

**CRISIS COMMUNICATION RESPONSES FOR TERRORIST ATTACKS  
AND THREATS: PERSPECTIVES OF TOURISM INDUSTRY STAKEHOLDER  
IN ABUJA, NIGERIA'S FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY**

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**Abstract**

*In the light of recurrent terrorist attacks and similar threats that confronts destinations and organisations, this paper appraises the crisis preparation, response and recovery framework in the context of the Abuja case site, where there had been terrorist attacks. The paper employs a qualitative case study approach using interviews and available documents to investigate the crisis communication strategies of the Abuja tourism stakeholders towards some of these incidents and similar threats. The study findings reveal that although the relevant destination stakeholders including government and industry stakeholders collaborate in effective communication towards preventing the recurrence of similar incidents, response to, and recovery from such events, they would require more resources including improved funding and adequate human capacities to consolidate on their efforts. This study, therefore, recommends that the destination stakeholders should constantly carry out risk assessment of their destination, including developing or adopting efficient crisis communication plan, such as the one developed for this study, for proactive crisis communication measures. This article contributes to the growing literature on risk and crisis communication measures to terrorist attacks and related incidents that affect the tourism industry and associated subsectors.*

**Keywords;** *Terrorist attacks, crisis communication strategies, tourism, stakeholders.*

**INTRODUCTION**

The tourism industry has experienced a significant increase in human-induced crisis as such terrorist attacks and related threats since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Ashley, Lori, & Kelly, 2014; Blake & Sinclair, 2003; Cró & Martins, 2017; Fall & Massey, 2005; Henderson, 2003; Lanouar & Goaid, 2019). These include the September 11 Twin Towers

terrorist attacks in New York City in 2001 (Blake & Sinclair, 2003; Cró & Martins, 2017; Fall & Massey, 2005; Yu, Stafford, & Armoo, 2005), followed by the bombing events in Bali in 2002 (Henderson, 2003; Putra & Hitchcock, 2006), Madrid in 2004 (Moss, Ryan, & Moss, 2008), London 2005 (Potton, 2005), and terrorist attacks in Mumbai in 2008 (Creech, 2014; Riedel, 2009),

Abuja, 2011 and 2014 (Asongu, Nnanna, Biekpe, & Acha-Anyi, 2019), Nairobi in 2013 (Ashley, Lori, & Kelly, 2014), Egypt, Paris and Tunisia, 2015 (Lanouar & Goaid, 2019), Berlin and Brussels 2016 (Lanouar & Goaid, 2019), Manchester bombing in 2017 (Roach, Cartwright, & Pease, 2020), etc. These incidents often necessitate non-obligatory advice from foreign offices of tourist generating destinations, regarding taking caution when travelling to affected regions. For example, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (2017) provide details of places that portend risk to travellers while visiting and staying in a destination like Nigeria (Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, 2017). This is because, according the British Broadcasting Corporation News (BBC News, 2011; BBC News, 2014), there has been several terror attack incidents in many of Nigeria's regions, including its capital, Abuja, where the United Nations building was bombed by terrorists in 2011 at the city centre (BBC News, 2011), and where a crowded bus station was bombed in the city's suburb in 2014 (BBC News, 2014). In addition to travel advisory regarding safety and security concerns at a destination, information regarding risk associated with a terror attack and other external crisis incidents are often widespread in split seconds through other various communication channels (Avraham, 2013; Avraham & Ketter, 2017). The consequence of travel advices associated with terror and similar external crisis are often evident in declined tourism demands and receipts and can affect a destination's competitiveness in the global tourism industry. This can generate concerns for destination management and industry practitioners who tend to develop or adopt crisis

communication management strategies to aid the return of their destinations and organisations to normalcy following such events (De-Sausmarez, 2013; Samitas, Asteriou, Polyzos, & Kenourgios, 2018).

Previous studies on crisis (Cró & Martins, 2017; Lanouar & Goaid, 2019; Perles-Ribes, Ramón-Rodríguez, Such-Devesa, & Moreno-Izquierdo, 2019; Sönmez & Graefe, 1998; Zopiatis, Savva, Lambertides, & McAleer, 2019) associated with terror attack impact on tourism seem to focus on recovery strategies. However, a growing number of other studies (Fall & Massey, 2005; Faulkner & Vikulov, 2001; Granville, Mehta, & Pike, 2016; Hystad & Keller, 2008; Paraskevas, Altinay, McLean, & Cooper, 2013; Pennington-Gray, 2018) sought a more comprehensive approach that focus on measures including communication before, during and after the occurrence of terror attack related incident(s). This paper contributes to the growing area of crisis communication management in the context of a destination such as Abuja, Nigeria that has experienced terror attack incidents, including the attacks on the United Nations building and Police Headquarters in 2011 and bombing of a city centre shopping mall and a bus station at the city outskirts in 2014. These terror attack incidents caused the loss of several lives and damage to property. Therefore, this paper examines the communication strategies employed by the Abuja destination managers and tourism industry practitioners towards the prevention, response to, and recovery of their destination from threats of terrorist attack related incidents.

