

## CORPORATE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF THE INDEPENDENT NATIONAL ELECTORAL COMMISSION IN MANAGING ELECTORAL VIOLENCE

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### **Abstract**

*This study evaluated the corporate communication strategy of the Independent National Electoral Commission, (INEC) in managing electoral violence in Rivers State. The study specifically investigated how INEC's corporate communication strategy helped manage electoral violence (pre/post) and how it helped to change the electorates' perception of the electoral process among other things. The survey design was used to sample all the 108 staffs of INEC in Rivers state using the census method of sampling. The questionnaire and interview guide were the instruments for data collection. The data analysis was done descriptively for the interview data and quantitatively using simple percentages and tables for the questionnaire data. The findings were that INEC corporate communication strategies have relatively helped in managing electoral violence by reducing its prevalence and intensity in Rivers State that the communication flow from INEC did not adequately reach out to the internal and external publics. The study therefore recommends that INEC improves the funding of the corporate communications department in order to improve communication flow between its internal and external publics and also expand its strategy to cover other areas of communication in order to earn more trust from electorates and other relevant stakeholders among other things.*

*Keywords: Election, Violence, Electorates, Corporate Communication, strategy*

### **Introduction**

Every organization has its method within which they operate. These modes of operation differ along the line of the objectives of that organization. The way an organization communicates is also a strategic part of its mode of operation which determines its success or failure. Corporate communication is a managerial vision of managing all communications that involve the organization as a whole (Christensen, Morsing & Cheney, 2008). One act that can never be ruled out of human existence is 'communication'. Communication plays a salient role in accomplishing a successful management function. Deficiencies in communication can be as a result of lack and insufficient planning and control. Mambwe (2015), opines that when the role

of the corporate communications person is assigned elsewhere other than its strategic place in an organization, Public Relations and Corporate Communication person can end up taking the flak for things going wrong in this space, not because of the person hired to perform in the role was incompetent or ineffective, but rather the misplacement of the function. Corporate communication message can also act as a destructive tool to the public due to the public's inability to gain clear understanding of the disseminated message, as meaning can be interpreted differently. In communication, meaning is produced from people's interactions with messages and text (Beck, Bennett & Wall, 2004).

A company's strategic communication is that communication aligned with the company's or organization overall strategy, which is intended to enhance its strategic positioning. Christopher (2007) calls it "participatory communication", which is more of a dialogue than a one-way communication or propaganda. Any strategy employed by an organization ought to be able to outweigh the problem it encounters.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was set up by the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, in addition to other things sort out elections into different political workplaces in the nation. With the vision of being the best Election Management Bodies (EMB) on the planet, that meets the yearnings of the Nigerian individuals and the mission to conduct a free, credible and trustworthy election for maintainable democracy in Nigeria. Election includes exercises which lead to the selection of at least one people out of numerous to serve in places of expert in Nigeria. It is fascinating to realize that political researcher and advancement scholar connect free, reasonable and solid elections to democratic administration, harmony and improvement. They contend that free, credible and dependable elections give premise to the rise of democratic, responsibility and authentic government with the ability to start and actualize unmistakably verbalized improvement programs. Valid elections are sine-qua-non for democratic administration, political dependability and national improvement.

Electoral violence precedes elections in many climes. Electoral violence is any arbitrary or planned act that tries to decide, delay, or generally impact an electoral procedure through risk, verbal terrorizing, abhor discourse, disinformation, physical attack, constrained assurance, shakedown, devastation of property, or death (Fischer, 2002). Electoral violence target can be individuals, places, property, information, or things. The general motive behind electoral violence is to alter electoral outcomes. In line with this view, Høglund (2009) maintains that it is primarily the motive and timing that set violence apart from other forms of political violence such as armed conflict, state repression or terrorism. The challenges of electoral violence seem to be a conventional action as complexities of nation-building and democratic development evolves. Past elections in Rivers State was described by both physical and mental violence. By and large, violence incorporates danger or utilization of physical power with the expectation of harming, murdering, encroachment of rights, and threatening someone else. It likewise includes demolition of property with the end goal of delivering enthusiastic or mental damage and financial misfortune on someone else (Osimen, 2012).

The Rivers State Federal and legislative re-run elections conducted by the INEC took place on Saturday December 10, 2016. The reason for the re-run election was due to widespread alleged violence and rigging in view of the annulment. The 2015 re-run election was as a result of the alleged violence and rigging that occurred due to struggle between the

People's Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressive Congress (APC) candidates. However, election process in Rivers State normatively, is flagged dangerous. The attitude political parties' display is what Amadi (2017) describes as 'a do-or-die' political attitude... (p.21). The case of electoral violence have been pushed aside and given less attention which is now perceived as normal and acceptable standard behaviour from citizens in the country.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Elections in Rivers State have been everything but peaceful. Without peace, there can be no electioneering process in place. If no electioneering process, there will be no leadership and development will be stalled. During the 2015 legislative re-run elections in rivers state, there was widespread anxiety because of the comments from both the political parties involved and the contestants themselves. It became necessary and convenient for the electorates to stay away from voting as a way of saving their lives and staying safe in the process. And without the electorates voting, the election was marred. The United Nations' Development Programme UNDP (2009), explains that what constitutes violence during elections manifest in different ways such as physical confrontations on opposition candidates and their party members as well as other violent street protest. In all, the legislative re-run election eventually held and Rivers State is still existing and relatively peaceful. This study therefore seeks to probe the strategy employed by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), to check the occurrence of electoral violence in Rivers State.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study sought to;

- i. identify the corporate communications strategy of INEC in managing electoral violence in Rivers State.
- ii. examine how the corporate communication strategy has helped INEC to manage electoral violence in Rivers State.
- iii. ascertain how INEC's corporate communication strategy can help change electorates' perception on violence in Rivers State.
- iv. identify the challenges of INEC in applying corporate communication strategy to manage electoral violence in Rivers State.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions shaped the focus of this study.

