

## “Blame Miners, not the Government”: An Image Repair Perspective of the Oyo State Government’s Response to the Ibadan Explosion in Nigeria

Adeola Obafemi Mobolaji

Purdue University, West Lafayette, United States of America

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### ABSTRACT

A compelling example of events that attracted public interest in crisis response and image repair is the recent deadly explosion in Ibadan, the capital of Oyo State, Nigeria, an event with significant implications for public safety, citizen well-being, and government credibility. This case is particularly relevant to governmental communication, as effective crisis communication strategies are vital for image repair during and after such events. Despite the frequency of crises involving Nigerian institutions, and the tendency for such crises to be politicized, there is a notable dearth of empirical studies applying Benoit’s Image Repair Theory to governmental responses. This study addresses that gap by examining how the Oyo State Government restored its image and reputation following the explosion. Using Image Repair Theory as a framework, the study analyzed official communications posted on the Oyo State government’s X (formerly Twitter) page. Findings indicate that the public rejected the government’s initial denial, but image repair was achieved through corrective action and compensation. This paper argues that government must not be discreet with its crisis response strategies. The analysis, therefore, underscores the importance of transparency and political leaders’ visible presence and empathy in enhancing the effectiveness of image repair strategies. These findings contribute to the crisis communication and governance literature, offering broader implications for crisis management and political accountability in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** *Communication in Crisis, Image Repair Theory, Oyo State Government, Ibadan Explosion, Nigeria*

### INTRODUCTION

Oyo State is one of the 36 states that make up the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and the capital of Oyo State is Ibadan, one of the largest cities in West Africa (Britannica, 2025). On the 17th of January 2024, an explosion that claimed many lives and left many injured rocked Ibadan, the largest city in the Southwestern region of Nigeria (Okedare, 2024). The cause of the explosion was identified as explosives that were kept for illicit mining operations.

Although Ibadan has seen many crises in the past, this incident is distinct and deserving of empirical study due to the political impact that crises of this nature typically have in the Nigerian political and security landscape. In addition, one of the critical and

central issues of governance and political leadership in Nigeria depends on how a crisis is managed. Moreover, crises in Nigeria often become politicized, necessitating the implementation of effective crisis response tactics by political leaders (Adeyemi et al., 2024)

Nigerians consistently assess the government's reputation during crises based on its response and management of the situation (Sunday et al, 2021). Unforeseen contingencies and incidents like the Ibadan explosion created an unexpected crisis for the state and a potential risk to the government's reputation (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2020). Whenever a government's image is at risk, they have a reason to take restorative approaches to image problems (Wailling et al, 2025). It is, therefore, important to examine this current study through image repair theory because organizations that feel that their reputation has been tarnished or is in danger frequently create defensive messages to counter negative perceptions. The rhetoric of image repair aims to address accusations or doubts about misbehavior.

Through the Image Repair framework, this study analyzed how the Oyo State Government responded to the crisis and how its communication strategies safeguarded the government's reputation. Ibadan provided a unique context for this study because apart from the fact that there is a dearth of empirical investigations on Image Repair in the Nigerian context, the study also examined the political implications of Oyo State Government's crisis response and reputational management because of the history of how political opponents tackle one another and cast aspersions based on how crises are being managed by government in power. In addition, this study provided an entry point for Image Repair Theory in a field that is replete with studies from the US and other developed nations of the world.

The Ibadan explosion triggered widespread panic and rumors that it was a bomb blast, raising public fears that the Boko Haram terrorist group had expanded its operations to Nigeria's Southwest. Therefore, the government's handling of such a crisis is critical not only for its own reputation but also for public safety. Effective crisis communication is essential for organizations and individuals to maintain or rebuild their image and reputation, which can be severely damaged and lead to a decline in financial health and stakeholder trust (Adim & Ekpa, 2020; Fadipe & Bakenne, 2020; Nwogwugwu & Oyewo, 2024; Ogunyombo, 2022; Varela Castro et al., 2023; Vukovic et al., 2025).