## **THEORETICAL REVIEW- CRISIS COMMUNICATION THEORY**

The generic literature agree that contemporary crisis communication theory began in the early 1980s when Johnson and Johnson experienced the Tylenol crisis (Mitroff, 2004). Subsequently, a large body of theory and research has been developed on crisis communication, including empirical investigations producing prescriptions and “best practices” for crisis communication stakeholders (Fall & Massey, 2005). Nevertheless, many organisations and destinations, especially as a result of the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States (US) in 2001 have implemented crisis communication into their strategy with no clear understanding of crisis communication ((Ashley, Lori, & Kelly, 2014; Fall & Massey, 2005). As a crisis is an unexpected event, it demands stakeholder's response through communication, and this is a practice that is now regarded as crisis communication (Fall & Massey, 2005). According to Seeger and Ulmer (2001) “crisis communication concerns the processes whereby organisations/destinations create and exchange meanings among stakeholders regarding the risk of crisis, cause, blame responsibility, precautionary norms and crisis-induced changes in the organisation/destination and its relationship to stakeholders” (p. 131).

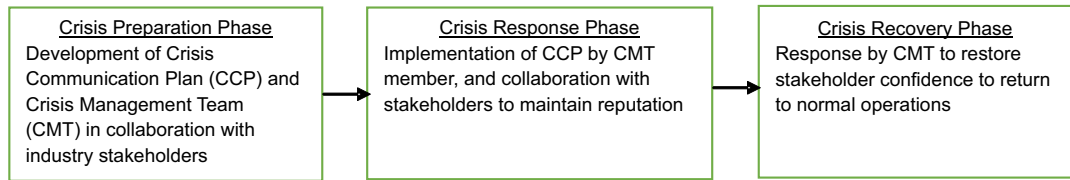
Fall and Massey's (2005) study and others agree that crisis communication is a three-phase model, including (1) Crisis preparation, (2) Crisis response, and (3) Crisis recovery. In the Crisis preparation phase, organisations and destinations must develop reservoirs of goodwill with

internal and external stakeholders and maintain effective reputations with stakeholders if they wish to survive crisis. In addition, the pre-crisis phase demands the development of strategic crisis communication plans (CCP) and the establishment of the crisis management team (CMT) by the crisis managers.

When an organisation or destination reaches the second phase of the model, i.e. crisis response, it has experienced a crisis event. In this phase, the CCP is implemented by crisis communication managers or relevant authorities in coordination with members of the larger CMT, including key representatives of various units such as those responsible for safety and security in the case of terror attacks, media, etc. This stage of the model would be more effective if organisations or destinations have created dialogue with key stakeholders prior to any crisis event.

In the last phase of the model, crisis recovery phase, stakeholders focus their efforts at reputation management and returning their destinations and organisations to a sense of normalcy. In this phase, crisis communication allows organisations and destinations to strategically manage stakeholder perceptions, especially where proactive approach to crisis communication has been undertaken. This includes a situation where a positive reputation has been developed and stakeholder relations have been managed effectively. FIGURE 1 provides a graphical representation of the crisis communication model as adopted from Fall and Massey (2005).

FIGURE 1: Crisis communication model



Adapted from Fyall & Massey (2005)

Fall and Massey's (2005) crisis communication framework was employed to investigate the US tourism industry responses to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the New York city. Fall and Massey's study revealed that, the US relevant stakeholders were not proactive in their crisis communication response towards the September 2001 terrorist attack incidents that claimed over 3000 lives. The model is similar to several generic crisis management frameworks/models (Coombs, 2012; Faulkner, 2001; Hystad & Keller, 2008; Mitroff, 2005; Paraskevas & Arendell, 2007; Paraskevas & Quek, 2019; Pelfrey, 2005; Pennington-Gray, Thapa, Kaplanidou, Cahyanto, & McLaughlin, 2011; Ritchie, 2004) employed by scholars in examining tourism industry and destination management actions including communication towards crisis incidents prevention, response and recovery. Therefore, this paper considers Fall and Massey's (2005) crisis communication model suitable for examining strategies employed by the Nigerian tourism industry and relevant stakeholders towards effective crisis communication associated with terror attack threats and actual incidents.

## CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

### Crisis Communication in the tourism context

Communication in tourism encompasses the visual and auditory imagery of an environment (Iosim & Popescu, 2015). Communication is vital in the crisis lifecycle (Lando, 2014; McCool, 2012; Palttala, Boano, Lund, & Vos, 2012; Pappas, 2019; Ritchie, Dorrell, Miller, & Miller, 2003; Steelman & McCaffrey, 2013), as an interruption in communication with key stakeholders may aggravate a crisis situation (McCool, 2012; Wang & Lopez, 2020). Crisis period is often associated with chaos and may create communication challenges amongst stakeholders (Pappas, 2019; Wang & Ritchie, 2004). The development of effective communication strategy would require that destination management organisations develop proactive communicative strategies that are designed to promptly reach the various stakeholders, including tourists, with regards to risk associated with crisis and measures being taken to address the situation (Aliperti, Nagai, & Cruz, 2020; Avraham & Ketter, 2013; Oliveira & Huertas, 2019; Wang & Lopez, 2020).