1. What is the corporate communication strategy of INEC in managing electoral violence in Rivers State?
2. In what ways have INEC's corporate communication strategy been able to help manage electoral violence in Rivers State?
3. How has the INEC's corporate communication strategy helped influence electorates' perception on violence in Rivers State?
4. What are the challenges encountered by the INEC in the use of its corporate communication strategy to manage electoral violence in Rivers State?

### **Theoretical Framework**

### **Development Communication Theory**

The term “development communication” was coined by a Philippines scholar, Nora Quebral. He contends that the primary goal of development communication is delivery of useful social and economic information to the masses. Quebral (1973) described development communication / journalism as the “art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country and transforming the majority of its people from poverty to a dynamic state of economic growth that makes possible greater social equity and the larger fulfillment of the human potential”.

Communication that induces development includes making components to expand public access to information on innovations, fortifying customers’ capacity to tune in to their voting demographics and consult with partners, engaging grassroots associations to accomplish a progressively participatory procedure and undertaking research exercises (World Bank, 2006). Ekeanyanwu, Ngoa and Sobowale, (2012) writes that development communication could be used to instill awareness among a target group. According to him, the process involves a deliberate planning, organization and systematic utilization of interpersonal and mass communication channels to motivate and stimulate development habits among developing masses. He says it is a current practice which includes efforts to modify western line or communication models by incorporating folk media and culture as a means of encouraging the participation of people in developing nations for promoting social development.

There is no maintainable, powerful social advancement in which the standards of authority from inside the people groups most offered, a solid and autonomous voice out in the open discussion, private exchange and choices making structure by individuals generally influenced and the individuals most promptly included characterizing and concurring the improvement motivation, have not been center, focal segments of the activities (Warren, 2006). The implication of this theory is that INEC should imbibe the principles of development communication by taking cognizance of the development needs of the society within which it operates and operate in line with those needs since winners of elections to a large extent determines how those needs will be met.

### **Corporate Social Responsibility Theory**

According to Carroll (1999), in his research on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), the definition construct on CSR started during the 1950s, which denotes the cutting edge time of CSR. Carroll further keeps up that the definitions extended during the 1960s and multiplied during the 1970s. During the 1980s, there were less new definitions, increasingly experimental inquires about and elective subjects started to develop CSR is the deliberate inclusion of public interest and sustainability in corporate decision involving people, plant and profit (3Ps) (Nkwocha, 2016). Nkwocha further describes CSR to possess the following features:

1. Giving back to society and contributing to welfare and wellbeing of people around the organizational environment.
2. Socio- economic, ethical and moral responsibilities of corporate organizations (big or small).
3. Compliance with legal, regulatory and ethical/ voluntary requirements for business and professional practice.

4. Responsible management of business activities to preserve environment, ensure health and safety in workplace, enhance humans dignity, produce products for human use, and uplift the less privileged.

Mohammad (2009) notes CSR as the responsibilities the corporation has its different stake holders or the community. INEC owes it a responsibility to the people of Rivers State to conduct free, credible and fair elections. This makes the incorporation of the wishes of the people and their co-operation, inevitable if INEC must achieve this feat.

### **Stakeholders' Theory**

The aim of stakeholders' theory according to Freeman (2004) is to make techniques to deal with the various gatherings and connections that brought about a key style. Further, Freeman (2004) imagines that the possibility of partners' administration or approach suggests that chiefs must plan the arrangement and actualize forms which fulfill all and just those gatherings who have a stake in the business. The principle objective in this procedure is to oversee and coordinate the connections interests of partners in a manner to ensure the long haul achievement of the Institution. A partners approach is significantly more worried about dynamic administration of the business condition, connections and the advancement of shared interests so as to create improvement systems. Freeman expresses that partner hypothesis starts with the presumption that qualities are essentially an unequivocally a piece of working together and rejects the partition proposal.

Deductively therefore, the relationship between these three theories to the study is that for any organization to succeed in contemporary times, its communication pattern with its public must be development driven such that the content of such communication must highlight the needs of the people as well as that of the organization. When these needs are harnessed then the organization can perform its corporate social responsibility in line with these needs. For this to happen, critical stake holders need to be consulted by INEC. This work is therefore anchored on the stakeholders' theory. Even so, Rivers State electorates are by norm legitimate stakeholders. As such, INEC ought to show that the organization is socially responsible and accord respect to the relevant stakeholders within the environment which it operates.