It is crucial to recognize the importance of crisis communication since Ibadan residents needed sufficient information and clarity to allay their doubts and anxieties. Crises are the exact kind of situation that will lead to attributions because they are unplanned, unpleasant, and abrupt (Iftikhar et al., 2023). A crisis begins when an organization is unable to meet the expectations of a stakeholder (Cannaerts, 2021).

Crisis communication refers to the act of acquiring, analyzing, and disseminating information required to manage a crisis (Wang, 2022). Reputation is an asset that every organization values because it serves as a storehouse for an organization's status and image, safeguarding it in times of emergency (Dominic et al., 2024; Von Berlepsch et al, 2022). The protection of organizational reputation cannot be separated from crisis

communication and the crisis response that an organization adopts. This indicates that how an organization responds to a crisis determines how such an organization sustains its reputation during and after crises (Dominic et al., 2024). Cannaerts (2021) also affirms that organizations need to have crisis communication because of the negative attributions that are invariably associated with crises.

Therefore, crisis communication strategies and responses are what organizations do and say anytime a crisis hits (Citrawijaya, 2024). Crisis communication strategies and responses are the two main instruments that help companies minimize the possible damage that a crisis might do (Haupt, 2021). Thus, learning how crisis events, crisis communication strategies, and crisis perception relate to one another can guide organizations in efficiently responding to crises that can disrupt their daily operations.

Effective crisis communication strategies are essential for government agencies and businesses to preserve their reputation and win over stakeholders and the public's trust in times of crisis. Crisis managers should first focus on addressing the victims' psychological and physical needs through communication (Tripathi et al., 2023). Only once this foundation has been formed should they consider reputational assets. Crisis communication necessitates a strong feeling of accountability from the organization since the victim is prioritized over the corporation (Fisipol, 2021).

The channels and methods organizations use to communicate with the public during a crisis are determined by the nature of the event. Quinn (2018) notes that the format of crisis communication largely depends on the target audience and the specific circumstances. To reach a broader audience, the same message can be disseminated through multiple channels simultaneously (Quinn, 2018). While most crises are unforeseen, crisis communication must be well-planned and strategic, regardless of the urgency (Haupt, 2021).

Effective crisis communication requires emergency managers to act in a way that facilitates the gathering, organizing, and sharing of information to ensure transparent, truthful, accurate, and customized two-way communication (Haupt, 2021). Additionally, crisis communicators must prioritize media strategies both before and during a crisis (Haupt, 2021). This is crucial for safeguarding stakeholders and protecting organizations in the event of a disaster (Matias & Cardoso, 2023).

Crisis communication is a tool for safeguarding an organization's reputation and its relationship with stakeholders (Hamid et al., 2024). Reputation, an invaluable intangible asset, is the collective perception of internal and external stakeholders that distinguishes an institution and provides a competitive advantage (Khan et al., 2022; Patriche et al., 2025; Pollák & Markovič, 2022). Consequently, when an organization's reputation is threatened or damaged, they may employ image repair strategies through crisis communication to defensively counter negative perceptions (Benoit, 2018).

When an organization's reputation is at risk, image repair messages must be carefully crafted and delivered to key audiences, including the public, media, employees, and competitors (Johnson, 2018). The way a defensive message is communicated is

crucial to its success in repairing an image (Sarfo-Kantankah, 2019). Therefore, crisis communication must be well-strategized, taking into account the text of the message, the media and channels used, and the broader context of the crisis, including its nature, the event, and the participants involved (Marsen, 2020).

In addition, for communication to be effective, especially in a political crisis, improving one's image requires moving beyond rhetoric to diplomacy (Hobbs et al., 2025). In essence, the rhetoric government and political institutions employ during a crisis is always used to manage image and reputation because a nation's global standing cannot be sustained without a good image and reputation (Cevik, 2024). It must be noted that the government will always have reasons to respond to accusations and people's questions about a crisis.

