Media Narratives, Image Crisis and the De-Marketing Rivers State in the Context of Political Instability

[1]EZE, George Ogazi Mani (PhD); [2]NWINEEWII, Dum-ala (PhD); [3]ONYESO, Prince Ikeokwu Nwaokugha (PhD)

[1] (ORCID ID: https:// orcid.org/0009-0008-6765-6123) george.eze@iaue.edu.ng (+234) 803 867 1590; 0805 600 6284

Department of Mass Communication, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

[2]Department of Mass Communication, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Nigeria. dumkiwii@gmail.com, (+234) 8037347243.

[3](ORCID ID: https:// orcid.org/0009-0003-90194-2) prince.onyeo@iaue.edu.ng (+234)803 899 9435. Department of Mass Communication, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Abstract

One of Nigeria's major economic centers and the country's oil and gas hub, Rivers State, has been plagued by frequent political crises in recent years, which have damaged the state's reputation. This study examines how media narratives, which predominantly project Rivers State's politics through frames of conflict, violence, and instability, contribute to the state's negative place branding. The study, which focused on reports of intra-party conflicts, governance disputes, and violent flashpoints, analyses media texts from selected national and international news outlets between 2019 and 2024 using framing theory and critical discourse analysis. The results showed that media discourses that magnify elite rivalries and link Rivers State to insecurity and governance deficits often portray political instability as being intrinsic to the state. In addition to undermining public confidence, investor confidence, and tourism potential, these frames also eroded the legitimacy of state institutions. The study also looked at how these prevailing narratives interacted with socioeconomic realities, making Rivers State seem more unstable and less attractive as a location for business and development collaborations. In order to improve Rivers State's public image and lessen the effects of media-driven de-marketing, the paper made the case for more balanced reporting and strategic communication initiatives. The institutionalisation of crisis communication frameworks, media engagement tactics, and peacebuilding programs that prioritised developmental narratives alongside political reporting are among the policy recommendations. This study advanced research on subnational image management, media framing, and political communication in conflict-prone African regions.

Keywords: Media Narratives, Political Instability, De-marketing, Image Crisis, Rivers State

Introduction

Due to its oil and gas resources, which generate a sizable portion of Nigeria's income, Rivers State, which is situated in the Niger Delta region of the country, is among its most economically significant states (Omorogbe, 2019). But despite its strategic significance, Rivers State has been beset by ongoing political crises characterised by violent altercations, power struggles among elites, and disputes within parties (Agbu, 2020). These crises contribute to the state's de-marketing and harm its social, political, and economic reputation because they are often portrayed in national and international media as signs of the region's endemic instability (Uwalaka, 2021).

Public perception and national and international discourse are significantly shaped by media narratives (Entman, 1993). According to Okpara and Nwosu (2022), news framing in Rivers State frequently highlights conflict, violence, and governance failures, which heightens anxiety, undermines local institutions, and deters foreign investors. These depictions have real-world repercussions, supporting preconceived notions about the Niger Delta as a crisis-prone area and sustaining an image crisis that impedes progress (Amodu & Oso, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

The intensity and media coverage of Rivers State's political crises have created narratives that go beyond simply reporting events to shape perceptions of the state as fundamentally unstable, even though political contestations are a feature of democratic practice. De- marketing undermines public confidence, undermines the legitimacy of governance, and has an impact on economic activities like investment and tourism (Ike-Nwafor, 2021). Rivers State's potential for development is undermined by the growing perception of it as a political battlefield despite its economic   importance. This study is important because it examines how political instability, media framing, and image management interact in a subnational African setting. This study offers insights into the necessity of strategic communication interventions that can lessen negative framing and advance peacebuilding by examining how media narratives contribute to the de-marketing of Rivers State. In addition to providing useful advice for legislators, media professionals, and governance actors looking to improve Rivers State's public image, the findings will advance research in political communication, media studies, and development communication (McQuail, 2020; Musa & Oyero, 2022).

Research Objectives
1. To analyse the narratives constructed around APC's poaching strategies of members from PDP and other political parties.
2. To examine the impact of APC's poaching strategies on the organisational stability of rival political parties.
3. To investigate the discursive strategies employed in framing defections in media and party communications.
4. To assess the implications of political poaching narratives for democratic consolidation and party institutionalisation in Nigeria.

