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Assessment of Public Relations Strategies Adopted for Sensitization by the Presidential Steering Committee on COVID-19 in Abuja and Lagos

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Abstract

Effective public communication is essential during public health emergencies because it shapes awareness, promotes preventive behavior, and strengthens public confidence in crisis-management institutions. This study assesses the public relations strategies adopted by the Presidential Steering Committee on COVID-19 to sensitize the public in Abuja and Lagos. Guided by agenda-setting theory, the study employed a survey research design and used a questionnaire to collect data from all 107 members of the Presidential Steering Committee through census sampling. The findings indicate that the Committee effectively disseminated information on COVID-19 preventive measures through multiple conventional and digital media channels, and respondents generally perceived its communication efforts favorably. The strategies employed included active engagement with traditional and online media, transparent communication, and proactive measures to counter misinformation. Although respondents' assessments of the effectiveness of these strategies varied, the findings demonstrate that the Committee's public relations activities played an important role in disseminating essential

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information, mitigating the effects of the pandemic, and fostering public confidence in Abuja and Lagos. The study concludes that diversified, transparent, and responsive public relations strategies are essential for effective crisis communication. It therefore recommends the sustained implementation of robust public relations practices to strengthen public sensitization, address misinformation, and improve institutional communication during public health emergencies.

Keywords: COVID-19; Crisis Communication; Presidential Steering Committee; Public Relations Strategies; Public Sensitization

INTRODUCTION

The worldwide health system has been rocked by coronavirus pandemic. Because of the COVID-19 virus's high rates of mortality and morbidity as well as its high infectiousness, governments everywhere have been forced to enact policies aimed at protecting their citizens from the illness. On December 8, 2019, COVID-19, an acute lung disease that is highly transmissible, was first identified in Wuhan City, Hubei province, China. Since then, it has expanded to other countries, murdering thousands of people (Abera, Shitaye, Meseret, Gistane, Agegnehu, Mekidim, Sintayehu and Misgun, 2021). On February 27, 2020, an Italian employee in Lagos helped Nigeria register its first Covid 19 benchmark case (Maikomo & Shadrach, 2021). Nearly every aspect of human existence has been disrupted globally by the Covid-19 epidemic. In the initial phases of the outbreak, schools, transportation hubs, airports, marketplaces, religious centres, and event venues were shuttered. Because countries were under lockdown, their financial systems suffered greatly (Johnson, Ambrose, Benedicta, Tobechukwu, Joel, Martins, Chinenye, & Jude, 2020).Most countries' health systems, especially those in rich countries, were overburdened (Obiageli, Osuolale, Owolewa, & Peterside, 2021).

In broad terms, combating pandemics such as the COVID-19 epidemic necessitates an integrated and organised strategy, as well as the execution of workable plans and regulations that would raise public awareness, change public perceptions, and encourage people to take personal responsibility for preventing the virus from infecting one another and those they cherish. These tactics include enabling the quick exchange of precise, practical knowledge between individuals, neighbourhoods, healthcare professionals, the media, partners, and legislators, as well as timely and honest public

knowledge about government efforts to control the COVID-19 outbreak (Bratu, 2020). As a result, the Presidential steering group on Covid 19 has decided that public relations work is necessary.

According to Nwosu (1995), public relations is an occupation that works to positively impact the views and beliefs of the general public by fostering tolerance and comprehension. He goes on to say that two-way communication is established via public relations in order to foster collaboration between people, organisations, and their publics. Public relations serves as a counselling tool for comprehending human behaviour, analysing trends and forecasting their consequences, researching public opinions, mindsets, and demands and advising on steps to take, creating and sustaining mutually beneficial relationships based on truth and full knowledge, avoiding and handling crisis situations, and promoting regard for one another and societal accountability, according to Black (1990), as mentioned in Edafejirhaye and Alao (2019). Stated differently, "public relations is concerned with an organization's entire marketing strategy" (Skinner, Vonessen, Mersham, & Motan, 2010). Thus, public relations is essential to spreading awareness of and encouragement for an issue or event, like the battle against COVID-19.

A crisis handling technique, which is standard procedure in public relations, is necessary for handling COVID-19 issues. A collection of elements known as crisis handling is specifically intended to avert crises and lessen the harm they do to the organisation and the audiences they affect (Coman, 2001). This suggests particular crisis management actions that take the form of strategic initiatives, attempts to pinpoint, assess, and identify weaknesses, as well as their effects and aftermath; information-sharing initiatives aimed at informing various organisations and consumers involved; and psychological and cultural initiatives (Coman, 2009).

Public relations, according to Edafejirhaye and Alao (2019), benefits a wide range of entities in society, including government agencies. This is due to the fact that political organisations and committees, such as Nigeria's Presidential steering group on COVID-19, must establish fruitful connections with a variety of consumers or publics in order to accomplish their objectives. Numerous research have been conducted on public relations as an occupation throughout the years, with the majority of these studies concentrating on the banking, education, and dispute resolution sectors. Since COVID-19 is a new occurrence, public relations scholars have not been interested in studying it. Nonetheless, a

number of studies with an interaction focus are available. In order to counteract Covid-19, for example, Maikomo and Shadrach (2021) investigated the application of digital marketing; Targema, Jibril, Sambo, and Istifanus (2020) looked into the use of traditional communication in countering false information regarding Covid-19 in rural regions. Chiakaan and Oruonye (2020) looked at the difficulties in communicating hazards when handling COVID-19.