Therefore, how the Oyo State administration handled its reputation following the Ibadan explosion provided a fresh viewpoint on the use of Image Repair Theory in the Nigerian setting. This study also helps to understand the uniqueness in how Nigerian political leaders repaired their image during a crisis.

Governments face numerous challenges during crises, requiring them to utilize advanced forecasting, comprehensive risk assessments, adaptable strategies, and a re-evaluation of political priorities (Parrott, 2020). As Jacobs and King (2009) observed regarding a political crisis in America, a financial crisis can trigger a political one, demonstrating that even non-political issues can escalate into political crises. Furthermore, some political leaders may even create crises from minor events to advance their own agendas (Watkins & Clevenger, 2021).

President Donald Trump's repeated claims that the 2020 presidential election was rigged created a persistent narrative that the election would only be legitimate if he won (Watkins & Clevenger, 2021). This continuous dissemination of false and misleading information led tens of millions to believe his unfounded accusations and view democratic institutions as corrupt (Watkins & Clevenger, 2021). This case exemplifies how political partisanship and the broader socio-political context can shape public relations practices and influence both the origin and management of a crisis (Galasso, 2014; Eyo, 2025).

Irrespective of the issues that lead to political crises, responses from political stakeholders are crucial, and in this regard, Park and Lee (2022) argued that political traits and characteristics are two main factors that determine how politicians respond during a crisis. However, Zahariadis et al., (2023) asserted that countries cannot respond to threats in the same way, even when they are faced with similar circumstances, because cross-national differences in crisis response are largely shaped by the interaction between policy style and political trust.

Citizens' satisfaction with political leaders increases when they perceive decision-making processes during a crisis to be adequate, collaborative, and representative of diverse opinions (Watkins & Clevenger, 2021). According to Petridou (2020), even local governments must prioritize crisis preparedness. The principles that guide municipal-level crisis management are: (a) the principle of accountability, where

the governing body responsible for an activity in peacetime remains in charge during a conflict; (b) the principle of parity, which dictates that authorities maintain their existing structure and location; and (c) the principle of proximity, which emphasizes resolving crises at the lowest possible governmental level. This illustrates that crisis readiness is a responsibility shared by every level of government.

Nigeria has experienced several crises, with the government adopting various communication strategies to address the victims. Adegbola and Okunloye (2022) examined the government's handling of two Boko Haram-related abductions: 276 schoolgirls in April 2014 and 110 in February 2018. They found that crisis communication was notably delayed in both instances, a pattern they consider typical of Nigerian political administrations. In a separate case, Adim and Ekpa (2020) investigated Dana Air's crisis response after one of its planes crashed while landing in Lagos on June 3, 2012.

Adim and Ekpa (2020) assert that organizations must act quickly during a crisis to minimize harm to stakeholders and protect their credibility and reputation. Conversely, Momoh et al. (2025) argue that solutions to Nigeria's crises require good governance and systemic change. While most crisis communication research in Nigeria has focused on Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory, this study contributes a new perspective by applying the Image Repair Theory to government communication. This theory is particularly suitable for this research as it explains the importance of communication and provides detailed strategies and tactics for reputation management (Benoit, 2021).

Against this background, this study investigated the responses of the Oyo State Government to the recent explosion that occurred in Ibadan within the ambit of all the strategies of Image Repair Theory that have been discussed. Therefore, the objective of the study was to examine the image repair strategies adopted by the Oyo State Government of Nigeria in the wake of the Ibadan explosion. What image repair strategies did the Oyo State Government adopt to respond to the crisis?