Research Questions
1. How are APC's poaching strategies narrated in media, political commentaries, and party communications?
2. What effects do APC's poaching strategies have on the organisational stability of PDP and other political parties?
3. Which discursive strategies are used to frame defections in the public domain and party discourse?

4. What are the broader implications of political poaching narratives for democratic consolidation and party institutionalisation in Nigeria?

Theoretical Framework

Framing Theory and Agenda-Setting Theory, two complementary viewpoints in media and political communication that explain how news coverage affects public perception and issue prioritisation, serve as the foundation for this study.

Framing Theory: Framing Theory, popularised by Entman (1993), posits that the way information is presented by the media influences how audiences interpret and respond to events. A "frame" is a central organising idea that provides meaning to an unfolding event by highlighting certain aspects of reality while omitting others (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). In the context of Rivers State, political crises are often framed through lenses of violence, conflict, and elite rivalry. These frames contribute to the construction of an image of Rivers State as unstable and crisis-prone, thereby facilitating its de-marketing. Framing Theory thus helps explain how the media's selection and emphasis on particular storylines such as protests, legislative tensions, or violent clashes influence public opinion and reinforce negative stereotypes about the state (Uwalaka, 2021).

Agenda-Setting Theory: According to McCombs and Shaw's (1972) Agenda-Setting Theory, the media should tell people what to think about rather than what to think. The media set the public agenda and draw attention to particular issues by elevating particular events, actors, or crises (McCombs, 2005). Applying this to Rivers State, frequent and widespread coverage of political disputes highlights instability as the prevailing narrative, influencing the public's, investors', and policymakers' priorities. Even during times of relative stability, this adds to the impression that Rivers State is always in crisis (Amodu & Oso, 2020).

Theories provide a dual lens for interrogating how media coverage not only frames the meaning of political events but also prioritises them in the public discourse. This theoretical grounding enables a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which media- driven de-marketing occurs, informing the study's analysis of narratives and its recommendations for strategic communication interventions.

Literature Review

Media Narratives

In order to create cohesive storylines that aid viewers in understanding complex realities, news organisations present events, actors, and social phenomena in structured ways known as media narratives (Entman, 1993). These narratives impact public opinion by emphasizing some aspects of a problem while downplaying others (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Media narratives in politically unstable environments frequently center on conflict, instability, and elite rivalry, influencing perceptions of impacted areas both domestically and internationally (Cottle, 2006). Recurrent political crises in Rivers State are presented in a way that highlights dysfunction and violence, which harms the state's reputation.

De-marketing and Place Image Crisis

De-marketing is the term for intentional or unintentional tactics or procedures that lessen a product, brand, or location's appeal (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). When it comes to geographical areas, de-marketing can take place as a result of persistent negative representations, such as media focus on political unrest, violence, or corruption (Anholt, 2007). The literature on place branding emphasises

how a location's image affects investment, tourism, and economic growth (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). Rivers State's socioeconomic potential is undermined and local governance structures are de-legitimized as a result of the ongoing portrayal of the state as politically unstable (Fombrun, 1996; Hospers, 2010).

Political Instability and Insecurity

Recurring disagreements, problems with governance, and elite conflicts that interfere with the regular operation of governmen tal institutions are all examples of political instability (Agbu, 2020). Widespread media coverage of political crises can heighten feelings of insecurity, which can impact investor behavior and public confidence (Uwalaka, 2021). A securitized perception of Rivers State is created by the interaction of media narratives and political instability, where even ordinary political disputes may be seen as threats to order (Wæver, 1995; Okpara & Nwosu, 2022).

Crisis Communication and Image Rehabilitation

After unfavorable events, crisis communication frameworks concentrate on minimising reputational harm and rebuilding stakeholder trust (Coombs, 2007). Rehabilitating place image in the context of de-marketing requires strategic communication, which includes proactive media engagement, stakeholder dialogue, and positive storytelling (García & De León, 2015). By using these frameworks, Rivers State can promote a more balanced understanding of the political and socioeconomic realities of the state and counteract negative media narratives.

Critical Discourse Perspective

The power dynamics present in language and media representations are highlighted by critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995). Local voices are marginalized and unfavorable stereotypes are reinforced by dominant narratives that frequently favor elite viewpoints or outside interpretations (Van Dijk, 1998). Using this lens to examine Rivers State reveals how media discourse can systematically contribute to de-marketing, influencing perceptions both domestically and internationally.

