

## EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT: EVIDENCE FROM THE NIGERIAN POWER SECTOR

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the role of effective communication in enhancing crisis management within the Nigerian power sector, focusing on the impact of message clarity and timeliness of communication. The study's broad objective is to explore how these communication factors influence crisis resolution in a sector marked by frequent disruptions. Specifically, it examines the effect of message clarity and the extent to which timely communication enhances crisis management. Using a survey research design, data were collected from 202 respondents comprising managers, technical staff, and regulatory officials within the sector. A structured online questionnaire was administered to capture diverse perspectives. Multiple regression analysis, conducted with SPSS, revealed significant findings. Message clarity, with an unstandardized coefficient of 0.438 and a standardized Beta of 0.394, explains 39.4% of the variation in crisis management ( $t$ -value = 4.669,  $p$  = 0.000). Timeliness of communication demonstrated a stronger effect, with an unstandardized coefficient of 0.630 and a standardized Beta of 0.590, accounting for 59.0% of the variation ( $t$ -value = 7.001,  $p$  = 0.000). The results underscore the critical importance of both predictors, with timeliness having a relatively greater influence. The study recommends that organizations in the power sector prioritize timely communication through efficient systems and real-time tools while also investing in training for crafting clear and effective messages. These strategies can significantly enhance crisis management outcomes, ensuring prompt resolution and minimizing the adverse impacts of crises.*

**Keywords:** Effective communication, message clarity, timeliness of communication, crisis management, Nigerian power sector

### INTRODUCTION

Effective communication is a cornerstone of successful crisis management, particularly in sectors that directly impact the lives of citizens. The Nigerian power sector, which plays a crucial role in the economic development of the country, faces recurrent challenges, including power outages, regulatory changes, and consumer dissatisfaction. Crisis management within this sector is often characterized by its

complexity, involving multiple stakeholders such as government agencies, power providers, and consumers. Communication, both internal (among employees) and external (between the sector and the public), has been identified as a critical factor in managing these crises effectively. Effective crisis communication strategies can help mitigate the adverse effects of crises by ensuring accurate information dissemination, building trust with stakeholders, and facilitating timely resolution of issues. The Nigerian power sector, however, often struggles with communication inefficiencies during crises, leading to dissatisfaction among consumers and reduced organizational effectiveness.

Message Clarity refers to how clearly and understandably the information is conveyed to the intended audience. Clear, concise, and well-structured communication reduces the chances of misunderstandings and ensures that the message is comprehended as intended.

Timeliness of Communication entails how promptly the information is communicated. Timely communication is crucial in crisis management or decision-making processes, as delays can lead to confusion, frustration, or missed opportunities for action.

Crisis management is a process by which an organization or individual responds to a critical event or emergency that threatens to disrupt normal operations, harm reputation, or cause significant damage. It involves a set of strategies, actions, and communication efforts aimed at minimizing the negative effects of the crisis, protecting stakeholders, and ensuring the organization can recover and continue functioning. Effective crisis management typically requires planning, rapid response, clear communication, and coordination across various departments or teams. The goal is not only to address immediate concerns but also to safeguard long-term sustainability and reputation by learning from the crisis and implementing measures to prevent future occurrences.

The Nigerian power sector is a critical component of the country's economy, responsible for the generation, transmission, and distribution of electricity. It plays a pivotal role in supporting industrialization, economic growth, and the overall development of Nigeria. Despite its importance, the sector has faced numerous challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, unreliable power supply, and inefficiencies in both public and private sector management. These challenges have led to frequent power outages, which hinder productivity and economic progress. Over the years, Nigeria has undertaken various reforms to improve the sector, including the privatization of the power generation and distribution companies, alongside efforts to enhance the regulatory framework through the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC). However, the sector continues to struggle with issues such as underinvestment, inadequate generation capacity, and transmission losses, making reliable and consistent electricity supply a persistent challenge.

The Nigerian power sector has faced several crises in recent years, including inadequate power supply, frequent outages, regulatory challenges, and widespread public dissatisfaction. These crises have been compounded by communication failures, leading to a lack of trust between power sector institutions and the public. Effective communication, therefore, remains a critical but underexplored factor in crisis

management within this sector. A notable limitation in existing research is the focus on either timeliness of communication or message clarity without examining their combined effects on crisis management. For example, Adeola and Bello (2023) and Okoro and Chukwu (2021) emphasize timeliness, while Eze and Aluko (2022) and Adebayo and Oyewole (2021) prioritize message clarity. This fragmented approach leaves a gap in understanding how the two variables interact to influence crisis outcomes. Considering that effective crisis communication likely requires a balance between promptness and clarity, future studies should explore their synergistic effects.