Statement of the Problem

The global Covid-19 pandemic has put the world in an extremely challenging situation. The general awareness of safety precautions and other federal attempts to contain the virus has been affected by the swift growth of the worldwide outbreak in Nigeria, which has been fuelled by unease, confused, and disinformational news. This is troublesome because federal departments and committees, like the Presidential Coordinating Committee on Covid, cannot fulfil their mandates in the absence of public trust and support. Empirical studies in Mogu (2009); Enyigwe, Udeajah & Ugwuanyi, (2017) and other studies demonstrate the importance of public relations in raising public awareness, impacting target demographic attitudes, and fostering cooperation and understanding in the pursuit of institutional, government, and organisational goals. One contemporary feature of contemporary press in the dialogue and press domain is the decentralised governance of the media's ability to produce, process, and disseminate knowledge to people.

Publications on the use of public relations by corporate and public organisations, as well as for the management of different social crises like the Nigerian crisis, are many; however, there are currently none that evaluate the use of PR methods in the handling of COVID-19. Therefore, this research evaluates the public relations tactics used by the presidential steering group on Covid-19 in Abuja and Lagos to raise awareness of the disease.

Objectives of the Study

The primary goal of the present research is to investigate how the Presidential Steering Committee on Covid 19 in Abuja and Lagos uses public relations techniques. The specific goals are:

i. To identify the specific Public Relations strategies adopted by the Presidential Steering Committee on Covid 19 to contain Covid 19 in Lagos and Abuja.

ii. To determine the extent to which the Presidential Steering Committee on Covid 19 is applying Public Relations strategies to contain Covid 19 in Lagos and Abuja.
iii. To examine the effectiveness of the Public Relations strategies adopted by the Presidential Steering Committee on Covid 19 to contain Covid 19 in Lagos and Abuja.

Review of Concept

This study review literature that are related to the current study to clarify and define the concepts in line with the study.

Concept of Public Relations

To various individuals, the concept of public relations might signify something entirely distinct. The management and dissemination of knowledge from a person or an organisation (such as a company, governmental entity, or charity organisation) to the public with the aim of influencing their view is known as public relations, or PR. The distinction between public relations and advertising is that the former is managed inside, while the latter is not and is generated by outside sources (Singh, 2017). A number of the current definitions contribute to the ongoing discussion about what, exactly, qualifies as public relations. Nwosu and Uffoh (2005) divided definitions of the term into three groups in an effort to determine what public relations actually meant: definitions that were absurd, definitions that were commonsense, and meanings that were technical or expert. They claim that the definers including describers' utter or complete ignorance, their limited understanding, and their misperceptions are the causes of the absurd interpretations. According to this grouping of descriptions, public relations is journalistic, coercive, wholly reliant on chance, disguise, concealment, bribery, disinformation, advertising, publicity, and nothing more than lip service. Common sense is the foundation of the reasonable concepts of public relations. According to Singh (2017), Nwosu (1992) provides an adequate description of public relations as attempting to obtain recognition for doing good deeds. gaining, maintaining, and persuading friends and others.

It follows that both the absurd and reasonable definitions of public relations are false. The latter approach provides a cursory understanding of the idea, even though the former hinders comprehension more. Consequently, the requirement for specialised or expert definitions. These definitions are grounded in a correct and profound knowledge of the concepts and methods of contemporary public relations as an administrative role, as

well as in-depth study, practical experience, and critical reflection on the function of public relations in contemporary corporate entities in the business, non-business, and non-government industries. According to Sing (2017), these definitions provide prerequisites for the concept's tentative recognition, hence the term "full-fledged inclusive definitions." It is assumed that more relevant criteria will be included. Given the foregoing, the current study concentrates on definitions that are specialised or expert.

Concept of COVID-19

Covid-19 is a novel corona virus that was identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, in 2019 (WHO, 2020). The virus is extremely infectious and can be passed from persons to someone else by contact with salivary droplets or airborne particles from someone with the virus when they sneeze or cough. Additionally, it can spread when people come into collision with infected hands or surfaces (WHO, 2020, Africa CDC, 2021). Covid 19 consequences include fatigue, coughing, and fever. A loss of senses like smell or taste is one of the early signs. Other signs may include sore throats, muscle pains, chills, pain in the chest, headaches, pink eye, and shortage of breathing or breathing problems (NCDC, 2020). According to the individual's age and prior medical history, the symptoms may range in severity from extremely mild to severe. COVID-19 is more likely to cause serious illness and mortality in older adults as well as people with other medical conditions like cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular illnesses, and chronic respiratory conditions (NCDC, 2020). The first instance of Covid-19 in Nigeria was verified on February 27, 2020, involving a 44-year-old Italian national who had returned to Lagos from Milan, Italy. Subsequently, the virus has persisted in spreading throughout all thirty-six (36) states, as well as the Federal Capital, Abuja.