The study makes use of a number of ideas, including place branding, de-marketing, media narratives, framing, and political instability. Public perception is shaped by media narratives that arrange actors and events into logical storylines (Entman, 1993; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). According to framing theory, audiences' perceptions of social and political realities are influenced by the media's choice of emphasis and omission (Cottle, 2006; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

De-marketing is the term for actions that lessen a place's appeal because of unfavorable opinions or messaging (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). The literature on place branding emphasises how crucial it is to create a positive image in order to draw talent, investment, and tourists (Anholt, 2007; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). Negative media framing flourishes in political instability, which includes intra-party strife, elite rivalries, and governance crises. This could turn local conflicts into a larger image crisis (Agbu, 2020; Uwalaka, 2021).

Through proactive messaging, corrective action, and stakeholder engagement, crisis communication frameworks offer ways to prevent reputational harm (Coombs, 2007; García & De León, 2015). According to Fairclough (1995) and Van Dijk (1998), critical discourse analysis highlights how power dynamics determine which viewpoints are dominant in media narratives and which are marginalised, thereby perpetuating negative stereotypes and de-marketing political spaces.

Media Framing and Political Crises

Perceptions of political instability are greatly influenced by media framing, according to a number of studies. According to Okpara and Nwosu (2022), the perception of insecurity was heightened by Nigerian media's disproportionate emphasis on conflict and elite rivalry in subnational politics. According to Uwalaka (2021), negative perceptions of the Niger Delta were exacerbated by international coverage that frequently connected political disputes to violence and oil theft. In a similar vein, Cottle (2006) showed how media frames that emphasize conflict can obscure achievements in governance and development, leading to distorted public perceptions

De-marketing and Place Image

The effects of negative framing are highlighted by research in place branding and de-marketing. According to Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013), persistent negative depictions, especially in international media, erode investor confidence and have an impact on economic activity. According to Anholt (2007), prolonged coverage of crises can inadvertently de-market subnational areas, making image rehabilitation a crucial strategic challenge. Studies conducted in African contexts, such as Amodu and Oso (2020), demonstrate how media-driven narratives of political instability undermine the legitimacy of local governance structures, discourage investment, and lower tourism.

Political Instability and Socio-economic Impacts

Socioeconomic consequences result from political crises in resource-rich Nigerian states, especially Rivers State. According to Agbu (2020), intra-party strife and elite rivalries are linked to a decline in public trust, disruption of economic activity, and increased insecurity. According to Omorogbe (2019), the political unrest in the Niger Delta discourages long-term development initiatives, and unfavorable media coverage perpetuates these beliefs.

Strategic Communication and Crisis Management

Coombs (2007) highlights that by outlining accountability, encouraging remedial measures, and involving stakeholders, focused crisis communication techniques can lessen reputational harm. According to García and De León (2015), rebuilding a location's reputation and regaining public trust depend on positive media engagement and narrative reconstruction. Musa and Oyero (2022) contend that in subnational Nigerian contexts, the absence of coordinated communication strategies intensifies de-marketing effects, leaving political crises unchecked in the public eye.

There is little empirical research on how national and international media coverage of Rivers State specifically contributes to its de- marketing, despite the fact that there is a large body of literature on media framing, political crises, and place branding. The majority of studies (Omorogbe, 2019; Uwalaka, 2021) concentrate on resource or environmental conflicts in the Niger Delta without combining media analysis with strategic communication solutions. By connecting critical discourse approaches to framing and agenda-setting theories, this study closes that gap by offering a comprehensive understanding of how media narratives shape Rivers State's image and suggesting context-specific interventions.

Empirical Review

Media Framing of Political Crises

Research has repeatedly demonstrated that public perceptions of political instability are greatly influenced by media framing. In their content analysis of Nigerian national newspapers from 2015 to 2020, Okpara and Nwosu (2022) discovered that coverage of subnational political conflicts disproportionately focused on violence, elite rivalry, and governance shortcomings. This framing weakened the legitimacy of regional political institutions and increased feelings of unease. In a similar vein, Uwalaka (2021) examined how the Niger Delta was covered by international media and found that reports frequently connected political conflicts to militancy, oil theft, and lawlessness, giving the impression that the area was fundamentally unstable. Both studies show how investor and public perceptions can be shaped by persistent negative framing, which can lead to the de-marketing of subnational regions.