### **Conceptual Framework**

#### **Corporate Communication (CC)**

Corporate Communication (CC) is the successor of Public Relations (PR) and its function grew out of necessity. Corporate Communication includes a wide range of activities. Corporate communication is been formalized as a practice by organizations, as an academic discipline and as widespread designation for private firms handle or ought to handle both internal and external communication, flowing from corporate branding and corporate social responsibility to crisis and change communication. Corporate communication on the modern paradigm is understood as "Centralized Management of overall company communication" dealing with numerous stakeholders, and among at achieving the highest reputation possible.

According Oliver (2001) asserts that a number of organizations have changed the name of their public relations departments to corporate communications.

Riel (1995) affirms that corporate communication plays a role of management instrument with the task to "harmonize all consciously used forms of in both internal and external

stakeholders". Although, corporate communication is not only adopted by private organizations but many other types of firms, including private non- for – profit organizations as well as public authorities such as the INEC.

Belasen (2008) affirms corporate communication in the so – called competing values frame work based on the idea that institutions are navigating in challenging, more complex and dynamic contests which are similar to those of the business world and requires more integrated strategic and stakeholder- oriented approach to manage activities of both their external and internal communication. Corporate communication is an administration work that offers an edge work for the successful co-appointment of all inner and outer communication with the general reason for setting up and keeping up great notorieties with partner bunches whereupon the association is reliant (Cornelissen, 2011).

As indicated by the European Marketing Confederation (2006), Corporate Communication is the arrangement of exercises engaged with overseeing and coordinating all inside and outside communication planned for making well beginning stages with partners on which the organization depends. Lusure's study (cited in European Marketing Confederation, 2006), depicts corporate communication as making "demonstrative and shift capacity" to animate all representatives to cooperate to help the organization's general destinations, instead of simply concentrating on their practical assignments. Almost certainly, corporate communication is new however it plays out a remarkable capacity in each association which looks for development and improvement. Oliver (2004) says corporate communication takes puts on areas where government isn't included (common society) or is just associated with a supervisory way (markets) and that is generally focused communication done in open for the most part. One of the key components of corporate communication is "understanding its relationship to in general hierarchical strategy", which incorporates crucial objectives (Wood, 2009). Dolphin (1991) Defines corporate communication as key administration process by which an association speaks with its different crowds to the shared advantage of both and improves upper hand. He further says corporate communication is a methodology instead of an order which has formed into 'a fundamental administration supporter'. Corporate communication as supported by World Health Organization (2000) is an administration capacity and contends that a comprehension of communication can support administrators and their work force co-ordinate endeavors expected to accomplish their organization's aim.

Corporate Communication is equipped towards building up a great corporate pictures and notoriety with the entirety of an association's partner gatherings, so these gatherings demonstration in a way that is helpful for the accomplishment of the association (Cornelissen, 2010).

### **Corporate Communication Strategies**

Corporate communication is an instrument for connecting with the different partners and evoking social help. One capacity in such manner is that the administrators of corporate associations ought to be in consistent contact with different partners. This will empower them screen assessment of open, gather and satisfactorily investigate important data which structures contributions to the choices making process is an association. For corporate communication to have the option to accomplish its order in, PR must be an administration work (Oso and Semiu, 2012). As indicated by Steyn (2002) corporate communication strategy

will be the result of vital choices in regards to the associations' communication with vital partners.

He says it will give a structure to the key communication plan and the operational plans - the methods by which the strategy will be actualized. The job of corporate communication isn't finished without remembering it as a procedure or exercises both at national and universal level.

These procedures appear as corporate communication projects and methodologies which requires key reasoning and arranging. As indicated by Teets' examination, (referred to in Steyn, 2002) "A strategist work is to see the organization not for what it's worth, however as it can turn into". Mintzberg (1994) says key reasoning includes catching what oversees gain from all sources – both delicate bits of knowledge just as the hard information. Corporate communication programs when applied at different degrees of activity draw in positive activities and don't pull in responses and impressions that are negative. For each association to keep up its legitimate picture exercises or projects that will suite it dependent on adequate accessible store, its advantage and time ought to be used. Key to having a corporate communication strategy is the notion of a corporate character: the essential profile that an association needs to extend to all its significance partner gatherings and how it intends to be known by these different gatherings as far as the corporate picture and notorieties that they have of the association (Cornelissen, 2010).

He additionally says corporate communication strategy is applied so guarantee that various partners to be sure think about an association in an ideal and extensively steady way, and furthermore in accordance with anticipated corporate character, associations need to put forth an admirable attempt to coordinate all their communication from leaflet, promoting efforts to sites in tone, subjects, visual and logos.

### **Brief History of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)**

The beginning of INEC goes back to an age before Independence when the Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN) was set up to direct 1957 elections. The Federal Electoral Commission (FEC) set up in 1960 held the prompt post – freedom government and local elections of 1964 and 1965. In 1966, the constituent body was broken up after the military overthrow. In 1978, the system of General Olusegun Obasanjo, comprised the Federal Electoral Commission, (FEDECO) with duty of sorting out elections of 1979 which invited in the Nigerian Second Republic during the administration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. The Federal Electoral commission additionally beled the general elections of 1983.

December 1995, the military administration of General Sani Abacha which in the wake of dissolving the National Electoral Commission (NEC) in 1993, built up the National Electoral Commissions of Nigeria (NECON) Local Government Councils to National Assembly. In spite of this, chosen institutions were not introduced before the unexpected passing of General Sani Abacha.