Stakeholder diversity is another area of concern. While Adeola and Bello (2023) and Eze and Aluko (2022) included regulators and customers, Adebayo and Oyewole (2021) and Okoro and Chukwu (2021) focused primarily on employees. This limited scope fails to capture the experiences and expectations of all stakeholders affected by crisis communication. Broader stakeholder inclusion, encompassing consumers, regulators, technical staff, and community representatives, is necessary to develop more holistic strategies. While previous studies have focused on crisis management and communication strategies in various sectors, there is limited research on the specific role of communication in managing crises within the Nigerian power sector. This study aims to address this gap by investigating how communication strategies influence crisis management outcomes in the Nigerian power sector. This study seeks to explore the relationship between effective communication and crisis management in the Nigerian power sector, with a particular focus on how communication strategies impact the resolution of crises and organizational performance.

The following research questions guided this study:

- i. How does message Clarity enhances crisis management in the Nigerian power sector?
- ii. To what extent does timeliness of Communication enhance crisis management Nigerian power sector?

The broad objective of the study is to investigate effective communication and crisis management: Evidence from the Nigerian power sector. The specific objective of the study is to:

- i. To examine the effect of message clarity in crisis management within the Nigerian power sector.
- ii. To ascertain the effect of timeliness of communication in crisis management within the Nigerian power sector.

The following research hypotheses were formulated:

**H1:** Message Clarity has no significant and positive effect on crisis management in the Nigerian power sector.

**H2:** There is a significant relationship between timeliness of Communication and crisis management within the Nigerian power sector.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Concept of Effective Communication

The importance of communication in crisis management has been well-documented across various sectors. According to Coombs (2015), communication plays a pivotal role in shaping how stakeholders perceive a crisis and how an organization can respond. Effective communication can help reduce panic, provide clear instructions, and restore organizational credibility. In the context of the Nigerian power sector, crises often involve public backlash, regulatory failures, or technical issues, all of which require a well-coordinated communication response (Ogunyemi & Akanji, 2020). Effective communication is the process through which messages are delivered clearly and accurately, ensuring that the intended meaning is understood without distortion (Santos et al., 2021). It refers to the ability of communicators to create mutual understanding and shared meaning through verbal and non-verbal cues, promoting a cohesive relationship between parties (Chen & Yang, 2020). Effective communication involves not just the delivery of information but also active listening and feedback, which ensures that messages are fully received and acted upon (Aminu et al., 2022). It is defined as the process of exchanging information in a manner that is appropriate to the context, audience, and medium, thereby facilitating clarity and relevance (Osagie & Abiola, 2023). Effective communication focuses on the efficient exchange of information to achieve specific goals, ensuring alignment and engagement between the sender and the recipient (Kalu & Obi, 2021).

### Message Clarity in Crisis Management

Message clarity in crisis management refers to the practice of delivering information in a manner that is straightforward, concise, and easily understood by all stakeholders involved. It involves ensuring that the content, tone, and intent of the message are free of ambiguity, allowing for effective decision-making and action during a crisis. Clear communication minimizes confusion, builds trust, and promotes coordinated responses to complex situations. In the context of crisis management, message clarity is critical for achieving organizational and stakeholder alignment. According to Coombs (2021), clear messages must address the "three Rs": relevancy, reliability, and responsiveness. This involves providing accurate information, presenting it in a timely manner, and tailoring the message to the needs and expectations of the audience. The clarity of communication becomes even more significant in crises that involve multiple stakeholders, such as employees, government agencies, media, and the public. For example, Johansen and Frandsen (2020) emphasize that the lack of clarity during crises can exacerbate uncertainty, lead to misinformation, and erode trust in leadership. Therefore, effective crisis communication strategies should focus on transparency, accessibility, and coherence in messaging.