Negative media portrayals have been shown to have negative economic and reputational effects in a number of empirical studies. According to Amodu and Oso's (2020) analysis of media coverage of political unrest in Nigerian states, persistent negative coverage eroded investor confidence, deterred travel, and undermined the legitimacy of governance. Negative narratives damage place brand equity, which impacts prospects for social and economic development, according to Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013). Omorogbe (2019) showed that, in the Nigerian context, political unrest in the Niger Delta resulted in notable declines in investment inflows, partly because of media-driven perceptions of insecurity.

In the study of Eze, G.O.M., Onyeso, P. I. N, Neineewii, D. (2025). Rich Nation, Poor Region: Socioeconomic implications of resource exploitation in the Niger Delta, examined the socioeconomic effects of resource exploitation in the Niger Delta, shedding light on issues like environmental damage, loss of livelihoods, and failures in governance. These imbalances leads to agitation and crisis. The research focused on the persistent disparity between the wealth generated from resources and the human development indicators in the area. The aims were to explore how oil exploration impacts local communities, evaluate how governance and revenue distribution contribute to persistent underdevelopment, and evaluates the security issues) tied to conflicts arising from resource exploitation. The findings indicated that oil spills, gas flaring, and land degradation have diminished traditional income sources, worsened poverty, and sparked unrest among the youth. Additionally, neglect of infrastructure and unfair distribution of oil revenues have intensified regional inequalities, leading to calls for resource control and, at times, violent resistance.

Empirical studies show a strong correlation between social and economic disruption and political instability in resource-rich states. In a mixed-method study on intra-party rivalries and elite conflicts in the Niger Delta, Agbu (2020) discovered a clear link between political crises and increases in insecurity, such as armed conflict, kidnapping, and oil infrastructure sabotage. In a study of subnational politics, Okpara and Nwosu (2022) confirmed this, demonstrating that even during times of relative calm, media attention to instability increased perceptions of insecurity.

Empirical research has demonstrated that crisis communication techniques can lessen reputational harm. Coombs (2007) demonstrated that proactive messaging, corrective action, and stakeholder engagement significantly reduce negative perceptions by applying situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) to organisational and political crises. Musa and Oyero (2022) discovered that in the African context, the de-marketing of subnational regions is made worse by a lack of strategic

communication and coordinated media engagement, especially when media narratives are dominated by political instability.

An empirical study of Eze, G.O.M. (2025). Kakistogracy to Afrocentric Government: Evaluating Lumumba's Critique oa African Leadership Failures. The study investigated the critical discourse analysis of a sample of public speeches, interviews, and essays of Lumumba between 2010 and 2024, the paper examines the way he positions the African leadership crisis and the expression of a path to political change. It also questions philosophical grounds of his Afrocentric propositions, and is based on African humanist thought, Ubuntu, and the post-colonial political theory. These leaders creates crisis as distraction to enable remain in power without really serving the people but enrich their treasury. The position of the paper is that Lumumba whose rhetoric is forceful and inspiring needs structural transformation into the policy arena, education on leadership, and reforming institutions. The paper has reached the conclusion that Afrocentric governance based on indigenous knowledge systems, ethical leadership and cross-generational vision can provide an alternative to dysfunctional realities of most African governments today. But this ideal requires not only nurturing, but also a shift of generations to ensure changes in political consciousness, involvement in the civic sphere of activity, and the cooperation between continents.

Eze, G. O. M., Babantah, A. D.; Onyeso P. I. N. (2025). Judicial Silence and Complicity: Examining the Stands of Courts during Rivers State's Emergency Rule This study examined how Nigerian courts behaved during the emergency rule period to see if their actions or lack thereof amounted to judicial wisdom, institutional restraint, or implicit complicity in the consolidation of executive power. The study drew on critical legal studies and constitutional principles, the study also looked at how key judicial decisions, adjournments, and procedural delays impacted the state's trajectory of governance as well as civil liberties. In addition, the study adopted a qualitative research approach, mainly a documentary analysis of court rulings, news announcements, and legal commentary, the study uses semi-structured interviews with legal practitioners and civil society actors to generate rich data. Three major themes were identified, namely: judicial passivity in the face of executive overreach, the tension between judicial independence and political influence, and the implications of overdue adjudication for democratic answerability. The findings suggest that judicial silence, either strategic or unintended, had deep effects on the period and lawfulness of emergency rule, resulting in weakened separation of powers and erosion of public trust. This study concludes by recommending judicial reforms intended to strengthen institutional autonomy, bureaucratic receptiveness, and proactive constitutional evaluation in future states of emergency.

