the following recommendations are made:

- The government should formulate a policy setting up a crisis communication management team that will be saddled with the responsibility of focusing solely on issues of national development.
- Communication experts and researchers should continue to explore ways of enhancing national development through crisis communication management approach.
- There is need for existing government agencies whose roles are related with development issued like health, economy, security, technology among others to collaborate with communication experts so as to fully harness the benefits communication for development.
- The government and other donor agencies should volunteer sponsorship of research initiatives that have links with development communication with a view to addressing the issues of national development.
- Other researchers should investigate the same area using a more systematic sampling procedure hence the current study adopted purposive sampling.

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