## **Timeliness of Communication in Crisis Management**

Timeliness in crisis communication refers to the prompt dissemination of accurate and relevant information to stakeholders during a crisis. It is a critical factor in minimizing uncertainty, preventing the spread of misinformation, and maintaining public trust. Timely communication ensures that stakeholders receive necessary updates as events unfold, allowing them to make informed decisions and take appropriate actions. During crises, the ability of organizations to communicate quickly can influence the overall outcome. According to Coombs (2021), timely communication is not only about speed but also about delivering the right message at the right time to the right audience.

Delays in communication can exacerbate confusion and amplify the negative impacts of the crisis. Conversely, proactive communication fosters transparency and positions the organization as reliable and in control of the situation. Timeliness also involves anticipating the information needs of stakeholders. For instance, Heath (2019) highlights that a well-prepared crisis communication plan includes pre-approved messages and protocols that enable immediate responses when a crisis occurs. This approach minimizes delays caused by internal approvals and ensures that communication remains consistent and coherent.

## **Crisis Management in Nigerian Power Sector**

The Nigerian power sector has faced numerous crises over the years, ranging from inadequate infrastructure, regulatory challenges, and financial constraints to inconsistent service delivery and public dissatisfaction. These issues have necessitated the application of robust crisis management strategies to ensure the stability and functionality of this critical sector. Effective crisis management involves proactive identification of potential risks, the development of contingency plans, and the implementation of responsive measures to mitigate the impact of crises. The Nigerian power sector's unique challenges stem from its dependence on aging infrastructure, inadequate investment, and inefficiencies in generation, transmission, and distribution networks. For instance, frequent power outages, vandalism of power installations, and non-cost-reflective tariffs have exacerbated operational inefficiencies and weakened public trust in the sector (Adedeji & Fagbemi, 2022). These challenges often escalate into crises, demanding well-coordinated communication and management interventions.

In the Nigerian power sector, poor communication has been identified as a key challenge in managing crises. Nwachukwu (2018) asserts that inadequate communication during power outages often leads to public frustration, which exacerbates the crisis. Furthermore, lack of transparency and inconsistent messaging from power sector agencies often result in diminished public trust and lower levels of compliance with regulatory measures. A study by Nwachukwu and Akinyele (2020) explored the role of communication in managing energy crises in Nigeria and found that timely, transparent, and accurate communication is essential for crisis resolution.

Effective communication can also enhance organizational learning and preparedness for future crises. Taha (2018) suggests that crisis communication should not only focus on managing the current situation but also on learning from the crisis to strengthen future communication strategies and crisis management frameworks. In this regard, Nigerian power sector organizations can benefit from adopting more proactive communication strategies, such as public awareness campaigns, regular updates during crises, and better internal communication systems to coordinate responses. Despite the growing recognition of the importance of communication in crisis management, research specifically focusing on the Nigerian power sector remains sparse. This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating the role of communication in crisis management within this sector and providing recommendations for improving communication practices to enhance crisis response and resolution.

## Theoretical Framework

The underpinning theory for this study is the Coombs' Situational crisis communication theory (SCCT). Coombs' Situational crisis communication theory is a well-regarded framework in crisis management and public relations that provides organizations with strategies to effectively respond to crises based on their characteristics. Developed by W. Timothy Coombs, SCCT emphasizes the importance of selecting appropriate communication strategies to safeguard an organization's reputation during a crisis. It serves as a guide for identifying and responding to the unique challenges posed by different types of crises. The core premise of SCCT lies in its assertion that the success of a crisis response strategy depends on three factors: the type of crisis, the level of responsibility attributed to the organization, and the potential damage to the organization's reputation. By understanding these dimensions, organizations can better tailor their communication strategies. The theory categorizes crises into three clusters based on stakeholder perceptions of responsibility. In the victim cluster, the organization is seen as a victim of the crisis, as in cases of natural disasters or product tampering. The accidental cluster refers to crises that occur unintentionally, such as technical failures or accidents. Finally, the preventable cluster includes crises caused by the organization's negligence or unethical behavior, where stakeholders perceive high organizational culpability.

To address these crises, SCCT offers a range of response strategies. Denial strategies are employed when an organization seeks to refute false accusations or deflect responsibility. Diminishment strategies aim to reduce perceived responsibility or harm through explanations or justifications. Rebuilding strategies focus on acknowledging responsibility, offering apologies, and taking corrective actions, particularly in preventable crises. Lastly, bolstering strategies aim to enhance the organization's image by reminding stakeholders of past positive actions or accomplishments.