The procedure was prematurely ended on June 1998 as General Abdulsalam Abdubakar's Administration disintegrated NECON and set up the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) which is operational till date and has been built up in every one of the 36 states, the Federal Capital Territory just as having workplaces in the 774 Local Government Areas in Nigeria.

## Violence

Viciousness is 'an utilization of physical power that harms, harms, disregards or decimates individuals or things' (Honderich, 2002, p.91). Steger (2003) points out that viciousness, 'involves a scope of implications, including "power, to harm, or to disregard'. While demonstrations of physical power regularly contain a few characteristics of infringement, most occasions when infringement happens with no physical power, or on the other hand, demonstrations of physical power may occur without anything or anybody being damaged. Hence, Bufacchi (2005) sees savagery in two ideas, brutality as power or all the more comprehensively and viciousness as infringement.

### i. Violence as power

Steger (2003, p.13) contends that 'viciousness is the deliberate punishment of physical or mentally damage on an individual or people'. As indicated by Coady's examination (referred to in Bufacchi, 2005) he says the typical or common comprehension of the term 'viciousness' is regarding relational demonstrations of power for the most part including the punishment of physical damage, which recommend that the idea of brutality can't be seen freely from their idea of power.

He says that the solid proclivity between the terms 'brutality' and 'power' seems, by all accounts, to be vindicate by Oxford English Dictionary, where viciousness is characterized as the activity of physical power in order to deliver damage on or makes harms individual or property'.

### ii. Violence as Violation

In the thought of power, brutality is additionally conceptualized in the action word 'to damage', which is to encroach, or violate, or to surpass some point of confinement or standard. For instance Salmi (1993) characterizes savagery as 'any avoidable activity that comprises an infringement of a human right, in its most stretched out significance, which forestalls the satisfaction of essential human need (pp79-80)'. He says each time individuals starve or are under supported on account of social or political reasons; it is authentic to think about these individuals as casualties of social brutality.

## Electoral Violence

Constituent viciousness is any activity which causes harm of property, curse of torment on people previously, during and after an election. The majority of the accelerating factors for discretionary brutality start at the pre-election organize. Sisk (2008) says brutality at the pre-election stage would for the most part appear as provocative talk, assaults on government officials and gathering supporters. According to Ofili (2011) articulations and remarks made by government officials could become potential brutality and could be developed by adherents or supporters as a call to savagery previously, during and after elections. Savagery at appointive stage as a rule starts from the gathering and election results declaration to suit and settlement of election questions. Appointive brutality shows in a few different ways remembering assaults for rival applicants, party authorities and supporters, just as fierce road fights (UNDP, 2009). Adoke (2011) portrays the appointive savagery which could include shooting, killings, pyromania, wanton demolition of property, for the most part executed by authorities as well as supporters of various ideological groups.



Somewhat lives of the security officials are lost in journey to stop the demonstration. A few investigators with the enthusiasm for examining discretionary brutality found election viciousness at different phases of the election cycle. An election cycle is ordinarily comprised of three phases the pre-election stage, the election time frame, and the post-election. Kammerud (2011) see the constituent cycle approach as helpful in creating strife aversion and the executive's techniques just as furnishing help to nations battling with the issues of appointive brutality. Ladan (2007) says election viciousness at the pre-election stage typically show in intra-party and between party conflicts emerging from battles over gathering designation and access to the electorate. Demonstrations of brutality at the election stage incorporate voter terrorizing, grabbing of polling booths or voting form papers, voting form stuffing and assault on election authorities and eyewitnesses. Savagery at the election stage would regularly begin from the surveying unit and may to spread from that point.

### **Cause of Electoral Violence**

Some underlying drivers of discretionary brutality include:

- i. Decline in trust and social capital among networks.
- ii. Saliency of shared Identifies in legislative issues and mutual pressure.
- iii. Culture of debasement.
- iv. Economic vulnerabilities.
- v. Decline in trust and social capital among networks

Brutal encounters by different public gatherings for example in Rivers State to a degree have disintegrated trust and social capital existing in the networks, in this way making networks powerless against political control.

In Nigeria individuals living outside its ethnic or territorial networks, are most occasions, prohibited from taking an interest in political existence of their place of habitation since they are seen as 'non-indigenes' (Ostein, 2009).

### **Empirical Review**

Okon and Vincent (2017) conducted a study on the topic, "Corporate Communications Strategies and Conflict Resolution in Tertiary Institutions: A focus on Uniport 2016 Unrest". The objectives of the study were to discover factors that led to the 2016 Uniport Students' unrest with a view to align them with disposition of students/management of Uniport, discover the corporate communication strategies adopted by the management of Uniport in the resolution of the 2016 students' unrest crisis so as to establish if it allows for dialogue, observe strategy adopted by management of Uniport for the resolution of 2016 students' unrest and design the adopted strategy of Uniport management in line with international best practices so as to allow for widespread adoption and adaptation by other tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The quantitative approach was employed by the study which required the utilization of questionnaire as instrument of data collection. Gathering of data, the study also used oral interview.

The findings of the study displayed that absence of dialogue and inexperience of corporate communications operational dynamics fueled the ambers of the 2016 Uniport students' unrest. The study also discovered that the corporate communication strategy the Uniport management adopted was not as good as to handle the crisis. The study recommended the need for a complete renovation of the information protocol and public relations unit of

Uniport marked by intensive training on communications. It further recommends that a stop be made on the engagement of non-professionals in the business of corporate communication and/or information protocol and public relations unit so as to avert further reoccurrence.