## LITERATURE REVIEW OR RESEARCH BACKGROUND

### *Image Repair Theory*

A person's or organization's image, reputation, or face is vital, according to Image Repair Theory (Benoit, 2021). Similarly, Hettiarachchi Maha Hettiarachchige et al. (2025) argue that individuals and organizations often craft defensive messages to combat negative perceptions when they feel their reputation is under threat. Image Repair Theory was developed to better understand the circumstances surrounding reputation management and defensive messaging (Benoit, 2021), helping us comprehend how people and organizations may respond to accusations during a crisis.

The heart of image repair theory suggests that a threat to an individual or organization may damage image or reputation (Parham, 2021). So, when a government has been held accountable for wrongdoing, such a government's image is in danger, and

the messages created to disassociate the accused from accusations of misconduct or acknowledge the crisis are what Image Repair Theory explains (Benoit, 2006).

Based on Image Repair Theory, there are 14 types of defensive strategies categorized into five groups (Thomsen, 2023). Denial is the first strategy, where the accused claims the objectionable act never occurred or that they were not responsible for it (Benoit & Henson, 2009; Ashmawy, 2020). The second is evading responsibility, which includes tactics such as provocation, defeasibility, accident, and claiming good intentions (Benoit, 2018). The third strategy, reducing offensiveness, involves attempting to lessen the negative feelings people have toward the accused after an accusation of misconduct (Benoit, 2014).

The tactics under the third strategy are bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking the accuser, and compensation (Liu, 2007; McCoy, 2014; Benoit, 2014; Benoit, 2021; Arendt et al., 2017; Myers & Russell, 2019; Compton & Compton, 2023). The next strategy under Image Repair Theory is "corrective action," and regarding this, Benoit (2015) notes that an accused person can make an effort to correct all the things he has done wrong.

As for mortification, which is the last strategy, an accused person may simply restore his image by asking for forgiveness. Image repair theory can improve crisis situations in a variety of ways, as demonstrated by the case study in this paper. During a crisis, Image Repair Theory can assist individuals or organizations in strategically crafting a message that advances the objective of reputational management. In addition, rebuilding public trust during crises requires the use of the frameworks offered by Image Repair Theory. The government can also be guided by image repair theory in times of crisis by using proactive communication instead of reactive communication, which could damage public confidence.

## METHODOLOGY

To answer the above-stated question, a qualitative research design was used. Qualitative Content Analysis was employed for the study because it offers dependability and credibility (Sirilakshmi et al., 2024). Specifically, content analysis of the selected responses of the Oyo State government, especially on social media, will be conducted. This study focused more on social media because the incident generated a lot of conversations on different social media platforms, and the Oyo State Government also employed social media effectively to respond and reach out to different stakeholders. Oyo State's Governor's communications on Oyo State Government's official X page were analyzed to discover image repair elements that were inherent in the messages.

Communication of the Oyo State Government on their official X page was then subjected to textual analysis. Textual analysis was used to examine the messages of the Oyo State Government as they appeared on the X page (Smith, 2017). This method was used to describe, interpret, and understand the government's response to the crisis (Smith, 2017). According to Stolle (2022) the purpose of textual analysis is to describe the content, structure, and functions of messages contained in the text. The study



analyzed fifteen (15) posts of the Oyo State Governor on the state's official X page between January 17, 2024, and February 15, 2024.

Posts that addressed the occurrence were the ones that were purposefully selected for analysis; those that omitted any mention of the explosion were not considered. Therefore, textual analysis was used to make inferences, analyze, and interpret the content of the crisis communication strategies adopted by the Oyo State Government.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Blame Shifting*

First, the Governor of Oyo State visited the scene of the explosion the same night it happened, and he immediately spelled out different things that would be done to alleviate the suffering of the victims. This move showed that the Governor is diligent and responsive to the plight of the masses. This move was strategic because, in Nigeria, a leader's presence in a crisis symbolizes hope because the failure of leadership is responsible for Nigeria's image crisis (Aleyomi & Abu Bakar, 2018).