The most likely communication issues during crisis are often associated with the variance in organisational cultures and structures needed, although crisis situations demand that organisations cooperate in crisis situations (Palttala, Boano, Lund, & Vos, 2012). However, Palttala, Boano, Lund, and Vos (2012) argue that communication may not constitute a vital component of crisis management, as the goals of crisis communication among stakeholders may differ. A typical example is where an organisation's main goal is to limit physical harm associated with a crisis, and another organisation's goal could be to safeguard her reputation (Palttala, Boano, Lund, & Vos, 2012). The identification of partners and division of communication responsibilities during the period of preparedness is vital to bridging the gap in crisis communication amongst stakeholders (Palttala, Boano, Lund, & Vos, 2012).

Communication plays a critical role in decision making, especially in periods of crisis, as communication can aid the mitigation of perceived risk, and facilitate crisis response (Aliperti, Nagari, & Cruz, 2020; Oliveira & Huertas, 2019; Palttala, Boano, Lund, & Vos, 2012; Wang & Lopez, 2020). However, Steelman and McCaffrey (2013) argue that a gap seems to exist between the adoption of communication strategies prior to a crisis incident, termed risk communication, and the adoption of communication strategies during a crisis event, referred to as crisis communication. Thus, Reynolds and Seeger (2005) suggest an emergency risk communication framework design

to minimise the gap between risk or warning messages and crisis communication, which harmonizes communication strategies from planning to implementation. Steelman and McCaffrey (2013) note that interactive communication strategies designed to address local-level concerns and actions are the most effective of crisis-related communication. In the same vein, Reynolds and Seeger (2005) suggest that communication would have to reflect stakeholders' priorities, values, and experiences, in addition to accurate and timely information (Stelman & McCaffrey, 2013).

A key determinant to establishing trust amongst stakeholders in crisis communication is transparency (Lachapelle & McCool, 2012). Transparency would involve identifying and leveraging on suitable persons to convey communication messages, which reflects how destination stakeholders accept and interpret information that is communicated (Lachapelle & McCool, 2012). Communication messages are often disseminated through media sources in order to reach the target ordinance. Thus, a number of authors emphasise the need for relevant stakeholders to harness the power of the media, including the use of twitter for effective post-crisis tourism destination recovery (AlBattat & MatSom, 2014; Becken & Hughey, 2013; Oliveira & Huertas, 2019). In order to provide accurate and prompt messages to tourist generating regions and markets, destination managers can collaborate with the media (Mair, Ritchie, &

Walters, 2016).

In spite of the fact that the success of destination management is reliant on media collaboration (Mair, Ritchie, & Walters, 2016), there is no substantial evidence to suggest that collaboration and communication between the media, tourism stakeholders, and destination leaders exist. Palttala, Boano, Lund, and Vos (2012) attribute communication constraints in crisis and post times amongst destination stakeholders to the complexity of challenges associated with external crisis incidents. However, research on crisis communication still requires further development (Palttala, Boano, Lund, & Vos, 2012; Pappas, 2019; Wang & Lopez, 2020), and demands the understanding of effective communication methods in a crisis lifecycle (i.e. pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis) context, using destination(s) and organisation(s) as case site(s) where crisis incidents has been experienced by government and industry stakeholders. This paper therefore investigates the crisis communication measures being employed by relevant stakeholders in a destination such as Nigeria where incidents of crisis including terror attacks has been experienced.

### **INDICATIVE CASE STUDY CONTEXT: TERRORIST ATTACKS IN ABUJA, NIGERIA.**

The City of Abuja, Nigeria's federal capital city experienced a terrorist attack in its central district shopping mall complex which occurred at about

16:00 local time (15:00 GMT) on 25 June, 2014. The bomb attack resulted in the deaths of 21 people and injured 52 others (BBC News, 2014). This attack is sequel to the June 2011 UN building bomb attack in the city's central area, where 18 lives were lost (BBC News, 2011), and the April 2014 Bus station bomb attacks at the city's outskirts, where over 70 lives were lost (BBC News, 2014). It seems that, despite these terrorist attacks, the Abuja hotels witnessed an increase in occupancy, even though average room rate declined from \$325.00 in 2014 to \$275.00 to 2015, due to the decrease in the arrivals of international guest, within the same period (Smith, Makhudu, & Dutrieux, 2016). The decrease in arrivals of international guests may be associated with concerns about safety and security, following the terrorist attacks and similar threats in Abuja. Also, a field record obtained by the researcher from a major luxury hotel in Abuja in 2020 (see TABLE 1) reveal that there was a loss of 150 rooms in 2012 compared to 2011. This suggest that the 2011 terrorist attacks had a negative impact on the Nigeria hotel sector, which is a major subsector of the Nigerian tourism industry. In the same vein, the decline in room occupancy between July and August 2014 by 10 and 12 rooms respectively, compared to June 2014 (see TABLE 1) when there were incidents of terrorist attacks suggest that the shock events had negative impact on the Abuja hotel sector.