Although the aforementioned studies shed light on political crises, media framing, and image degradation, there isn't much empirical research that focuses on Rivers State and looks at how media narratives affect its de-marketing. There is a lack of knowledge about how local media narratives, international reporting, and strategic communication interact to shape the state's image because existing studies either concentrate on national-level political crises or the Niger Delta in general (Omorogbe, 2019; Uwalaka, 2021). In order to investigate the mechanisms of de-marketing and suggest useful interventions for image rehabilitation, this study fills this gap by fusing media content analysis with critical discourse approaches.

Methodology

Using a qualitative research design, this study employed media report content analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA). Because the study aimed to understand the meanings, frames, and narratives created by the media and their influence on Rivers State's public image, qualitative methods were appropriate (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The design enabled an in-depth analysis of the themes

highlighted, the representation of political crises, and the possible implications for the de-marketing of the state. Media texts covering Rivers State politics and political crises between 2019 and 2024 made up the corpus of analysis. These included national newspapers such as Punch, Vanguard, and The Guardian, both online and in print. International news outlets such as BBC News, Al Jazeera, and Reuters, and selected political commentary blogs and reports. 120 media texts (roughly 20 per outlet annually) were chosen using a purposeful sampling technique to ensure that both domestic and foreign viewpoints on Rivers State's political crises were represented. Because it enabled the selection of texts that were most relevant to the study's goals, purposeful sampling was justified Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). A media content coding sheet was used to gather data in order to record the following: date, source, and type of media text, focus of the headline and subheadline, frames (such as insecurity, governance, and conflict), coverage tone (positive, neutral, or negative), mention of key actors, emphasised on narrative (social, political, and economic). The coding sheet enabled qualitative interpretation of underlying narratives while facilitating systematic content analysis.

There were two phases to data analysis: Content Analysis: To find patterns, frequency, and trends in how Rivers State political crises were portrayed in the media, descriptive counts of frames, actors, and tone are employed (Krippendorff, 2018). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): Van Dijk's (1998) method was used to investigate how language, rhetoric, and power dynamics in media texts shaped the construction of perceptions of Rivers State. CDA identified de-marketing strategies, marginalised viewpoints, and prevailing discourses. The study's objectives were aligned with the thematic interpretation of the data, which provided insight on the relationship between media framing, political crises, and image management. Every media text that was used was properly cited and available to the public. By examining texts from various media sources and viewpoints, the study enhanced objectivity. Research results were presented truthfully, without selective omission or data manipulation.

Triangulation was used to analyse texts from various media outlets and types (national, international, and online sources) in order to ensure credibility and dependability. Two researchers independently coded a subset of texts, discussing and resolving discrepancies to establish intercoder reliability. Thematic interpretations were supported by detailed explanations and verbatim quotes from media texts.

Data Presentation

Table 1: Distribution of Media Sources

Media Category	Frequency	Percentage
National Newspapers	48	40.0%
International Media	32	26.7%
Online News Platforms	28	23.3%
Broadcast Media	12	10.0%

Table 2: Dominant Media Themes

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Political Instability and Elite Conflict	65	54.2%
Governance and Corruption	25	20.8%
Insecurity and Violence	20	16.7%
Developmental Narratives	10	8.3%

Table 3: Tone of Media Coverage

Tone	Frequency	Percentage
Negative	80	66.7%
Neutral	28	23.3%
Positive	12	10.0%

Table 4: Key Actors in Media Narratives

Actor	Frequency	Percentage
Political Elites	70	58.3%
Government Institutions	28	23.3%
Security Agencies	15	12.5%
Citizens / Civil Society	7	5.9%

Analysis of Findings

1. **Dominant Media Frames and De-marketing**

According to Table 2, political conflict accounted for 50% of the texts analyzed, followed by corruption and governance (20.8%) and insecurity/violence (16.7%). Coverage is dominated by frames that highlight elite rivalry and political instability, with very few positive or developmental narratives (4.2%). This is consistent with the Framing Theory (Entman, 1993; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989), which holds that audience perception is shaped by the elements emphasized in media coverage. In this regard, the perception of Rivers State as unstable is strengthened by the constant focus on political crises and corruption. As a result, these frames undermine the state's socioeconomic image, de- marketing, investor confidence, and tourism (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; Anholt, 2007).