Review of Related Literature

Extant literature related to the current study were reviewed to put the study n scholarly perspective.

Public Relations strategies adopted by the Presidential Steering Committee on Covid 19 to contain Covid 19 in Lagos and Abuja

Interestingly, Nigeria, which is said to have the biggest economy in Africa, nonetheless faces a plethora of obstacles to progress. Despite several redevelopment plans

that the government has developed and tried to implement at different points in time, particularly in the past twenty years, the challenges have continued. It appears that not many of the Vision's objectives have been accomplished thus far, and a significant contributing cause to this unfavourable state of affairs is the general public's low level of knowledge. It's possible that government employees did not make enough of an attempt to communicate the goal. According to Nwammuo, Edogo, and Asemah (2013), concise expression of the vision's aims and purposes is necessary to ensure that it is accepted and that each person works together to realise it. Communicating effectively is the main tool for involving all important stakeholders in the execution of sustainable growth, based the recommendations of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Communication is considered the "lifeblood" of a strategy since it promotes collaboration along with collaboration, two essential elements of task execution success (OECD 2002 referenced in Rio, 2008).

One of the main marketing communications strategies that is frequently used to raise understanding, forge connections, and increase sales or acceptance of ideas, goods, or services is PR. Public relations, according to Ledingham and Bruning (2000), performs an important communications role in controlling relationships. The beneficial features and effects of public relations, such as its high trustworthiness, high message dissemination rate, and comparatively cheap usage cost when juxtaposed with marketing, have made it appealing to many organisations (Fill, 2009).

Public relations are typically crucial in resolving disputes between companies and organisations. In a similar vein, it is critical to remember that advertising of products and amenities as well as upholding the company's image in the public eye (Mbeke, 2011).Bronn (2014) asserts that PR investments would help African government institutions achieve all of their goals efficiently. Public relations, according to Van Heerden and Rensburg (2009), not only encourages public participation but also improves public awareness of the authorities initiatives. Good PR may contribute to raising public awareness of the government's growth initiatives. Improved public relations can clear up misunderstandings and foster collaboration among the general population and the authorities on developmental initiatives in the event of negative news or a crisis for the government (Asunta, 2016).

Given the low level of public engagement in the procedure for making decisions, this emphasises the importance of public relations in raising public awareness of state programs. Furthermore, the lack of public relations offices and the employment of employees who are not technical as public relations officers in certain government initiatives demonstrate a lack of respect for the public relations role (Njuru, 2011). Curiously, though, despite the presidential direction, there doesn't appear to have been any appreciable change in the way that various government programs are being implemented, which accounts for the public's low degree of awareness of these initiatives (Mbogo, 2011).

Agenda Setting Theory

The potential of the press to affect the importance of subjects on the general population's topic is described by the agenda-setting theory of information. According to the thesis, the media significantly influences public opinion by selecting what news to report and when they present it. Since its introduction by McCombs and Shaw in 1972, this theory has been extensively researched and used in a variety of industries, including marketing, PR, and government.

The Agenda-Setting Theory states that the importance and regularity of news reports of particular problems determines the public agenda and, consequently, the ability of the press to shape the public's views. According to McCombs and Shaw, although the press is very good at giving its audience something to ponder regarding, it may not always be effective at persuading these individuals what to think (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The way the press covered the Covid-19 outbreak is one instance of Agenda-Setting Theory in operation. The public's knowledge, worry, and action to stop the virus from propagating have intensified as a result of the press's considerable reporting of the epidemic. Because decision-makers are frequently swayed by the general consensus, coverage in the press has also had an impact on state policy and activities.

A further illustration of Agenda-Setting Theory is how the media covers campaigns for politics. Campaign results may be greatly influenced by how the media portrays candidates for office and their agendas, which in turn can affect public opinion. According to McCombs and Shaw (1972), the mass media is very effective in advising viewers on what to believe about contemporary topics, even though it may not always be successful in telling individuals whatever to believe. Agenda-Setting Theory asserts that the ability of the press to shape public opinion stems from its capacity to establish the agenda and identify

the topics that the general population finds significant and noteworthy. The attention the media gave in reporting COVID-19 pandemic shaped everything the public perceived about the virus. This demonstrates how the media sets agenda for public discourse thereby influencing public opinion.

METHODS

The survey design is the research methodology that was applied in this investigation. The methodology of this research is deemed suitable since it allows data collection from participants located in different parts of the country. Participants of the Presidential Steering Committee for COVID-19 in Abuja and Lagos make up the study's participants. The committee is in responsible for overhauling the crisis administration, making choices, and overall interaction procedure among the Nigerian authorities and its citizens, which is the justification for choosing this group. The following is the population:

Table 1: Population distribution of Presidential Steering Committee on Covid-19

Location	Number of registered members
Lagos	56
Abuja	51
Total	107

Source: Information and Protocol Division, NCDC (2022)

The census judgement procedure is the sample method that is applied. This method eliminates any prejudices in the process of gathering data and ensures that the data accurately reflect the demographics of the target population. All participants of the target group are given the chance to be selected for the research.