TABLE 1: ROOM OCCUPANCY FOR A LUXURY HOTEL IN ABUJA FOR THE PERIOD 2010 -2019

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
2010	62	80	78	76	76	76	77	70	73	79	77	71	895
2011	67	78	77	72	72	70	71	65	60	69	63	61	825
2012	41	67	71	49	56	50	59	41	55	60	73	53	675
2013	50	72	59	65	61	61	62	54	62	56	71	60	733
2014	53	71	71	52	54	65	55	53	60	61	68	61	724
2015	59	52	68	60	70	74	51	60	61	64	67	53	739
2016	59	68	66	65	62	62	58	60	52	54	53	46	705
2017	37	43	29	29	43	38	47	40	46	51	52	43	498
2018	40	55	52	52	44	49	60	45	53	61	59	59	629
2019	54	63	70	70	59	65	74	56	65	70	70	64	780

The susceptibility of Abuja to terror attacks may be connected to the fact that;

(i) It is a city, where major decisions of government are discussed, and implementation carried out at the six geo-political zones, which comprise of the 36 states of the federation,

(ii) It is home to some of the world class hotel chains (e.g. the Hiltons, Sheratons, Marriott), where destination leaders and business people converge for various regional and business meetings (Nwosu, 2016; Smith, Makhudu, & Dutrieux, 2016). Although there is a general consensus on the lack of reliable up to date statistics on the tourism subsector such as hotels, and the flow of tourism within Nigeria in general (Bankole, 2002; Nwosu, 2016).

(iii) It hosted the World Economic Forum

on Africa in 2015, during which participants from over 70 countries including 10 Presidents with over 900 delegates were harboured in many hotels. Over 5,000 security officials were deployed for the event (BBC, 2014) to ensure safety and security.

(iv) It is home the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) headquarters where meetings concerning the welfare and development of the West African sub-regions are held

(v) It has a world class International Conference Centre (ICC) where major occasions are held, and a Federation of International Football Association (FIFA) standard stadium where various sporting events are hosted,

(vi) It is where a yearly cultural event “*the*

*Abuja Carnival*” that showcases the Nigerian diverse cultural heritage is held, and the events attracts tourist from across all the states of the federation, and foreign tourist from many countries across the world.

These tourism attributes of Abuja can facilitate domestic and international business and leisure tourism to the city, which makes the city a potential target for human induced crisis such as terrorism.

All secondary and primary data collected during this research, regardless of the methods employed in gathering data has been analysed using content analysis. Content analysis can be described as the technique deployed for understanding, interpreting and analysing texts, phrases or themes that are relevant to the research questions and which require analysis (Krippendorff, 2004, 2019; Neuendorf, 2002; Steve, 2001). As a result, content analysis was employed in such a way that key terms associated with crisis communication theories and frameworks are identified and expounded in relation to how stakeholders of Abuja, Nigeria's capital city communicate prior to, during and after crisis and threats they are being confronted with. In the same vein, documents including information from extant literature, standards in crisis communication and related practices and reports on crisis incidents communication for the case site was studied and coded or defined as themes in line with the study objectives, and subsequently, results from the study findings was analysed and discussed. There is no doubt that, this process deployed for this case site investigation is associated with qualitative and interpretative approach for data analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section presents the result and discusses the specific crisis communication strategies being deployed by the Abuja destination stakeholders towards terrorist crisis related incidents based on the study framework, and emergent themes. Thus, the first part of this section of the paper identified and discussed the preparedness communication measures being used by the stakeholders to possibly prevent the occurrence of crisis associated with terror attacks. The second part this section identified and discussed communication measures being deployed by the stakeholders in response to actual crisis incidents associated with terror attacks. Lastly, the third part of this section identified and discussed communication measures being used by the stakeholders towards the recovery of their destination(s) following crisis related incidents associated with terror attacks.

### Crisis Preparation/Prevention Phase

*Information sharing/ Communication with security and policy makers to ensure peaceful coexistence*

Availability of crisis communication plan is important in proactive crisis prevention and preparedness (Fall & Massey, 2005; Ashley, Lori, & Kelly, 2014). Yet, the majority of the stakeholders who participated in this study do not seem to possess defined/formal crisis preparedness/prevention communication plans with regard to measures being adopted to preventing or preparing for crisis that can disrupt normal tourism operations in their destination(s). However, the study findings reveal the



importance of collaboration in information sharing (i.e. communication) amongst the stakeholders at Abuja towards minimising the disruptions crises can cause on their tourism industry. For example, the emergency destination stakeholders in Abuja (AEO1, AEO2 and AEO3) who participated in this study affirm that the whole process of communication with regard to crisis prevention/preparedness is a multi-jurisdiction, resources based and stakeholder activity, as no single organisation has the capacity to handle crisis incident communication alone. The stakeholders all seem to agree that, communication with regard to crisis prevention/preparedness associated with terrorist attack events takes the proactive coordination, collaboration and cooperation of several stakeholders to ensure that their destination is safe for tourists visitations, businesses operations, and for the safety of lives and property, not only in Abuja, but for Nigeria, as a whole. For instance, in emphasising the importance of collaboration amongst stakeholders in effective communication for crisis prevention and preparedness, AEO1, who is a senior official at the Police Command headquarters, Abuja said;