This particular action may not be classed as corrective action but as an emphatic reactive step because the purpose of the visit at the odd hour of the day is to take immediate steps to offer a quick solution to the issue at hand. It was an image repair attempt because other Nigerian political leaders might have waited till the next morning before they paid a visit to the scene of the event. However, the Oyo State Government's first attempt in responding to the crisis was to *deny* the fact that the explosion was because of the government's negligence or lack of security awareness and consciousness.

In the first press release by the Oyo State Government on their official social media page, the Governor, Engineer Seyi Makinde, attributed the explosion to explosive devices stored by illegal miners. This particular response by the Governor was not just *denying responsibilities* but also *shifting blame* to illegal miners. As stated by the Governor in the first video he released on his official X page after he visited the scene on the night the explosion occurred, the Governor noted that the:

Preliminary investigations by the security agencies revealed that illegal miners occupying one of the houses in Bodija had stored explosive devices there which caused the blast. We have always told people that when you see something say something and the authorities will do something. This is quite unfortunate, and at this stage, it is just to rescue those that are still under the rubble and give those in the hospital care. And also those whose properties have been destroyed to provide temporary accommodation for them at hotels within the city, and then in the morning, we continue with the investigation. The affected family the government will support them in the recovery effort. The

investigations are ongoing. All those found culpable for this will be brought to book (Oyostategovt, 2024).

Shifting the blame to the miners by the government is also a way to make the citizens desist from damaging the reputation of the government in the heat of the crisis. In a crisis like the explosion that occurred in Ibadan, shifting blame is a strategic way of reducing the agitation against the government and instead directing it against the perpetrator. Although some residents of Ibadan still blame the Oyo State government for not being security-conscious enough to allow such a deadly explosion to happen, many people focused their anger on the miners who carelessly stored the explosives in a residential area (Oyostategovt, 2024). In essence, blame-shifting by the Oyo State Government diverted people’s attention and anger from the government to another person.

As regards *blame shifting*, the Governor also blamed the residents of the state for not helping the government enough in terms of neighborhood security. The Governor made a statement:

*“We have always told people that when you see something, say something, and the authorities will do something”*

This statement is a tactical way of telling people that they are key stakeholders and they also have a part to play in the state’s security. Therefore, the lack of insider information from Bodija residents of Ibadan about the unscrupulous activities of illegal miners storing explosives in a residential area could be classed under *defeasibility*, and in this regard, Benoit (2015) notes that defeasibility is pleading lack of information about or control over important factors in the situation.

#### *Reducing Offensiveness through Corrective Action*

Furthermore, reducing offensiveness was another notable image repair strategy used by the Oyo State Government after the explosion. Under this approach, the government used corrective action as a way of reducing the offensiveness caused by the explosion. In the statement made by the Governor, he promised to care for the injured people who were in the hospital. He also moved those whose properties had been destroyed to some of the best hotels in Ibadan to give them temporary accommodation.

This kind of image repair strategy is very important in this kind of critical situation to alleviate the suffering of the victims. Beyond the provision of temporary accommodation, the state government adopted more *corrective actions* to repair its image by promising to thoroughly investigate the incident and punish the perpetrators.

The next day, the Governor paid another visit to the scene of the event, and a statement was released on the Government official X page, accompanied by pictures of the Governor’s visit. The post goes thus:



His Excellency also paid another visit to the scene of the Bodija incident for an on-the-spot assessment. Lastly, he visited the Oyo State Housing Corporation Bodija to meet officials who are at the Emergency Operations Centre coordinating the response to the incident (Oyostategovt, 2024a).

The second visit of the Governor to the scene and the State Housing Corporation was also a *corrective action* directed at giving hope and assurance to people and to come up with solutions to the problem. This further shows that the Governor of Oyo State was present in all the response strategies that were targeted at finding solutions to the crisis. Moreover, the Oyo State Government extended its intervention beyond the provision of temporary accommodation by facilitating a personal visit from the governor to assess the victims' well-being and by covering their hotel expenses. The image repair strategies that were used in this regard were a combination of *compensation* and *corrective action*. The statement below was released on the Oyo State Government X page.