Although this study is different from the current study as it is based on tertiary institution, whereas the current study will investigate electoral body – INEC. This study discussed how corporate communications strategies enhanced peace between the Uniport students and management. While the current study will examine how structured corporate communication strategies will help manage and prevent future electoral violence in Rivers State and the role of corporate communication in image/reputation building of INEC.

Egobueze and Ojirika (2017) conducted a study to investigate electoral violence in Nigeria's fourth republic: Implications of political stability. The study employed qualitative research method, using documentary evidence and the ex-post-facto research design in terms of reviewing the 2015 general elections. The study adopted conflict theory as a framework of analysis. The study found that history of election in Nigeria has shown it is usually difficult to hold elections that are completely free and fair. However, the study amongst others, recommended adherence to the rule of law as a major step to achieving stability in elections in Nigeria. While the study by Egobueze and Ojirika was conducted to cover Nigeria in general, the present study is conducted to cover Rivers State in particular. While the study by Egobueze and Ojirika utilized qualitative research design, the present study will employ quantitative research design.

Orji and Uzodi (2011) conducted a study to investigate the post-election in Nigeria. The study situated its focus on the violence within conceptual, historical, empirical and comparative perspective ([www.placng.org](http://www.placng.org)). The study traced the roots of electoral violence in Nigeria to some remote causes. The study employed qualitative content analysis. The study found that electoral violence was usually directed at the incumbents / ruling parties and their supporters, indicating an expression of frustration and dissatisfaction with the ruling party's domination of the political process ([www.placng.org](http://www.placng.org)).

The study found that the bone of contention is not necessarily about the people's perception of the integrity of elections, but their interpretation and reaction to the wider implication of the outcome of the electoral process ([www.placng.org](http://www.placng.org)). While the study by Orji and Uzodi focused on the 2011 electoral violence, the present study focused on 2015 electoral violence. While the study by Orji and Uzodi covered Nigeria in general, the present study covers Rivers State in particular.

Whyte and Wakama (2017) conducted a study to investigate corporate communication strategies of Niger Delta Development Commission: An appraisal. The study adopted survey research method. The population size of the study was 38. Data collected were analyzed using frequency distribution tables, percentage, and weighted mean score. The study found that sponsorship of social events; empowerment programmes and employment were the most implemented corporate communication strategies of NDDC which were tilted towards favourable image building. The study summarized that healthy dialogue /interaction and corporation between management and stakeholders help build good reputation. The study recommended that there should be clear-cut organizations policies for communication efforts to become measurable and productive. The study by Whyte and Wakama was conducted to appraise corporate communication strategies of NDDC. While the present study sought to

examine corporate communication strategies of INEC to manage electoral violence. While the study by Whyte and Wakama covered the Niger Delta Region, the present study covers Rivers State in particular.

### **Research Methodology**

This study employed the survey design. The survey design method "...allow researchers to exercise the interactions among variables and to develop explanatory interference." The researcher also employed the use of interviews to elicit more information in order to find answers to questions that may not have been totally answered by respondents to the questionnaire.

The population of this study comprised the staff members of the communication department of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Port Harcourt who according to the Public Affairs Officer of INEC, Rivers State, Mrs. Geraldine Ekelemu were One Hundred and Eight (108) in number. Considering that the population is manageable, the researcher therefore, utilized the census method which means that the entire population becomes the sample size. The sample size therefore became the entire one Hundred and Eight (108) members of staff of the communication department of INEC.

The instrument that was used for this study is a semi-structured interview and structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into 2 parts. The first contained the demographic information about the respondents while the second part determined the respondents' ideas on the subject area. This instrument (questionnaire) was titled: Strategies of INEC Corporate Communication Department in managing electoral violence questionnaire. The items were rated based on the modified 4-point Scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The questionnaire also contained some closed ended questions that generated answers to research question 3.

Reliability is the 'degree of consistency which instances are assigned to same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). In order to determine the reliability of the instrument, the researcher used the test-retest techniques to test the reliability of the instrument. This was done by administering copies of the questionnaire to about 10 lecturers of Rivers State University and re-administered the copies of questionnaire within 3 weeks interval for retest. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to obtain the reliability coefficient value.

The instrument (questionnaire) was administered to the respondents through direct contact approach. The purpose of this approach was to reduce the occurrence of biased responses and unwillingness on the part of the respondents, as they might be persuaded for compliance. One hundred and eight (108) copies of questionnaire were distributed to the selected staff of INEC in Port Harcourt. The data gotten from the study were presented in simple frequency tables for ease of interpretation while analysis was done in simple percentages and the Weighted Mean Score (WMS). For the interview data, analyses were done on the responses from the interviewee in line with the research questions.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

### Data Presentation

Out of the one hundred and eight (108) copies of questionnaire distributed, only one hundred (100) were filled and returned correctly hence this formed the basis for the analysis.

**Table 1: Sex Distribution of Respondents**

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	61	61%
Female	39	39%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

From the above table, it can be seen that majority of the staff of INEC were male with 61% indication to that effect.

**Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents**

Age	Frequency	Percentage
20 – 30	4	4%
31 – 40	49	49%
41 – 50	40	40%
51 and above	7	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

The results on table 2 shows that majority of the respondents were between the ages of 31 – 40 which shows the youthful nature of the staff of INEC.