We employ community policing strategy by discussing/communicating with members of society, trade unions, tourism organisations etc, and sensitise them on issues of terrorism, crime and criminality. We also advice stakeholders on how to identify threats and report such to us in a timely manner. This can help to prevent any chaos that can affect tourism, as it holds important position in the global economy. It is important to note that the proactiveness of the police take care of the entire humanity and that translates to;

prevention.

Also, with regard to the importance of collaboration in communication/information sharing towards terrorist attack prevention similar to previous occurrences, AEO2, a senior official at the Voice of Nigeria, said:

We liaise with the police and military spokespersons, speak with the National Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) and military to assure people of safety and security. We also speak with policy makers, the big ones. For instance, prior to the recent herders/farmers and similar crises, we went to the sources of crises, visit people behind the mask, dowse tensions, liaise with worrying factions, and establish peace through information sharing with the government on the issues on ground.

Likewise, in emphasising the need for collaboration in communication/information sharing in preventing/preparing for crises, AEO3, a senior official at the National Orientation Agency (NOA) on issues related to emergencies said;

Before issues snowball into crisis such as terror attack events, the mandate of NOA gives the Community Mobilisation Officers (COSMOS) across the states of the federation the mandate to laise with people, groups and religious leaders, and discuss with them on the need for peaceful co-existence, and to prevent impending crisis. For the NOA, our prevention/preventive mechanism include harnessing information from COSMOS and communicate it to the appropriate quarters for immediate intervention.

Similarly, in emphasising the need for continued collaboration in communication/information sharing amongst other stakeholders in effective in crisis prevention/preparedness ATO1, a senior official of the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC) said:

We constantly communicate with the relevant security agencies and other stakeholders in preventing any incident(s) of crisis including the previous incidents we experienced. We advise stakeholders on the need for regular police patrol of tourism attractions and businesses to ensure tourists safety, and our suggestions are reviewed and adopted by tourism businesses, immigration; museums and monuments. We collaborate with the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics to provide awareness of the situation at our destinations and forestall crises.

In the same vein ATB1, a senior official at the Transcorp Hilton, Abuja said:

As you know, we are a 5-star hotel with global link, and we adhere to the safety principles of our partners. In addition, we work in synergy with other organisations; Federal Fire Service (FFS), National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), and other agencies in establishing strategies for crisis prevention/preparedness through regular communication/information sharing.

This corroborate the statements of other tourism business stakeholders in Abuja. For example, ATB2, a senior official at NICON luxury hotel said:

We collaborate in crisis communication and share information with security agencies and other colleagues. We share ideas and recommendation, and we

provided security equipment for the National Emergency Management Agency and Federal Fire Service. We stationed the equipment at our premises to aid preparedness for crisis incidents similar to previous occurrences in the city.

It would seem from the comment(s) of respondent ATB2 that, the provision of emergency related equipment for government related organisations can facilitate the possible prevention and preparedness of would be crisis incident(s). This could be considered a proactive crisis prevention measure by a major hotel management towards ensuring the safety of tourists/guests and staff members. It could also be regarded as the hotel's corporate social responsibility to emergency and security organisations who maybe ill equipped towards preparing for crisis related incidents that demand the use of such equipment.

However, the implication of hotel organisation having to provide emergency equipment for government organisations' use could mean that, other major hotels or related tourism businesses that are not able to provide such equipment for the prevention of crises or intervention may be vulnerable, and constitute risk to tourists/guests and staff members. This constitutes a significant finding for this study as extant literature is yet to reveal where tourism businesses such as hotel have had to provide emergency related equipment for government authorities to enable them to prepare for and intervene in crisis times.

### **Crisis response phase**

*collaboration and partnership in information exchange/training media*

*relations and risk communication.*

The crisis response phase demands the implementation of crisis communication plan by destination crisis communication team, in collaboration with other relevant stakeholders to maintain destination reputation (Fall & Massey, 2005). While the Abuja stakeholder do not have defined crisis communication plan as the study reveals, the study findings suggest that the measures the stakeholder employ for crisis response include collaboration in information exchange/ and media relations and risk communication. For example, with regard to collaboration in communication and security as crisis response strategy, AEO1, a senior official at the Police Command Headquarters, Abuja, said;

We are not alone in crisis response, following our experiences with crises here and elsewhere in the country, and in response to crisis incidents and threats, we communicate and partner with several stakeholders in the services sectors and the general public. We advise stakeholders in the tourism subsectors including hotels to have police phone numbers handy, for prompt intervention. In addition, we sensitise the general public on how to avoid unsafe areas.