This morning, Governor Seyi Makinde visited Carlton Gate Hotel and 77 Palms Hotel to see the victims of the Bodija incident who are being temporarily accommodated by the Oyo State Government. Governor Makinde thanked the hotel proprietors for their support and directed that a deposit be made to cover the expenses incurred (Oyostategovt, 2024a).

The Governor also organized a press briefing to give updates about the efforts of the government after the crisis had occurred. In the briefing, the Governor told the public about those who were rescued from the rubble, and he also noted that an Emergency Operation Center has been organized for those who have been physically and psychologically affected by the explosion (Oyostategovt, 2024).

The Emergency Operation Center was also saddled with the responsibility of coordinating the search effort. The Governor of Oyo State, Engineer Seyi Makinde, appealed to the public in the press briefing and urged them to remain calm because the government will provide them with the support needed. Apart from the 615, which was the number that people can call during an emergency, the Governor gave out other phone numbers that people can use to reach out to the Government and other emergency workers. He also reassured the public that justice would be adequately served on the culprits. This is another *corrective action* that the Oyo State Government used to repair its image after the explosion.

The Governor of Oyo State gave daily updates on the efforts of the government to provide support for the victims. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of January, 2024, the Governor also released another statement on the state's official X account to appreciate the effort of the rescuers, emergency workers, security agencies, and even the public for their concerted effort in putting normalcy into the situation. In addition, most of the

Governor's posts ended by reassuring the public that the Oyo State Government cares about them.

Our administration remains committed to supporting all victims of this unfortunate incident and ensuring that everyone responsible is brought to book (Oyostategovt, 2024b).

In addition, the Oyo State administration set up an emergency assistance program for the affected. To facilitate donations and support for the victims, the government set up a bank account. This is an additional form of *corrective action* designed to give victims more support. The establishment of a second emergency phone line, which victims of the crisis can use to get treatment and other resources, is another noteworthy remedial measure taken by the Oyo State government. In the Oyo State Government's image repair strategies, the Governor took his *corrective action* to another level by creating a law that guides the storage of harmful substances in Oyo State. According to the release on the Governor's official X account, the Governor said:

Earlier today, I signed Executive Order No. 001 of 2024 on the Safe Handling and Storage of Harmful Substances within Oyo State. The order specifies that anyone in possession of harmful substances in Oyo State must notify the relevant authorities within 72 hours of the effective date of this order (which is today) and subsequently, within 24 hours of coming into possession of the harmful substances. Failure to comply with the provisions of this Executive Order shall constitute an offence and shall be punishable under Chapter 38 of the Criminal Code Law, Laws of Oyo State of Nigeria, 2000, and any other applicable Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Seyiamakinde, 2024)

The overall takeaway in the crisis response and image repair strategies adopted by the Oyo State Government was that the public was well-informed about all the steps of the government. In essence, the government made use of the media very well and updated people adequately about all its moves.

### *Discussion*

The analysis in this case study shows that the Oyo State government acted quickly to address the situation after realizing its gravity and potential effects on its reputation. The government also understood the issue's political implications because, in such circumstances, rival political factions constantly attempt to fabricate a story to undermine the ruling administration.

However, the Oyo State Governor, Engineer Seyi Makinde, reacted swiftly by arriving at the explosion scene just after it occurred. While some members of the public

questioned the government's preliminary investigation into the cause of the explosion, the Governor was applauded for moving swiftly.

*@seyiamakinde* This is LEADERSHIP! He didn't even wait till Morning. He was there that same night. Went to Hospitals; Proactive. Thank you Gov. Seyi Makinde, for leading from the front. Thanks for exemplifying Good Leadership. May d Soul of the departed rest in Peace, & Speedy Recovery to Injured" (Oluwamidunsin, 2024).