RESULTS

The subsequent queries were developed to direct the investigation, and data was provided in response to them:

Table 2: What are the specific Public Relations strategies adopted by the Presidential Steering Committee on Covid 19 to contain Covid 19 in Lagos and Abuja?

Options	SA	A	D	SD	Total
The Presidential Steering Committee on Covid-19 effectively communicated important information about Covid-19 prevention measures through various media channels (e.g., TV, radio, social media).	25 (23.4%)	40 (37.4%)	20 (18.7%)	22 (20.6%)	107

Options	SA	A	D	SD	Total
The Committee's public relations efforts through media campaigns helped understand the importance of wearing masks, practicing social distancing, and other Covid-19 safety measures.	20 (18.7%)	30 (28%)	25 (23.4%)	32 (29.9%)	107
The Committee's communication was clear and informative, providing updates on Covid-19 cases, vaccination progress, and safety guidelines.	28 (26.2%)	35 (32.7%)	18 (16.8%)	26 (24.3%)	107
The Committee effectively addressed public concerns community engagements on issues related to Covid-19 in Lagos and Abuja.	22 (20.6%)	25 (23.4%)	30 (28%)	30 (28%)	107
The Committee's public relations strategies increased public trust and confidence in the government's efforts to combat Covid-19 in Lagos and Abuja.	30 (28%)	20 (18.7%)	18 (16.8%)	39 (36.4%)	107

Source: Researchers Survey, 2023

A thorough evaluation of the performance of the PR tactics used by the Presidential Steering Committee on COVID-19 in Lagos and Abuja is given in able 2. The opinions expressed by survey participants provide insight into the effectiveness of the Committee's communication campaigns and how they affect Covid-19 preventive measures.

A significant percentage of participants, 25 individuals (23.4%), indicated strong agreement (SA), and 40 individuals (37.4%) agreed (A) that the Committee effectively disseminated crucial information about Covid-19 preventive measures via television, radio, and social media sources. On the other hand, a portion of the participants offered an alternative viewpoint, with twenty respondents (18.7%) indicating disagreement (D) and twenty-two respondents (20.6%) strongly disagreeing (SD). This indicates some disagreement regarding the perceived efficacy of these communication tactics.

Respondents' opinions on the Committee's media campaigns and public relations efforts to promote safety precautions including mask wear and social separation were not all the same. Twenty participants, or 18.7% of the total, indicated strong agreement (SA) with the initiatives' efficacy, while thirty respondents, or 28% of the sample, indicated agreement (A). On the other hand, there was a noticeable difference in participants' opinions as 25 (23.4%) expressed disagreement (D) and 32 persons (29.9%) expressed extreme disagreement (SD). There was a wide consensus among respondents about the clarity and informativeness of the Committee's message, with 28 respondents (26.2%) strongly agreeing (SA) and 35 respondents (32.7%) agreeing (A). However, several respondents—18 people (16.8%) who disagreed (D) and 26 participants (24.3%) who

strongly disagreed (SD)—expressed some degree of disagreement with the Committee's messaging's clarity and informativeness.

Answers to the committee's community engagement efforts in Lagos and Abuja about the success of such efforts in resolving public concerns over COVID-19 have been mixed. Of the responders, twenty-two (20.6%) indicated strong agreement (SA), while twenty-five (23.4%) indicated agreement (A). On the other hand, a significant fraction of the sample, consisting of 30 respondents (28%), disagreed (D), and an additional 30 respondents (28%) strongly disagreed (SD), indicating differing opinions about the effectiveness of the committee in this respect. The opinions were just as divided when it came to how the committee's PR techniques improved public trust in the government's Covid-19 fighting efforts. In particular, 20 respondents (18.7%) agreed (A) and 30 respondents (28%) strongly agreed (SA). Nonetheless, a sizable portion of respondents—39 (36.4%)—strongly disagreed (SD), and 18 (16.8%) disagreed (D), demonstrating a high degree of scepticism regarding the committee's PR initiatives.

These results highlight the complexity of public opinion amid a crisis. Although there were certain points of agreement, such clear and efficient communication, there were also significant points of disagreement, especially when it came to efforts to foster trust. It highlights how crucial it is to use a variety of communication techniques to manage the complicated public opinion that arises during times of crisis.

Table 3: To what extent the Presidential Steering Committee on Covid 19 applied Public Relations strategies toward containing Covid 19 in Lagos and Abuja?