This constitutes sensible crises response approach on the part of the Police Command in a city that had experienced some major terror related crisis incidents as stated in the case site section. This finding suggests that, the Abuja Police command are in partnership with other stakeholders of the destination in terms of communication and partnership that can aid effective crisis response with a view to minimising the negative impacts of crisis related incident(s) on their tourism industry. This is consistent with the

findings of McCool (2012) whose study suggests that, communication partnership among stakeholders constitutes effective crisis response measure for destination crisis management.

In line with engaging other stakeholders in terms of establishing partnership in communication as crisis response and security measure, AEO2, a senior official at the Voice of Nigeria, said;

As government media/emergency reportage organisation, we collaborate with other stakeholders in responding to crises. We deploy the “beyond the bullet programme”; it is designed to identify what caused crises, how it is being managed, e.g. what caused the Boko-Haram crisis. Sequel to our findings, we make available, security communication desk systems in partnership with the emergency agencies, and we design ways to quell these crises and build programme around them. Subsequently, we use life streaming, webcast, Facebook, programmes, etc. to properly inform the generally public about the crisis and management efforts.

Media organisation's collaboration with other destination stakeholders in responding to crises is essential in disseminating appropriate messages through various medium to the public (tourists inclusive), on the nature of crises and efforts being made towards its management. This can help tourists and others to make informed decisions that would not put them at risk, when they consider travelling to, or investing in destination(s) where some of its regions may be experiencing crisis related incidents. This is consistent with the findings of Morakabati and Beavis (2017) which highlight the importance of

stakeholder's collaboration in crisis response, including establishing public information centres, regular updates of key stakeholders, the media, etc.

Like the emergency and media organisations, the study findings suggest that tourism businesses such as travel organisations and hotels also establish communication with customers through information sharing in response to crisis incidents. For example, ATB6, a senior official at Vefa Travels, said:

Our crises response strategy for a volatile country like Nigeria include; establishing contact with our clients such as passengers, airliners, hotels and other partners in and outside Nigeria via emails, telephone. This is to inform them on crises situation, and in some cases, we advise on alternative destination for clients and rescheduling of travel plans.

This is congruent with the statement of ATB7, a senior official at L4G Travels who said;

We don't relent on our efforts in crisis response, and our strategies include; sharing information with our clients on the actual state of crises in our destination, through electronic media platforms. We also collaborate with different statutory regulatory organisations to provide us with information on the situation at our airports. We subsequently pass relevant information to our clients after we physically assess the situation of things in our destination as regards safety and security issues associated with incessant crises in Nigeria.

### **Crisis recovery**

*Positive destination image portrayal and destination marketing*

The recovery phase of crisis comprises of the measures taken by the crisis management team to restore stakeholder confidence in returning destination to normal tourism operations (Fall & Massey, 2005). The study findings suggest that the strategy employed by the Abuja stakeholder towards destination recovery include positive destination image portrayal and marketing and *Communication via various social media platforms*. For example, with regard to the former, ATO1, a senior official at the Nigeria's Tourism Development Corporation, Abuja, said;

“We market our destinations at different fora and through our publications, as we try to tell tourists the truth about our destinations that are safe/unsafe.”

This is consistent with the findings of Avraham (2015) and Beirman (2003) whose studies suggest that stakeholders who have experienced crises at their destinations are able to project safe regions of their destinations to potential and repeat tourist. This can boost tourism demand and receipts through various media that provide tourists with necessary information about destination crises (Avraham, 2015; Beirman, 2003).

In line with projecting and marketing destinations as a recovery measure designed to boost tourism, another stakeholder (AEO3) in Abuja said;

Despite the negative image perception occasioned by the crises we have experienced, we attempt to project of the Nigerian image at different fora within and outside Nigeria. We do this by balancing of battered image with the good stories emanating from Nigeria. We use postcards of wonderful events such as the Abuja Carnivals amongst others to

portray the image of safety and our unique cultural heritage in order to boost tourism.

The idea of balancing poor destination image perception with good image perception, as a destination recovery measure through the showcasing of tourism products is consistent with the studies of Avraham and Ketter (2017) and Beirman (2003) who suggest that stakeholders should attempt to project the image of their destinations using various pull strategies to attract tourist, in order to enhance normal tourism operations at their destinations following crises that affect tourism.

In line with the strategy of projecting and marketing destination image as a measure designed to recover destination following crises, a tourism business stakeholder in Abuja (ATB3), a senior official at the Federation of Tourism Association of Nigeria (FTAN), said;

We are trying to rebuild our image by projecting and marketing our destination at different fora including the World Travel Market. Now that the economy of the country is improving, we are tapping on the post crises situation to create an opportunity from tourism. As you may know, Nigeria provides a good value for money spent by tourists, and research like this should help to suggest how best to recover from crises that affects tourism.