The relevance of SCCT can be observed in the Nigerian power sector, where it offers a framework for managing challenges such as power outages, tariff disputes, and infrastructure failures. For victim crises, such as outages caused by natural disasters, operators could use denial or diminishment strategies to

redirect responsibility. In accidental crises involving technical failures, providing explanations and implementing corrective measures can help restore confidence. For preventable crises stemming from negligence, rebuilding strategies, including public apologies and transparent actions, are crucial to regaining stakeholder trust.

### **Empirical Review**

Adeola and Bello (2023) studied timeliness of crisis communication and its impact on stakeholder trust in the Nigerian Energy Sector. The study employed a mixed-method approach, combining surveys and interviews. Data were gathered from 250 participants, including power sector employees and consumers, using stratified random sampling. Quantitative data were analyzed through multiple regression analysis, while qualitative insights were obtained from thematic analysis of interviews. The findings indicated that timely communication during crises improved stakeholder trust and facilitated effective resolution of issues such as service interruptions. The study highlighted that delayed responses often led to stakeholder dissatisfaction and prolonged crises. The study recommended that the Nigerian power sector establish a centralized crisis communication unit to ensure timely responses. It also suggested the use of social media platforms to disseminate real-time updates to stakeholders.

Eze and Aluko (2022) examined message clarity and stakeholder engagement in crisis management: Insights from Nigeria's Energy Sector. The study utilized a survey design with 200 respondents, including power sector employees, regulators, and customers. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the relationship between message clarity and crisis resolution. The results showed a strong positive correlation between clear communication and successful crisis management. The study highlighted that transparent and concise messaging reduced misunderstandings among stakeholders and facilitated quicker resolutions during crises, such as tariff disputes and service interruptions. The study recommended that the Nigerian power sector adopt digital platforms for real-time communication to enhance message delivery and clarity. It also emphasized the need for regulatory bodies to monitor communication strategies during crises.

Adebayo and Oyewole (2021) investigated the role of effective communication in enhancing crisis management: Evidence from the Nigerian Power Sector. The study employed a mixed-method approach, combining survey research and in-depth interviews with 150 employees across power distribution companies in Nigeria. Quantitative data were analyzed using regression analysis, while qualitative data were thematically analyzed. The study found that message clarity significantly enhances crisis resolution in the Nigerian power sector. Employees reported that clear communication during crises improved response time and reduced customer dissatisfaction. Miscommunication, on the other hand, often exacerbated crises, leading to prolonged outages and disputes. The study recommended that power sector stakeholders adopt standardized communication protocols and invest in employee training to ensure message clarity during crisis situations.

Okoro and Chukwu (2021) investigated timeliness of communication as a catalyst for effective crisis management in the Nigerian Power Sector. The study utilized a case study approach, focusing on three major power distribution companies in Nigeria. Data were collected through structured questionnaires distributed to 120 employees and analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis. The study revealed that timely communication significantly reduced the escalation of crises in the power sector. Quick dissemination of accurate information during power outages or tariff disputes helped manage public expectations and fostered trust among stakeholders. Delayed communication often led to misinformation, which aggravated crises. The study recommended that power companies implement a crisis communication plan emphasizing timeliness and accuracy. Additionally, the authors suggested adopting advanced communication technologies to enhance real-time information sharing.

### METHODOLOGY

The survey research design was utilized in the study through the use of questionnaire. The study surveyed a target population of 202 respondents. This participants were selected from key stakeholders within the Nigerian power sector. This included managers, technical staff, and regulatory officials. The selection aimed to capture diverse perspectives on communication effectiveness and crisis management in the sector. The researcher used a structured online questionnaire developed through Google Forms. This approach ensured broad reach and convenience for respondents across various locations. The questionnaire contained multiple sections tailored to address the study objectives. Multiple regression was used to analyse the data with the aid of SPSS.

### DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### Test of Hypotheses

**Ho<sup>1</sup>:** Message Clarity has no significant and positive effect on crisis management in the Nigerian power sector.

**Ho<sup>2</sup>:** There is a significant relationship between timeliness of communication and crisis management within the Nigerian power sector.