**Table 3: Educational Qualification of Respondents**

Qualification	No. of Respondents	Percentage
SSCE/NABTECH	0	0
OND	7	7%
BSC/HND	69	69%
Post Graduate Degree	24	24%
Others	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

From the above table, majority of the respondents were bachelor's degree (B.Sc.) and higher national diploma (HND) holders indicating that the staff members of INEC has gone through one form of formal training (schooling) or the other. The implication is that INEC has an enlightened staff strength which can function effectively under the right circumstances.

**Table 4: Marital Status of Respondents**

Status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	29	29%
Married	53	53%
Divorced	18	18%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4 shows that 53% of respondents are married showing that most of the staff have one form of responsibility or the other apart from their jobs.

**Table 5: Religious Affiliations of Respondents**

Religion	Frequency	Percentage
Christianity	71	71%
Muslim	13	13%
Others	16	16%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

The result on table 5 shows that majority of the respondents were Christians. This is not surprising because Rivers State is a Christian dominated state.

**Table 6: Presence of Corporate Communication Department**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	100	100
No	0	0
Can't tell	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

The above table shows a 100% response that INEC has a corporate communication department in Port Harcourt.

**Table 7: How Effective are the Strategy**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very effective	71	71
Not effective	27	27
Can't tell	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

The above table shows that majority of the respondents numbering up to 71% indicated that the communication strategies used by INEC are effective.

The parameters for measuring items being accepted or rejected from Table 4.8 to Table 4.11, according to the researcher is a 'rank order'; using a specific point on the scale to denote SA-Strongly Agree, A-Agree, SD-Strongly Disagree, D-Disagree: for items with 1 to 2 on the scale denotes disagree, for items with 2 to 3 on the scale denotes strongly disagree, for items with 3.1 to 3.5 on the scale denotes agree, for items with 3.5 to 4 on the scale denotes strongly agree.

**Table 8: Responses on the corporate communications strategy adopted by INEC in managing electoral violence in Rivers State**

S/No	Questionnaire item	Responses				N	$\sum \bar{x}$	Means ( $\bar{x}$ )	Remarks
		SA	A	D	SD				
1.	INEC has an Inter-Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) comprising of all security agencies in the State and it interfaces with them to ensure adequate security during electoral processes.	34 (136)	64 (192)	2 (4)	0 (0)	100	332	3.32	Accepted
2.	INEC does voter sensitization (Engagements with the youths on the need to shun violence) in Rivers state during election period.	59 (236)	32 (96)	9 (18)	0 (0)	100	350	3.5	Accepted
3.	Regular interaction with critical stakeholders is a strategy used by INEC in managing electoral violence.	65 (260)	14 (42)	1 (1)	20 (20)	100	323	3.23	Accepted
4	INEC utilized town hall meetings to reach out to the electorates in Rivers State.	5 (20)	8 (24)	40 (80)	47 (47)	100	171	1.71	Rejected

5.	Emails, websites, blogs and other social media platforms constitute a channel through which INEC reach out to its public on election matters in Rivers State.	47 (188)	39 (117)	10 (20)	4 (4)	100	329	3.29	Accepted
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Table 8 shows the responses on the various corporate communications strategy adopted by INEC in managing electoral violence in Rivers State? From the table, item 1 reveals that the respondents cumulatively agreed on the view that INEC has an inter-consultative committee on election security (ICCES) that comprise of all security agencies in Rivers State. The respondents also agreed that INEC does voter sensitization in Rivers State during election period and that regular interaction with critical stakeholders is a strategy used in INEC in managing electoral violence. The respondents also accepted the view that INEC use various social media to reach out to its publics in Rivers State. The respondents however rejected the view that INEC utilized town hall meetings to reach out to the electorates in Rivers State.

**Table 9: Response on ways INEC's corporate communication strategy been able to help manage electoral violence in Rivers State**

S/N	Questionnaire item	Responses				N	$\sum \bar{x}$	Means ( $\bar{x}$ )	Remarks
		SA	A	D	SD				
1.	INEC has been organizing sensitization workshop on the dangers of electoral violence in Rivers State during elections	45 (180)	10 (30)	42 (84)	3 (3)	100	297	2.97	Rejected
2.	Traditional media channels have been used to reach the public with anti-violence messages	68 (272)	13 (39)	12 (24)	7 (7)	100	342	3.42	Accepted
3.	The corporate communications unit of INEC has successfully used the mass media to help reduce violence during elections.	81 (324)	8 (24)	2 (4)	9 (9)	100	361	3.61	Accepted

4	INEC communicates regularly with the Rivers populace during elections using both online and offline channels.	35 (140)	7 (21)	18 (36)	40 (40)	100	237	2.37	Rejected
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The results on table 9 shows that respondents rejected the views that INEC has been organizing sensitization workshop on the dangers of electoral violence in Rivers State during elections and that INEC communicates regularly with the Rivers people during elections using online and offline channels. They however accepted the views that INEC has used traditional media channels to reach out to the public with anti-violence messages and that the corporate communications unit of INEC has successfully used the mass media to help reduce violence during elections.