In contrast to how crises have traditionally been handled in Nigeria, the Governor's response appeared to be different because of the quick response and steps to address the situation. One well-known instance was the #EndSARS crisis, which required the former Nigerian President to wait more than two weeks before giving a press conference. As seen by Governor Seyi Makinde's response, the Oyo State Government's crisis response strategies were centered mostly on *reducing offensiveness, shifting blame, and corrective action*. These tactics were successful because the crisis had already inflicted harm, and people needed a plan and a message of hope that such tragedies would not happen again. Second, people require social support to provide the necessary reassurance to get them through tough circumstances.

The Oyo State Government's corrective action was also well-planned, as evidenced by the Governor's regular updates on the steps the administration was taking after the explosion. Through this, the Oyo State Government accomplished two goals: First, the public became calm and focused on the actions being taken by the administration to address the situation. In certain instances, individuals were re-sharing on social media the various initiatives the government was taking to assist the explosion victims, and this shows that the Government was able to get people's support. Second, the government's corrective action significantly decreased the blame narratives on social media. Thus, one could argue that in addition to employing the media to respond to crises, the public needs to be well-informed.

Put simply, the government is a public entity and should not be secretive about its crisis management techniques. Crisis responsibility rests on the organization and its leadership, and the more stakeholders are aware of different efforts to assist the victims of a certain incident, the more it could help safeguard the organization's reputation (Gribas et al, 2018).

However, the Oyo State Government's statement of blame-shifting was problematic, particularly because of its wrong timing. The blame-shifting failed because the public did not trust the genuineness of the result of the preliminary investigation that came barely an hour after the explosion occurred. Additionally, the public did not accept the findings of the government's investigation about what led to the explosion and the Malians whom they claimed were responsible for it.

@seyiamakinde But the explosives 🧨 that miners use shouldn't be this powerful that it was felt more than 10km away from the scene. There is more to this story. I hope the investigating team finds out more details because there is more to this. Thank God my parents who live there are safe (Bigtreypoints, 2024)

@seyiamakinde Illegal miners? Stored explosives? Hmmm...mining what precisely? Where is the mining operation? What type of explosive ordinance? Why did it randomly go off? (Vibeyrerta, 2024)

A takeaway from Oyo State Government's apology was the strategic use of *compensation* and *'presence'*. Benoit's Image Repair Theory does not have *presence* as part of its tactics but as seen in the Oyo State Government's response, the government did not just compensate the victim, the Governor and key people in the administration were present in the hospitals where victims were taken to and even in the hotels where victims were given temporary accommodation.

In essence, the Government added 'face' to its compensation effort, and this gave the victims a sense of belonging and a feeling that the government cared for them. *Presence* represents one of the strategic leadership roles during a crisis, and these stem from leaders' traits and personalities (Schaedler et al, 2022). Essentially, it is possible to theorize that in the context of crisis communication in Nigeria, the presence of a leader in a scene where a terrible incident occurred and in places where victims are taken care of could help in image repair.

Overall, the Oyo State Government, led by Governor Seyi Makinde, used an image repair and crisis management strategy that helped rebuild trust, as seen particularly by some of the reactions of people on X about the explosion. Below are some tweets that showed how some public reacted to the government's response and image repair strategies.

This is how a governor handles issues with leadership and compassion. Oyo state governor showing why he is valued across the country (Jagabanolu, 2024)

More GRACE your Excellency, this is impressive. Prompt actions spiced with quality feedbacks like this increases people's trust in the governing class. You will succeed! (LanreOLAIDE1, 2024)

Good job from the Peoples' Governor for being so responsive when necessary (Oluyemi007, 2024)

Good work, Mr. Governor! We await the outcome of the investigation to know who authorized the mining activities, which minerals were they mining, where the mine located, why using residential for explosive storage, and the integrity of intelligent & surveillance of the State? (Ibndaud, 2024)

As shown in some X posts above, the public's reactions indicated that many were content with the Oyo State government's management of the crisis, suggesting that the image repair strategies implemented effectively preserved the government's reputation and sustained public trust in the administration.