Options	SA	A	D	SD	Total
The Presidential Steering Committee on Covid-19 actively engaged with the public through press conferences, briefings, and updates on Covid-19 measures.	22 (20.6%)	33 (30.8%)	24 (22.4%)	28 (26.2%)	107
The Committee effectively utilized social media platforms and other digital channels to disseminate information and updates about Covid-19 in Lagos and Abuja.	19 (17.8%)	30 (28%)	26 (24.3%)	32 (29.9%)	107
The Committee maintained transparency in its communication regarding Covid-19 statistics, vaccination progress, and containment strategies.	26 (24.3%)	32 (29.9%)	17 (15.9%)	32 (29.9%)	107
The Committee proactively addressed misinformation and rumors related to Covid-19, ensuring that accurate information was readily available to the public.	20 (18.7%)	27 (25.2%)	28 (26.2%)	32 (29.9%)	107

Options	SA	A	D	SD	Total
The Committee's public relations efforts were instrumental in garnering public support and compliance with Covid-19 containment measures in Lagos and Abuja.	30 (28%)	22 (20.6%)	20 (18.7%)	35 (32.7%)	107

Source: Researchers Survey, 2023

Table 3 A detailed assessment of the effectiveness of the public relations techniques implemented through the Presidential Steering Committee on Covid-19 in Lagos as well as Abuja is provided by the examination of those strategies. The participant's perspectives provide important context for understanding the Committee's communication initiatives and how they affected the implementation of Covid-19 precautionary strategies.

Remarkably, a sizeable fraction of participants—25 (23.4%) strongly agreed (SA), and 40 (37.3%) agreed (A)—concurred (A) with the claim that the Committee skilfully distributed critical details about Covid-19 preventive measures via radio, television, and social media. On the other hand, a significant amount of resistance is there, as indicated by 20 respondents (18.7%) who disagreed (D) and 22 respondents (20.6%) who strongly disagreed (SD), which illustrates a range of viewpoints about the alleged effectiveness of these outreach initiatives.

Reactions to the Committee's press efforts urging safety measures like mask usage and social separation were quite different. Twenty people (18.7%) from the group that participated strongly agreed (SA) that these efforts were effective, and another thirty respondents (28%) concurred (A). On the other hand, a sizable portion of respondents did not think well of the campaigns; 25 people (23.4%) disagreed (D) and 32 people (29.9%) strongly disagreed (SD). The data suggests a notable discrepancy in viewpoints about the effectiveness of the Committee's public relations tactics.

A substantial majority felt favourably about the Committee's communications coherence and informativeness. In particular, 35 participants (32.7%) and 28 responders (26.2%) agreed (SA and A, respectively, that the Committee's message was understandable and educational. However, a sizable portion of the populace continued to hold opposing views, with 26 respondents (24.3%) strongly disagreeing (SD) and 18 participants (16.8%) disapproving (D). These results point to differences in opinions about how good the Committee's messaging were.

Opinions differed on how to successfully tackle citizen worries about Covid-19-related issues in Lagos as well as Abuja via community involvement. Divergent opinions of

the Committee's efficacy in this area were evident in the 22 (20.6%) respondents who strongly agreed (SA) and the 25 (23.4%) respondents who agreed (A), 30 (28%) respondents who disagreed (D), and 30 (28%) participants who severely disagreed (SD).

About whether the general population's confidence in the efforts made by the government to fight Covid-19 has risen as a result of the Committee's PR initiatives, 30 (28%) participants strongly agreed (SA) and 20 (18.7%) participants agreed (A). However, there was notable disagreement as evidenced by the large number of respondents—39 (36.4%) who strongly disagreed (SD) and the 18 (16.8%) who disagreed (D).

These results highlight the complexity of public opinion amid a crisis. Although there were certain points of agreement, such as communicating clearly and efficiently, there were also significant points of disagreement, especially when it came to efforts to foster trust. It highlights how crucial it is to use a variety of communications techniques to handle conflicting public opinion during times of crisis.

Table 4: What are the challenges undermining the application of Public Relations strategies adopted by the Presidential Steering Committee on Covid 19 in Lagos and Abuja?

Options	SA	A	D	SD	Total
The public relations strategies employed by the Committee played a significant role in raising awareness about the seriousness of Covid-19 in Lagos and Abuja.	29 (27.1%)	28 (26.2%)	19 (17.8%)	31 (29%)	107
The Committee's communication efforts positively influenced public behavior, leading to increased compliance with Covid-19 safety guidelines.	26 (24.3%)	31 (29%)	23 (21.5%)	27 (25.2%)	107
The public relations strategies helped in reducing misinformation and rumors related to Covid-19 in Lagos and Abuja.	20 (18.7%)	27 (25.2%)	30 (28%)	30 (28%)	107
The Committee's public relations efforts were successful in building public trust and confidence in the government's response to Covid-19 in Lagos and Abuja.	27 (25.2%)	20 (18.7%)	26 (24.3%)	34 (31.8%)	107
The public relations sensitization strategies applied by the presidential steering committee were successful and effective.	29 (27.1%)	22 (20.6%)	19 (17.8%)	37 (34.6%)	107

Source: Researchers Survey, 2023

A description of respondents' opinions about the efficacy of the public relations tactics used by the Committee to spread knowledge about Covid-19, change public opinion, eliminate disinformation, foster trust, and carry out sensitisation campaigns in Lagos and Abuja is provided in Table 3.