**Table 10: Response on whether INEC's corporate communication strategy helped influence electorates' perception on violence in Rivers State**

S/N O	Questionnaire item	Responses				N	$\sum \bar{x}$	Means ( $\bar{x}$ )	Remarks
		SA	A	D	SD				
1.	INEC organizing sensitization campaign has helped manage electoral violence in Rivers State.	73 (292)	13 (39)	11 (33)	3 (3)	100	367	3.67	Accepted
2.	The communications strategies used by INEC has enhanced a free, fair and credible election in Rivers state.	15 (60)	7 (21)	43 (86)	35 (35)	100	202	2.02	Rejected
3.	The corporate communications strategies used by INEC in the just concluded election has made Rivers State peaceful before, during and after the elections.	7 (28)	13 (39)	25 (50)	55 (55)	100	172	1.72	Rejected



4	Electorates in Rivers State believe and trust in the credibility of INEC in elections as a result of INEC's communication strategies.	2 (8)	39 (117)	53 (106)	6 (6)	100	237	2.37	Rejected
5.	Regular consultation with critical stakeholders has enhanced a violent free election in Rivers State.	20 (80)	3 (9)	58 (174)	19 (19)	100	282	2.82	Rejected

From table 10, it can be seen that the respondents rejected the view that INEC's corporate communications strategy helped influence electorates' perception on violence in Rivers State except the view that INEC organizing sensitization campaign has helped manage electoral violence in Rivers State which the respondents accepted.

**Table 4.11: Responses on the challenges encountered by INEC in the use of corporate communication strategy to manage electoral violence in Rivers state**

S/N O	Questionnaire item	Responses				N	$\sum \bar{x}$	Means ( $\bar{x}$ )	Remarks
		SA	A	D	SD				
1.	Lack of finance has constituted a major barrier to the functioning of INEC's corporate communications unit.	17 (68)	22 (66)	47 (94)	14 (14)	100	242	2.42	Rejected
2.	Political interference has hindered the corporate communications unit of INEC from carrying out its duties effectively.	43 (172)	29 (87)	16 (32)	12 (12)	100	303	3.03	Accepted
3.	Excessive bureaucracy in INEC has affected the smooth application of effective corporate	61 (244)	12 (36)	10 (20)	17 (17)	100	317	3.17	Accepted

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	communication strategies in Rivers State								
4	Shortage of adequate manpower has constituted a hindrance to the design and application of sound communication strategies in INEC.	10 (40)	28 (84)	19 (38)	43 (43)	100	205	2.05	Rejected
5.	There is a distorted flow of communication between INEC and its internal and external publics thereby causing some hindrance to the use of communication in reducing electoral violence.	50 (200)	20 (60)	26 (52)	4 (4)	100	316	3.16	Accepted

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The result on table 11 shows that respondents rejected the view that lack of finance has constituted a major barrier to the functioning of INEC's corporate communication unit. Another view that was rejected by respondents according to the table is the view that shortage of adequate manpower has hindered communication in INEC. These data indicate that INEC receives enough finance that it requires to operate and also has enough manpower in its communication department. The table further reveals that respondents accepted the view that political interference has hindered the corporate communications unit of INEC from functioning effectively. This puts a doubt on the true independent nature of INEC respondents also accepted the view that the bureaucracy in INEC affects its smooth operation. All the respondents also agreed that there is a distorted flow of communication between INEC and its publics and this has caused some hindrances to the use of communication in reducing electoral violence.

### **Presentation of Interview**

This section contained five (5) open-ended questions and one (1) closed ended which were prepared for the corporate communication staff of INEC. The Public Affairs Officer of INEC, Rivers State, Mrs. Geraldine Ekelemu who was mandated to respond to the researcher on behalf of the commission for the interview segment of the research gave the following responses:

### **On whether INEC has a department that handles corporate communications:**

The Public Affairs officer of INEC Mrs. Geraldine Ekelemu stated that the Independent National Electoral Commission is an organization established by laws of the Federation thus has all what a fully functional organization should have including a department which handles both internal and external communication. She confirmed that, INEC has a corporate communication department which is responsible for relating with the different publics of the commission.

### **On the corporate communication strategy used by INEC in managing electoral violence in Rivers State**

Mrs. Geraldine said that the commission utilizes different ways to reach out to its diverse publics before, during and after elections. She highlighted some of the elements of the communication strategy of INEC to include

- i. Stakeholder meetings
- ii. Town hall meetings
- iii. Market outreaches
- iv. Road shows
- v. Jingles/press releases etc.

She further stated that INEC also used the channels listed below for their internal and external communication. The channels include:

#### **External**

- i. Media (TV, Radio, Newsprint)
- ii. Door-to-door voter sensitization
- iii. Social media
- iv. Town criers
- v. Bill boards/handbills
- vi. Press Releases
- vii. INEC's website
- viii. INEC's citizens contact centre (ICCC)
- ix. INEC's social media handles.
- x. Sign languages/Braille for people living with disabilities.etc.

#### **Internal**

- i. Bulletins
- ii. Minutes of meeting
- iii. E-mails
- iv. E-groups (Whatsapp, Facebook etc.)
- v. Internal memos

After itemizing these methods and strategy of reaching out to the public, Mrs. Ekelemu said that the primary concern of INEC is to ensure that elections are properly conducted in a fair and secure environment hence whatever it takes to ensure this is a priority to the commission.