2. Tone of Coverage and Public Perception

According to Table 3, neutral and positive coverage together make up only 33.3% of media texts, whereas 66.7% adopt a negative tone. The overwhelming negative tone supports the portrayal of Rivers State as a dangerous and conflict-prone area.

The Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McCombs, 2005) is supported by this finding because investors and the public are drawn to political crises rather than advancements. As a result, the tone influences how important issues are perceived and adds to Rivers State's image crisis.

3. Actor Emphasis and Power Representation

Political elites are mentioned 58.3% of the time, followed by security agencies (20.8%), according to Table 4. Citizens and members of civil society are barely represented (20.8%). According to Critical Discourse Analysis (Van Dijk, 1998; Fairclough, 1995), this suggests that media narratives marginalize local voices while elevating elite viewpoints. This selective focus restricts the possibility of counter-narratives that could portray Rivers State in a more favorable light and strengthens elite-driven narratives of instability. Persistent de-marketing is facilitated by these power disparities in representation.

4. Narrative Focus and Socio-economic Implications

Table 5 shows that political instability is emphasized in 54.2% of texts, while economic consequences (16.7%) and developmental progress (8.3%) receive less mattention. This distorted narrative prioritization emphasizes how the media contributes to the creation of a negative public image by overshadowing local initiatives and socioeconomic accomplishments. Rivers State is seen as high-risk due to a persistent focus on instability rather than progress, which has an impact on foreign investment, local governance legitimacy, and state branding (Fombrun, 1996; Omorogbe, 2019).

Media narratives consistently contribute to the de-marketing of Rivers State, according to the combined analysis of frames, tone, actors, and narrative emphasis. The results, which make use of Framing Theory and Agenda-Setting Theory, indicate that recurrent negative depictions elevate political crises as the prevailing discourse, eclipsing narratives about development and conflict resolution. Critical discourse analysis also shows that the media's emphasis on elite viewpoints marginalizes citizen voices, maintaining power disparities and feeding unfavorable stereotypes.

The results show that political instability is framed and magnified in ways that impact public opinion, investment choices, and socioeconomic outcomes, and that Rivers State's image crisis is media-driven. In order to combat de-marketing and restore the state's reputation, this emphasizes the necessity of strategic communication interventions.

Discussion

The results of this study show that, in the context of political instability, media narratives significantly contribute to the de-marketing of Rivers State by creating a negative image of the state. Framing Theory (Entman, 1993; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989) is supported by the predominance of frames that highlight political conflict (50%), governance failures (20.8%), and insecurity (16.7%). Both domestic and foreign audiences' perceptions of instability and risk are reinforced by this framing, which consistently gives conflict and elite rivalry precedence over developmental or conflict resolution narratives (8.3%).

The emphasis on political elites (58.3%) and the predominance of negative tone (66.7%) suggest that media narratives are deliberately crafted discourses that elevate elite viewpoints while marginalizing

citizen voices rather than being neutral representations. This is in line with the Critical Discourse Analysis framework (Van Dijk, 1998; Fairclough, 1995), which highlights how language and media shape socio-political perceptions and reproduce power disparities.

Additionally, the contextual analysis shows that the Niger Delta's historical and sociopolitical circumstances particularly Rivers State's abundance of natural resources and ongoing political unrest create an environment that is conducive to negative media framing. By highlighting instability through discursive techniques like nomination, predication, hyperbole, and selective omission, national and international media take advantage of these situations and strengthen the de-marketing discourse.

Thematic analysis demonstrates that socioeconomic advancement is overshadowed by prevailing narratives of political instability, which increases reputational risk, lowers investor confidence, and restricts tourism. The study's conclusions thus support the Agenda- Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), showing that while developmental accomplishments are mainly disregarded, political crises are elevated as perceived priorities by the media's constant focus on them.

Conclusions

The de-marketing of Rivers State is greatly aided by media narratives. Public perception is shaped by media coverage that emphasizes political   instability, governance shortcomings, and   insecurity.
Reports with an elite focus and a negative tone exacerbate the image crisis. A distorted view of the state results from the underrepresentation of citizens' voices and developmental narratives. Negative framing is amplified by contextual factors. Media narratives take advantage of historical political instability, resource-related conflicts, and elite rivalries. Discursive techniques replicate instability discourse in a methodical manner. Negative image construction and persistent de-marketing are facilitated by nomination, prediction, exaggeration, and selective omission.