However, it is important to examine contextual differences in the application of image repair theory in crisis. Image repair theory has been used to address different crises in the world.

Studies of crisis communication offer several examples of image repair strategies in action. In response to allegations of sexism at the Cannes Film Festival, Thierry Frémaux employed strategies of denial and reducing offensiveness. Lauzen's (2016) analysis revealed he also used shifting blame, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence. Similarly, during its flight cancellation crisis in October 2021, Southwest Airlines used denial, specifically through scapegoating, and evasion of responsibility by blaming the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and bad weather (Thomsen, 2023). In a political context, President George W. Bush utilized denial, defeasibility, and transcendence to repair his image following public criticism over the failure to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and rising job losses in the U.S. (Benoit, 2006).

Thus, certain trends or variations in image repair strategies were found when the Ibadan explosion in Oyo State, Nigeria, was compared to the aforementioned international instances of individual, organizational, and governmental crisis management. The strategy of *denial* was common in the image repair strategies adopted in all the crises. However, unlike the Frémaux, Southwest Airlines, and President Bush, where denial and blame-shifting were the most commonly used strategies, the Oyo State government complemented blame-shifting with corrective action.

Even though the Oyo State government blamed the explosion on the illegal miners, they still managed the situation by acting swiftly to restore public confidence. They took victims to the hospital, paid the hospital bills, and provided them with temporary accommodation. Additionally, the governor of Oyo State visited (presence) the victims regularly, which is believed to have improved public perception of the administration during the crisis. This kind of combination of response and image repair strategy demonstrates native intelligence from the Oyo State government and localized adaptation of image repair strategies tailored to a crisis concerning public safety and governance within a communal Nigerian culture.

However, from the ethical point of view, it must be noted that blame-shifting can erode public confidence and trust in the government during crises. Many residents

of Oyo State were not happy with how the government shifted the blame to illegal miners, and at first, the strategy made the government look irresponsible. Therefore, individuals, organizations, public sector communicators, and scholars should know that while blame-shifting can be used during crises, it puts government or organizational reputation at risk because it deflects accountability and may not offer long-term image protection.

#### CONCLUSION

The study revealed different image repair strategies that were used after the explosion that rocked the city of Ibadan. Corrective action, compensation, and presence were identified as strategies that helped rebuild the confidence of the people in the Oyo State Government. The study highlights the need for prompt communication and swift action by political leaders during a crisis. In conclusion, the strategic use of media to promote the government's crisis response activities was one reason for the success of the Oyo State Government's corrective action and compensation. Furthermore, the government was remorseful, and their social media posts and media statements showed empathy in abundance. This was successful in reducing offensiveness, lowering blame narratives, and satisfying public expectations. The Oyo State Government ultimately managed the situation and preserved its reputation because they were able to garner public support through its crisis response techniques.

Theoretically, this study provides a fresh perspective on the application of image repair theory to crises in the developing countries of the world and the Global South in general, highlighting how the peculiarities of the socio-cultural and political landscape can influence how image repair strategies are employed during crisis. Practically, this study also provides insights for individuals, businesses, and governments on effectively managing crises, reputation, and image in a manner that reflects responsibility and accountability. Without neglecting the crisis context, crisis response should essentially be prompt, strategic, well-crafted, and directed towards the appropriate audience.

#### BIODATA

Adeola Obafemi Mobolaji is a doctoral student at the Brian Lamb School of Communication at Purdue University, West Lafayette, USA. His research interests include organizational communication, leadership communication, peacebuilding, and political violence prevention, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. He has collaborated with researchers who specialize in media studies, organizational communication, marketing communication, social media, and audience participation.



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