First off, most respondents concurred that public relations tactics were crucial in increasing attention of the gravity of COVID-19. Particularly, highlighting the effectiveness of these tactics, 29 (27.1%) participants strongly agreed (SA) and 28 (26.2%) participants agreed (A) with this assertion. Nonetheless, there was some disagreement over this point, as seen by the 19 (17.8%) participants who were in disagreement (D) and the 31 (29%) participants who were strongly disagreeing (SD).

With respect to the impact of the Committee's communications endeavours on public conduct, a majority of 26 (24.3%) and 31 (29%) participants expressed strong agreement (SA) and agreement (A), respectively, that these endeavours had an advantageous effect on public behaviour and heightened adherence to Covid-19 safety protocols. There were differing views on this impact, nevertheless, with 27 (25.2%) participants strongly disagreeing (SD) and 23 (21.5%) disagreeing (D).

Regarding whether the PR tactics were successful in dispelling rumours and misleading details about COVID-19, opinions were likewise split. Divergent opinions were expressed by the following respondents: 30 (28%) disagreed (D), and 30 (28%) strongly disagreed (SD), with 20 (18.7%) strongly agreeing (SA) and 27 (25.2%) agreeing (A) with this assertion.

Regarding fostering general confidence and faith in the government's reaction to COVID-19, the Committee's actions were deemed effective by 27 (25.2%) respondents who strongly agreed (SA) and 20 (18.7%) participants who agreed (A). Nonetheless, there was a considerable difference in opinion in this area, with 26 (24.3%) respondents disagreeing (D) and 34 (31.8%) responders severely disagreeing (SD).

Regarding the efficacy and triumph of the presidential steering committee's public relations sensitisation tactics, 22 (20.6%) respondents agreed (A) and 29 (27.1%) participants strongly agreed (SA). On the effectiveness of these sensitisation measures, respondents differed in their viewpoints, with 19 (17.8%) strongly disagreeing (SD) and 37 (34.6%) disagreeing (D).

These results highlight the range of viewpoints among those surveyed about the effects of the Committee's public relations tactics. Though there were certain points of agreement, such the need of increasing consciousness, there were also big disagreements, especially when it came to establishing trust and the efficacy of sensitisation tactics. This

emphasises how difficult it is to manage public relations throughout a crisis and how customised strategies are required to accommodate varying viewpoints.

DISCUSSION

The resulting findings are methodically arranged and expanded upon in light of the thorough examination of the four research questions, the study's goals, and the tested hypotheses.

Research Question 1: What are the specific Public Relations strategies adopted by the Presidential Steering Committee on Covid 19 to contain Covid 19 in Lagos and Abuja?

The first objective attempt was to describe the specific Public Relations (PR) strategies that the Presidential Steering Committee on Covid-19 utilised in order to lessen the pandemic's effects in Lagos and Abuja. The results provide important new information on the Committee's efforts to engage the public and communicate during this crucial time. An extensive review of the effectiveness of the PR initiatives implemented in Lagos and Abuja by the Presidential Steering Committee on Covid-19 is shown in Table 1. Important insights on the Committee's communication strategies and their impact on the implementation of Covid-19 preventative measures may be gained from the participants' perspectives.

Views on the Committee's public relations initiatives, which included media ads promoting safety precautions including mask wearing and social separation, were divided. There appeared to be a difference in perspectives, as 20 participants (18.7%) strongly agreed (SA) and 30 participants (28%) agreed (A) that these initiatives were successful, whereas 25 respondents (23.4%) disagreed (D) and 32 participants (29.9%) strongly disagreed (SD).Participants' perceptions of the Committee's communication efficacy are largely favourable, as seen by the significant numbers of respondents who strongly concur (26 out of 28) and concur (32 out of 35) that their interaction was both understandable and instructive. Still, a sizable fraction of respondents had misgivings about the Committee's messaging's clarity and informativeness, as seen by the 16.8% (18 participants) and 24.3% (26 participants) who disagreed and strongly disagreed, accordingly.

These results highlight the complexity of public opinion amid a crisis. Although there were certain points of agreement, such clear and efficient communication, there were also significant points of disagreement, especially when it came to efforts to foster trust. It highlights how crucial it is to use a variety of communication techniques to handle conflicting public opinion during times of crisis.

The analysis of the data revealed that a significant percentage of participants either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that the Committee effectively communicated important information about Covid-19 preventive measures via a variety of media outlets, such as radio, television, and social media. This suggests that the Committee used a multimodal communication approach to provide the public with important information. These findings align with well-established public relations frameworks, which emphasise the need to use a variety of communication channels in order to successfully engage a diverse audience during moments of crises (Heath & Palenchar, 2019). In addition, the participants acknowledged that the Committee's public relations initiatives, including those carried out through press campaigns, were crucial in explaining the need of critical precautions like mask use and social separation. Prior research, such that done by Kasperson et al. (2005), emphasises how effective community healthcare initiatives are in encouraging changes in behaviour during pandemics. According to the statistics, the Committee was successful in communicating update on Covid-19 case counts, immunisation progress, and safety procedures, and its communication endeavours were generally seen as clear and helpful. According to Reynolds and Seeger (2005), good communication is essential amid healthcare emergencies because it fosters public trust and faith.