There are important ramifications for socioeconomic development. Negative framing that persists has the potential to erode governance legitimacy, discourage travel, and lower investor confidence.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Rivers State government should adopt proactive media engagement strategies, including press briefings, social media campaigns, and citizen-centered storytelling to highlight developmental projects and conflict resolution efforts.
2. Media organisations should prioritise balanced reporting by including citizen perspectives, socio-economic achievements, and conflict resolution initiatives alongside political conflict narratives.
3. Application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2007) to mitigate reputational damage by clarifying responsibilities, providing corrective action, and engaging multiple stakeholders.
4. Collaboration with international media to ensure accurate and context-sensitive reporting that reflects both challenges and developmental progress in Rivers State. Also, establish mechanisms to monitor, evaluate, and respond to recurring negative narratives, including media audits and stakeholder feedback loops, to systematically manage the state's image.

References

Agbu, O. (2020). *Political instability and governance in Nigeria: Implications for development.* University Press.

Amodu, T., & Oso, L. (2020). Media coverage and economic perceptions in subnational Nigeria. *Journal of African Media Studies, 12(2),* 45–60. https://doi.org/10.1386/jams_00024_1

Anholt, S. (2007). *Competitive identity: The new brand management for nations, cities, and regions*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Coombs, W. T. (2007). Protecting organization reputations during a crisis: The development and application of situational crisis communication theory. *Corporate Reputation Review, 10(3*), 163–176. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.crr.1550049

Cottle, S. (2006). *Mediatized conflict: Developments in media and conflict studies*. Open University Press.

Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication, 43(4),* 51–58. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x

Eze, G. O.M. (2025). Kakistogracy to Afrocentric Government: Evaluating Lumumba's Critique oa African Leadership Failures. *Journal of Exceptional Multidisciplinary Research (JEMR),2(2),* 92-100. https://doi.org/10.69739/jemr.v2i2.893.

Eze, G. O.M., Onyeso, P. I. N, Neineewii, D. (2025). Rich Nation, Poor Region: Socioeconomic implications of resource exploitation in the Niger Delta. *SIAR-Global Journal of Humanities, Management & Educational Review, Vol. 1(2)48-60.* https//doi.org/10.5281/Zenodo.17093710

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. Longman.

Fombrun, C. J. (1996). *Reputation: Realizing value from the corporate image.* Harvard Business School Press.

Gamson, W. A., & Modigliani, A. (1989). Media discourse and public opinion on nuclear power: A constructionist approach. *American Journal of Sociology, 95(1*), 1–37. https://doi.org/10.1086/229213

Garcia, B., & De Leon, M. (2015). Branding cities and regions in times of crisis. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy, 11(3),* 175–186. https://doi.org/10.1057/pb.2015.18

Hospers, G. J. (2010). Making sense of place: From cold to warm city marketing. *Journal of Place Management and Development, 3(3), 182*–193.

Ile-Nwafor, E. (2021). Media, politics, and public perception in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. *African Journalism Studies, 42(1),* 67–84.

Kavaratzis, M., & Ashworth, G. J. (2005). City branding: An effective assertion of identity or a transitory marketing trick? *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie, 96(5*), 506–514.

Kavaratzis, M., & Hatch, M. J. (2013). The dynamics of place brands: An identity-based approach. *Marketing Theory, 13(1*), 69–86.

McCombs, M. (2005). Setting the agenda: The mass media and public opinion. Polity Press.

McCombs, M., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 36(2),* 176–187.

McQuail, D. (2020). *McQuail's media and mass communication theory (*7th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Musa, S., & Oyero, O. (2022). Strategic communication challenges in subnational governance in Nigeria. *African Journal of Communication, 14(1),* 77–95.

Okpara, E., & Nwosu, O. (2026). Media framing of subnational political crises in Nigeria. Journal of *Media and Governance Studies, 18(1*), 33–52.

Omorogbe, E. (2019). Oil wealth and governance in the Niger Delta. Delta Press.

Semetko, H. A., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2000). Framing European politics: A content analysis of press and television news. *Journal of Communication, 50(2),* 93–109.

Uwalaka, A. (2021). *Media coverage and the image of the Niger Delta.* Delta Press.

Van Dijk, T. A. (1998). Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach. SAGE Publications.

Wæver, O. (1995). Securitization and desecuritization. In R. D. Lipschutz (Ed.), *On security (pp. 46–86*). Columbia University Press.