It is significant to find that, of all the interviewees who participated in this research, only a tourism business trade stakeholder was of the view that, following crises, destination can leverage on crises events to improve on tourism. The tourism business stakeholder suggests that further research should recommend ways to enhance destination

recovery for improved tourist arrivals and receipts.

#### *Communication via various social media platforms*

In addition to projecting and marketing their destinations at various fora and deploying the use of visibility policing to restore confidence of tourists, towards normal tourism operations recovery, the study finds that the stakeholders in Abuja and Jos employ a variety of communication strategies including collaborating with one another and using various media sources to quell perceptions of risks of associated destination crises. For example, AEO2, a senior official at the National Emergency Management Agency, Abuja said;

*“We employ various strategy to restore confidence through proper media communication, using different channels, especially through the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporations who are the stakeholders responsible for building the minds of tourists, when we have stabilised a crisis situation.”*

Another stakeholder in Abuja, AEO3, a senior official at the Voice of Nigeria, says;

*“We communicate with other stakeholders including the National Security, Civil Defence Corps, the military and big policy makers to assure people of safety and security.”*

It is important that the authorities in Abuja cooperate in passing relevant information designed to build the confidence of tourist and others through key destination authorities responsible for information dissemination concerning the safety and

security of their destination following crises. This is consistent with the study of Fall and Massey (2005) which emphasise the importance of transparent communication strategy among stakeholders in restoring their destinations to normalcy, following crisis incidents. Other communication strategies being employed by the destination stakeholders in Abuja include the use of social media. For example, AEO5, a senior official at the National Parks Services, Abuja, said;

In restoring our destination following all these crisis incidents, and even ongoing crisis such as the Boko-Haram caused crises, we employ the use of internet, television, fliers to communicate and educate people on the safety of our parks, and where not to go to. For instance, we don't encourage people to visit our parks in Lake Chad even though we have not been targeted yet, but Abuja and others are relatively safe for visitation.

In addition to using various social media platforms to reach tourists and others on the safety of places to visit, another stakeholder (AEO4), a senior official at the Public Enlightenment and Mass Mobilisation, National Orientation Agency, Abuja said;

*“Following crises, we communicate to a variety of audience through; dramas, film show episodes and books to paint Nigeria in a good light, to encourage visitation to our destinations.”*

Educating tourist and others on where to visit, and where to avoid using various social media platforms is important in ensuring their safety and security in destinations that are experiencing crisis related incidents that can expose them to

risks. This can help tourists and other persons to make informed decisions on attraction sites at destination to visit or avoid.

Like the public authorities, the tourism and related businesses stakeholders in Abuja also adopt various communicate media to facilitate the recovery of their businesses following crises that affect demands. For example, ATB2, a senior official at the Nikon Luxury Hotel said;

*“We use media propaganda via television, internet, emails, etc, to restore our business, even though it can be difficult to return to normalcy following some of these crises”*

This is congruent with the strategies being used by other tourism related business stakeholders. For example, ATB3, a senior official at the Bolton White Hotel, Abuja said;

In restoring our businesses following crisis such as the Boko-Haram bombing of some facilities in Abuja, we engaged in sending emails of assurance of safety and security in our facilities. Email system can help to convey assurance that the country is relatively safe. We especially send emails to our international guests, as they need to be given a sense of security and safety, as they are often apprehensive.

In the same vein, ATB4, a senior official at the Reitz Continental Hotels, Abuja said;

*“What we do to recover our business include communicating with our guests via emails and calls, especially our international guests on the restoration of safety and security of our facility, and not to be afraid.”*

Similarly, ATB5, a senior official at the All States Travels & President Federation of Tourism Association of Nigeria (FTAN), Abuja said;

Although, the world is now a global village, we try to enhance our business recovery by opening email links for our foreign tourists, and we provide assurances of safety and security on our websites, as foreigners are often weary of insecurity following crises, and we also send messages of safety through WhatsApp.

It seems that the hotel and other tourism related businesses stakeholders in Abuja mainly focus on providing foreign guests with assurances of safety and security through various social media platform to boost their businesses following crises. This is understandable as foreign visitors tend to constitute a substantial number of the guests who stay in most of the high-end hotels in Abuja (Smith, Makhudu, & Dutrieux, 2016).

## CONCLUSIONS

This study analysed and discussed the data gathered by means of interviews

with the Abuja tourism industry stakeholders on the crisis communication strategies they employ towards crisis prevention, response and recovery of their destination, based on their experiences of terrorist attacks and similar threats. The analysis and discussion of findings also include scant available documentary evidence on the subject matter. The findings highlight issues associated with the stakeholder's general crises communication strategies, based on their experiences of the effect of crisis incidents on their tourism industries/sector. The general findings of this research suggest that, the majority of the stakeholders in the Nigerian tourism industry in Abuja either lack defined crisis communication plan for external crises associated with terrorist attack, or they do not have the capacity to prepare and effectively manage crisis related incidents that can affect their tourism industry. However, where some level of crisis communication strategies exists among the stakeholders of Abuja, the measures mostly conform with the generic crisis preparedness cycle; prevention (pre-crisis) response (crisis) and recovery (post-crisis) as summarised in TABLE 1 below.