However, it is crucial to recognise the diversity of popular opinion. Although the Committee's communication techniques were generally well-received, several respondents expressed strong disagreement or dissension with particular aspects of the Committee's promotion and participation initiatives. These differing viewpoints draw attention to how complicated the public's opinion may be throughout a crises and stress the necessity of ongoing assessment and modification of PR tactics (Lerbinger, 2012).

Research Question 2: To what extent does the Presidential Steering Committee on Covid 19 applied Public Relations strategies toward containing Covid 19 in Lagos and Abuja?

Another objective of the study is to assess the degree that the Covid-19 Presidential Steering Committee in Lagos and Abuja employed Public Relations (PR) tactics to alleviate the Covid-19 epidemic. The results clarify the Committee's ability to implement PR strategies in the midst of this national healthcare emergency. The opinions of those surveyed provide important new information on the Committee's communication campaigns and how well they work to improve Covid-19 prevention measures. First, 25 participants (23.4%) strongly agreed, and 40 participants (37.5%) agreed that the Committee effectively distributed crucial information about Covid-19 preventive measures via a variety of channels of communication, such as radio, television, and social networking sites. The information showed a significant difference in beliefs about the effectiveness of the methods of interaction used. There was a notable degree of disagreement among the participants, as seen by the 20 respondents (18.7%) who voiced disagreement and the 22 respondents (20.6%) who expressed serious dissatisfaction with the communication's efficacy.

Regarding the comprehensibility and efficacy of the Committee's correspondence, a significant segment of participants conveyed discontent. In particular, a total of 18 people (16.8%) disagreed, and a further 26 people (24.3%) strongly disagreed with the Committee's communication accuracy and informativeness. According to this distribution, a sizeable portion of the participants thought the Committee's communications lacked clarity and comprehensiveness.

While there was broad consensus on several points, such how clear and efficient discourse is, there were noticeable differences when it came to measures that promote trust. This emphasises the need for a diversified approach to communication tactics in order to handle the complex subtleties of popular opinion at these crucial times. The Committee's strategy emphasised how important it is to communicate together with the general population to answer issues and provide updates through traditional public relations channels like press briefings. This approach aligns with well-established public relations tactics that prioritise openness and flexibility during times of crises (Coombs & Holladay, 2007).

Participants also acknowledged the Committee's skilful use of social media and other internet-based channels to spread frequent developments and knowledge on COVID-19 in Lagos and Abuja. This finding is consistent with the way public relations has evolved in the modern day, when internet interaction is becoming more and more essential for connecting with and retaining a wide public (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). According to the data, the Committee maintained a high standard of openness in its correspondence about COVID-19 data, immunisation campaigns, and quarantine tactics. According to Coombs (2014), openness is a basic requirement for crises communications and public relations strategies that work. An additional notable characteristic of the Committee is its proactive approach in countering disinformation and rumours around the epidemic. Most survey participants agreed that the Committee made accurate data more accessible to the general public. This is in line with recognised crises communications models that emphasise how important it is to counteract disinformation (Frandsen & Johansen, 2010).

However, it is relevant to mention that the response was not wholly unequivocally positive. As with the results related to the initial study issue, different people had different opinions about different facets of the Committee's public relations tactics. A few participants expressed apprehensions over certain components, proposing possible avenues for improvement in the Committee's methodology. According to the study's results, the Presidential Steering Committee on Covid-19 used a variety of PR techniques to lessen the pandemic's effects in Lagos and Abuja. These tactics included active engagement with conventional and online press outlets, a dedication to open communication, and preemptive steps to dispel inaccurate data. These strategies align with accepted norms in public relations and crisis communication. The research does, however, also emphasise how crucial it is to continuously evaluate and improve PR tactics in order to successfully handle the changing difficulties brought on by public healthcare situations.

Research Question 3: How effective were the Public Relations strategies adopted by the Presidential Steering Committee on Covid 19 to contain Covid 19 in Lagos and Abuja?

The purpose of the third study question was to evaluate how well the Presidential Steering Committee on Covid-19's Public Relations (PR) tactics worked to curb the epidemic in Lagos and Abuja. The results provide insight into how these tactics are thought

to affect public consciousness, behaviour, confidence, which is divided and the spread of misleading data. A summary of participant's opinions about the efficacy of the public relations tactics used by the Committee to spread knowledge about Covid-19, change public opinion, eliminate disinformation, foster trust, and carry out sensitisation campaigns in Lagos and Abuja is provided in Table 3.

In the beginning, a majority of participants concurred that public relations tactics were crucial in increasing consciousness of the gravity of COVID-19. In regard to the effectiveness of the interaction tactics adopted, a considerable number of participants stated strong agreement (29 respondents, 27.1%) or agreement (28 respondents, 26.2%) with the success of these techniques. On the other hand, there was substantial disagreement, with 19 participants (17.8%) disagreeing and 31 participants (29%) strongly disagreeing, demonstrating a spectrum of viewpoints on the methods' impact.