**Table 1**

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.981 <sup>a</sup>	.962	.962	.24821

a. Predictors: (Constant), TC, MC

The R Square value of 0.962 indicates that 96.2% of the variation in the dependent variable (Crisis Management) is explained by the independent variables (Timeliness of Communication and Message Clarity). This exceptionally high value reflects a very strong fit, demonstrating that the model effectively captures the relationship between the predictors and crisis management. It suggests that the model is robust and provides a reliable explanation of how these independent variables influence crisis management outcomes. The Adjusted R Square, also 0.962, adjusts the R Square value to account for the number of predictors in the model. The fact that the Adjusted R Square remains identical to the R Square indicates that the inclusion of both predictors (Timeliness of Communication and Message Clarity) is justified and relevant. It further suggests that the model does not suffer from overfitting, as the predictors contribute meaningfully to explaining the variation in Crisis Management.

**Table 2**

**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	309.661	2	154.830	2513.113	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	12.260	199	.062		
	Total	321.921	201			

a. Dependent Variable: CM

b. Predictors: (Constant), TC, MC

The ANOVA table tests the overall significance of the regression model, determining whether the independent variables (Timeliness and Message Clarity) collectively explain a significant portion of the variation in the dependent variable (Crisis Management). The regression model is highly significant, as evidenced by the very low p-value (0.000) and high F-statistic (2513.113). This confirms that timeliness and message clarity collectively explain a significant portion of the variation in Crisis Management, making the model reliable and valid for predicting outcomes.

**Table 3**

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.353	.066		-5.316	.000
	MC	.438	.094	.394	4.669	.000
	TC	.630	.090	.590	7.001	.000

a. Dependent Variable: CM

The regression analysis explores the relationship between Crisis Management (dependent variable) and two independent variables: Message Clarity and Timeliness of Communication. The results provides understanding into the contributions of each predictor and their significance.

Table 3 shows message clarity with unstandardized coefficient of 0.438, implying that for every one-unit increase in message clarity, crisis management improves by 0.438 units, holding timeliness of communication constant. The standardized coefficient (Beta) is 0.394, suggesting that message clarity accounts for 39.4% of the variation in crisis management. With a t-value of 4.669 and a p-value of 0.000, the relationship between message clarity and crisis management is statistically significant. Based on this result, the null hypothesis which states that message clarity has no significant and positive effect on crisis management in the Nigerian power sector is rejected. Eze and Aluko (2022), Adebayo and Oyewole (2021).

Similarly, timeliness of communication shows an unstandardized coefficient of 0.630, indicating that a one-unit increase in timeliness of communication leads to an improvement of 0.630 units in Crisis Management, assuming message clarity remains constant. The standardized coefficient (Beta) is 0.590, meaning timeliness of communication explains 59.0% of the variation in crisis management. The t-value of 7.001 and a p-value of 0.000 further confirm the significance of this relationship. Based on this result, the null hypothesis which states that timeliness of communication has no significant and positive effect on crisis management in the Nigerian power sector is rejected. The result is in accordance with the findings of Okoro and Chukwu (2021), Adeola and Bello (2023).

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The regression analysis reveals that both message clarity and timeliness of communication are vital factors in determining the effectiveness of crisis management. Each variable plays a significant role in shaping outcomes, but their impacts differ in magnitude. Timeliness of communication has the greater influence, accounting for 59.0% of the variation in crisis management. This indicates that the speed and promptness with which information is communicated during a crisis are crucial in managing and resolving issues effectively. On the other hand, message clarity contributes 39.4% to the variation in crisis management, emphasizing the importance of delivering clear and easily understood messages to ensure proper understanding and action. Both predictors are statistically significant, underscoring their importance. However, the greater impact of timeliness of communication suggests that prioritizing swift and prompt communication systems during crises can yield more substantial improvements in crisis management outcomes. Nevertheless, ensuring clear messaging is also essential for maximizing effectiveness.

The following recommendations were made from the findings:

- i. Organizations should prioritize timely communication during crises by implementing efficient communication systems and ensuring prompt information dissemination. This can be achieved through real-time communication tools and predefined crisis communication protocols to mitigate delays.
- ii. To improve Crisis Management, organizations should train employees and leadership in crafting clear, concise, and effective messages. Clarity in communication can reduce misunderstandings,

build trust, and ensure that critical instructions are easily understood and acted upon during a crisis.

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