**TABLE 1: Summary of stakeholder crisis communication actions in response to terrorist attacks at Abuja, Nigeria.**

Stakeholder	Responses during the lifecycle of the terrorist attacks incidents		
	Crisis preparedness	Crisis Response	Crisis Recovery
Media (2)	Collaboration in information sharing amongst stakeholders towards minimising the disruptions crises can cause on their tourism industry.	Sensitisation of public on the state of crisis and provision of information desk	Use of life streaming medium to assure visitors of safety

Police/emergency organisations (3)	Simulation training and drills on averting terrorism	Police visibility and reliance on community for information.	Review of exercises and identification of gaps for improvement
Destination management (1)	Marketing of destinations at forums and through publications on safety and security.	Provision of information on true state of crisis via media	Encouragement of police patrol around tourism facilities and use of Close Circuit Television (CCTV) to boost confidence
Hotels (3)	Cooperation with security agencies in ensuring that facilities are safe for tourists and other guests	Collaboration with the security agencies in information sharing facility safety	Communication with customers about safety of facility.

However, the specific general findings from this research based on the interviews with the three key categories of stakeholders (i.e. key executives and representatives of; emergency organisations, tourism organisations, tourism businesses) of the Nigerian tourism industry at Abuja who participated in the field research are that:

Emergency organisations and related stakeholders manage to ensure that crisis communication strategies are based on collaboration and information sharing amongst other stakeholders in identifying hazards and minimising the risk of crisis or disaster in the event of an occurrence, despite lack of adequate resources to function efficiently.

There seem to be a crisis communication standard with the Police Force Command, which was not shown as documented to the researcher at Abuja, although that of the emergency management agency in Abuja is documented and can be tailored to external crisis communication when backed with adequate human and capital resources.

Tourism organisations at Abuja do not

seem to have clearly developed functional crisis communication plans for recurrent external crisis incidents that have affected normal tourism operations, other than collaboration with the police for enhanced security at tourist sites and other services venues.

Most of the tourism businesses, except for a few, do not seem to have defined external crisis communication plans. Where the plans exist, especially for the five-star hotels, the plans are mainly designed to ensuring the safety and security of their guests, facilities and staff members.

In general, there is no existing, implemented holistic-documented crisis communication plan that is tailored to crisis prevention/preparedness, response and destination recovery, and this seems to be the position of the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation, which is an apex body for the promotion and regulation of tourism associated businesses in Nigeria.

## RECOMMENDATION

Sequel to the findings of this article, TABLE 2 below provides summary of



proactive crisis communication plans that can help the Abuja tourism industry stakeholder to proactively prevent/prepare for crisis, respond to crisis incidents and recover from crisis incidents. The table provides a list of key destination stakeholders including the

media, emergency organisations, destination management organisation and hotels and measures they can employ towards ensuring effective crisis communication, as regards terror attack threats and incidents.

**TABLE 2: Recommendations for proactive crisis communication actions in response to terrorist attacks at Abuja, Nigeria.**

Stakeholder	Crisis preparedness	Crisis Response	Crisis Recovery
Media (2)	Provision of reliable information to the general public on threats through various mediums	Deliver precise report on crisis situation to the general public	Provide report on improved situation and support positive destination image promotion
Police/emergency organisations (3)	Engage in planned simulation sessions training on crisis prevention in collaboration with other stakeholders.	Deploy resources in collaboration with stakeholders to reduce casualties and update the public on efforts	Reappraise preparedness and response actions, and make necessary adjustments
Destination management (1)	Learn from other crises, encourage the use of crisis preventing measures at tourist facilities.	Liaise with security agencies to effect rescue and ensure safety of guests & promote safe regions	Negotiate with policy makers for tax relieve for tourism businesses, initiate foreign investment deals
Hotels (3)	Ensure standby security, escape route, prepare guest for eventualities	Ensure security for facility in collaboration with security agencies, in addition to operations cost reduction measures	Collaborate with destination management providing enhanced security & promotional packages.

## AVENUE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Examining the Abuja tourism stakeholder's crisis communication responses to terrorist attacks and threats represents a small aspect of several ways by which various stakeholders at different destinations and organisations has worked to prepare for, respond to, and

recover from crisis. Future studies on crisis communication can focus on other sectors including the entertainment, events, food and transport industries in order to compare the similarities and differences in stakeholders' responses to crisis that affect them. There is no doubt that when crisis such as terror attacks and other shock events happen at destination(s) including the current

COVID-19 global pandemic, they can have ripple effects on these sectors of an economy. Therefore, other studies on crisis communication can examine measures taken by stakeholders of various sectors of an economy to prepare for other events that can cause crisis and return their destination(s) and business(es) to normalcy.

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