### **On the strategy of INEC in managing electoral violence in Rivers State**

The Public affairs officers stated that this is a priority for the commission. She noted that in the past eight years, Rivers State has been a hot bed of violent elections, and that for that reason; INEC pays special attention to elections in Rivers State.

She further stated that it is part of the strategy of the commission to deliberately carry along all stakeholders in the State by ensuring that they all are aware of the programmes set out for the elections in Rivers State. She also pointed out that continuous engagement of the populace is another strategy of the commission. Mrs. Ekelemu was of the view that the commission ensured that political parties and the voting public had direct access to the commission through the various communication channels set up by the commission. She further stated that continuous voter enlightenment and education was another strategy to manage election violence. She buttressed that for the commission their strategy was to ensure that they nib the violence in the bud by making sure that voters and political parties alike do not misunderstand the programmes and activities of the commission. She also said that the commission constantly enlightened the populace on the dangers of being involved in electoral violence.

In conclusion, Mrs. Ekelemu stated that simply put, the corporate communication strategy of the commission in managing electoral violence in Rivers State was, Engage, Educate, and Evade. She state that these were achieved using various communication tools and channels.

#### **On how has INEC's corporate communication strategy helped influence electorates' perception on violence in Rivers State**

Mrs. Geraldine Ekelemu posited that although the people will continue to be dissatisfied with some activities of the commission because of some noticeable lapses but those only points to the fact that the commission is growing. The commission has been able to sensitize voters on the need to shun violence and this to a large extent has changed the mindset of Rivers youths though some youths are still being misled and used to perpetuate electoral violence. Regular interactions with critical stakeholders has enabled the commission know the critical issues affecting the Rivers people and this has enhanced the shaping of INEC's communication strategy. Also, the transparent nature of the conduct of electoral processes in Rivers state has changed the perception of the audience towards INEC.

#### **On the challenges confronting INEC in the application of their corporate communication strategy to manage electoral violence in Rivers State**

Every organization has its problem and so does INEC. One of the most common problems of the commission is excessive bureaucracy which delays decision making. This problem sometimes frustrates the efforts of the commission to implement useful decisions that would have facilitated work within certain frame of time. Also, the issue of adequate and timely funding that arises due to the problem of approval is another problem confronting the commission.

Above all, is the challenge of distrust between the voting public and INEC. The public tend to conclude that INEC is partial or will be partial when in fact this is not and has never been true. So because of this distrust, the public tends to stone-wall against whatever message emanating from INEC. This creates a lot of difficulty is achieving set goals and objectives of the strategy team.

The following were observed from the findings;

1. INEC has an inter-consultative committee on election security which is responsible for the general security of lives and property before, during and after the elections in Rivers

State. The success of this committee in carrying out their activities is however debatable.

2. INEC do embark on sensitization campaigns to enlighten the people of Rivers State (especially youths) on the dangers of electoral violence while also meeting with critical stakeholders for electoral interactions.
3. INEC's corporate communication strategies have relatively helped in managing electoral violence in Rivers State.
4. In spite of INEC's efforts in ensuring a peaceful election in Rivers State, electorates still do not trust the credibility of INEC during elections due to its communication strategy. The communication flow in INEC is distorted due to the bureaucratic process it goes through and political interference. The communication strategy of INEC has not adequately reached out to its internal and external publics.

### **Conclusion**

Communication is the live wire of societies and organizations. The communication structure of any organizations goes a long way in determining its success rate. Every organization (INEC inclusive) must take its communication procedures seriously for it to succeed. This includes giving the employees conducive atmosphere to air their views freely because when communication is restricted, ideas are confined and in some cases good ideas are killed. The communication pattern in INEC is such that cannot engender a successful running of the commission. If an organization that its maximum potential can only be attained when it is independent, can't independently communicate, then something is wrong. INEC is an independent organization but ironically, its independence is continually questionable. It is only normal for a commission that was made to be independent to show such independence in its decision making pattern such that its stance cannot be easily compromised on any grounds. If INEC must succeed, then it must get its communication right.

When what is said is meant, the speaker then becomes trusted in subsequent conversations. This is probably because action speaks volume than voice.

### **Recommendations**

From the findings, the following recommendations are made;

1. The inter-consultative committee of INEC on security should prioritize human life before, during and after elections more than any other interests. The sacred nature of human life should be emphasized during enlightenment process. Through ensuring that the lives and property of 'the haves and have not' are equally protected.
2. The corporate communication department should be properly funded to be able to carry out sensitization campaigns to the most remote part of the state during electioneering period. Since funding seems not to be a problem in INEC, the allocated funds should be channeled properly to the corporate communications unit to enable them sensitize the electorates on how to choose their leaders and the dangers of bad leadership. The use of drama illustration to narrate and portray expected behavior before, during and after electioneering process will be useful.
3. Since INEC corporate communication strategy have relatively helped in managing violence in Rivers State, it should continue to be used and improved according to the growing

dynamics of the Rivers society. Any outdated aspect of the strategy should be revitalized in line with modern electoral practices.

4. INEC should concentrate on building and maintaining trust between itself and the general public through its actions which should be transparent. Appropriated funds should be used accordingly and not mismanaged. This can be done by ensuring that the devices and materials to be used are pretested and made available at the accurate time and locations and the operators are properly trained too. This can provide the desired expectations by electorates.

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