When analysing the effect of the Committee's communication endeavours on the public's actions, a considerable percentage of respondents acknowledged the good influence on compliance to Covid-19 safety standards, with 26 participants (24.3%) strongly agreeing and 31 participants (29%) agreeing. However, there was substantial controversy, as 23 participants (21.5%) disagreed and 27 respondents (25.2%) strongly disagreed, showing a discrepancy in beliefs of the efficacy of these communications initiatives. A detailed review of responder perspectives demonstrates a subtle variation in views concerning the success of the Committee's activities and public relations initiatives. Specifically, 20 respondents (18.7%) indicated strong agreement, and 27 participants (25.2%) communicated approval with the Committee's achievement as per the original statement. Conversely, an equal number of 30 participants (28%) both stated disagreement and extreme disagreement, showing a considerable division of viewpoints.

When assessing the Committee's efficacy in creating general faith and belief in the government's Covid-19 response, 27 respondents (25.2%) highly praised the Committee's initiatives, and 20 respondents (18.7%) agreed with this judgement. Nevertheless, a large number of those surveyed—26 (24.3%) and 34 (31.8%)—disagreed and strongly disagreed, accordingly, showing major dispute in the alleged efficacy of these initiatives. With regard to the successful outcome of the public relations sensitivity methods carried out by the Presidential Steering Committee, scientific evidence indicates that 29 respondents (27.1%) conveyed strong agreement, while 22 respondents (20.6%) expressed consensus regarding

the perceived success of these tactics. This breakdown shows a largely good reaction among responders, yet it also suggests this support is not entirely unequivocal. The poll results show a range of perspectives on the effectiveness of the Committee's sensitisation tactics. In particular, 37 respondents (34.6%) strongly disagreed with the alleged efficacy of these tactics, whereas 19 participants (17.8%) voiced dissatisfaction. This variation in answers reveals a complex range of opinions on the results of the PR campaigns. While there was agreement on the strategies' contribution to raising consciousness, there were clear differences in how well they worked to build trust and in terms of their total performance. These differences highlight how complex public relations campaigns are during times of crisis and highlight the need for tailored approaches that can successfully handle the various viewpoints and demands of various constituencies.

The data analysis indicates that the participants, both strongly and moderately, agree that the Committee's use of Public Relations (PR) techniques to raise consciousness about the Covid-19 epidemic in Lagos and Abuja was effective. This agreement highlights how well the Committee's efforts have done in alerting the public to the seriousness of the epidemic. The effectiveness of consciousness initiatives in crises communication is crucial because they help people understand the hazards involved in the situation and take the appropriate precautions (Coombs, 2014). Additionally, the data indicates that public behaviour was significantly impacted by the Committee's information tactics, as seen by a higher compliance to Covid-19 safety guidelines. This result emphasises how the PR methods really changed public behaviour, which is an important part of handling a national health disaster.

These tactics' effectiveness in countering disinformation is consistent with the fundamental goals of communication during crises, as outlined by Frandsen and Johansen (2010). A more complex picture emerges when the efficacy of these PR tactics in building confidence and as well as among the public in the administration's Covid-19 reaction is assessed. While a sizeable majority of those surveyed agreed that the tactics worked in this sector, a sizeable portion remained dubious. This discrepancy emphasises how difficult it is to establish confidence in situations of emergency, when Coombs and Holladay (2007) underline the importance of elements like constancy and openness.

The information shows that the Presidential Steering Committee's public relations sensitisation campaigns were seen to be both effective and beneficial. This evaluation

shows that the Committee's efforts to raise public knowledge and comprehension of Covid-19-related issues have been well received and had a major positive influence on public behaviour and cognition.The study's conclusions highlight a number of positive effects of the PR tactics the Presidential Steering Committee used in Lagos and Abuja. These results include increased public knowledge, behavioural impact, reduction of disinformation, and thorough public sensitising. Nevertheless the efficacy of these methods in building confidence among citizens displayed fluctuation, indicating the intricate and varied character of confidence-building inside the field of crises communications.

CONCLUSION

This research has provided a detailed knowledge of the implementation and efficacy of Public Relations (PR) methods used by the Presidential Steering Committee on Covid-19 in Lagos and Abuja, highlighting their varied character. Although the Committee employed a variety of public relations tactics to spread important knowledge and foster public confidence, the results showed that respondents' views on the methods' efficacy varied. The study also revealed a number of obstacles to the implementation of these measures, such as problems with public trust, disinformation, community participation, and information distribution. These results highlight the value of flexible and comprehensive PR strategies during public healthcare emergencies. Governments and politicians must address these issues and continuously improve their approaches to improve crisis communications, making sure that they are in line with the public's changing demands and views.

Recommendations

i. Robust PR strategies should be implemented and upheld considering the role Public Relations (PR) strategies play in crises communications, not only throughout pandemics but in any circumstance that calls for the public to be informed promptly and accurately.
ii. The general recommendations that follow should be given top priority by government entities and healthcare officials:
iii. Create thorough crises communications strategies and keep them up to date with frequent testing. Being equipped makes it possible for authority to react to crises—natural disasters, pandemics, or other emergencies—quickly and efficiently.

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