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Article

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TELEVISION COVERAGE AND CITIZEN ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE STATE OF EMERGENCY IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined television coverage of the 2025 state of emergency in Rivers State, Nigeria, and its influence on citizens' attitudes and guided by the Framing theory and Uses and Gratifications theory. Adopting a mixed-methods design, the study combined a descriptive survey of 399 residents of Rivers State, selected through multistage sampling across Port Harcourt, Obio-Akpor and Bonny. The content analysis involved 40 television reports on the emergency, drawn from Channels Television (14 reports) and Rivers State Television, RSTV (26 reports), broadcast between 18 March and 17 September 2025. Structured questionnaire data were analysed using frequency distributions, percentages and mean scores with an average mean of 2.50. Findings showed that both stations gave the emergency extensive and sustained coverage (grand mean of 2.99), and that residents were highly exposed to this coverage (grand mean of 2.98), relying on television as a primary source of information, with 47.4 percent watching television news daily. Coverage moderately shaped citizens' understanding of the crisis (grand mean of 2.80) and was generally perceived as credible (grand mean of 2.71). However, respondents felt the coverage lacked balance across competing viewpoints, and the item was rejected at 2.45 mean. The coverage also produced measurable emotional and psychological effects with a grand mean of 2.84, heightening awareness, concern and anxiety, without correspondingly building confidence in government's handling of the crisis. It also revealed that television framing emphasised on security and the restoration of order (grand mean of 2.72) and encouraged compliance with directives, but did not translate into increased political support

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for the emergency measures. Both hypotheses were accepted, confirming significant relationships between exposure and attitude, and between framing and support. The study concludes that, for Rivers State residents television functions primarily as an information and sense-making resource rather than a persuasive instrument for political consent. It recommends greater balance, transparency, and conflict-sensitivity in future crisis broadcasting.

Keywords: Television Coverage, Citizens Attitude, State of Emergency, Framing, Crisis Communication.

Introduction

Television remains one of the most influential mass communication platforms, shaping public understanding of political and social events through its combination of audio, visual and narrative elements (McQuail, 2010). Its real-time reporting capability positions it as the preferred medium for crisis coverage (Norris, 2010), while its dramatic visuals, expert commentary and live field reporting can evoke strong emotional responses that shape political attitudes (Gross & Brewer, 2007). A state of emergency is among the most consequential declarations a democratic government can make. It alters civil liberties, increases security presence and disrupts everyday routines for affected communities, making the manner in which it is communicated central to how citizens judge its legitimacy and necessity (Patterson, 2013). Rivers State, given its economic significance as a major oil-producing state and its history of socio-political tension, offers a particularly instructive context for examining this dynamic. When a state of emergency is declared, residents depend on trusted media sources, chief among them television, to interpret events, and the framing, tone and prominence of coverage can shape whether audiences perceive government intervention as protective or as an overreach (Tamuno, 2011; Entman, 1993). In a media environment where political affiliation and selective exposure influence which channels citizens trust (Stroud, 2008), understanding how coverage from a private national broadcaster and a state-owned regional broadcaster jointly shaped public attitude is of direct relevance to both media practice and crisis governance in Nigeria.

The State of Emergency in Rivers State

The state of emergency declared in Rivers State in March 2025 was the culmination of a prolonged political crisis that began shortly after the inauguration of Governor Siminalayi Fubara in 2023. A political disagreement between Fubara and his predecessor, Nyesom Wike, produced divisions within the Rivers State House of Assembly, legislative deadlock, impeachment threats and judicial interventions that raised concerns about governance and political stability (Reuters, 2025; Associated Press, 2025). The crisis deepened following the destruction of the Rivers State House of Assembly complex in December 2023, which remained so more than a year after, and a Supreme Court ruling of 28 February 2025 which found that constitutional governance in the state had effectively broken down. Rivers State's strategic position in the oil-producing Niger Delta added a security dimension, as rising incidents of pipeline vandalism were linked by security analysts to the weakened coordination that accompanied the political impasse. In response, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu declared a state of emergency on 18 March 2025 pursuant to Section 305 of the 1999 Constitution, suspending Governor Fubara, Deputy Governor Ngozi Odu and members of the House of Assembly for an initial six months, while retired Vice Admiral Ibok-Ete Ibas was appointed Sole Administrator. In his national broadcast, the President argued that the cumulative effect of political paralysis, constitutional violations and security threats

endangered both Nigeria's democratic order and its economic stability (Tinubu, Presidential Address, 2025). Emergency rule was lifted on 17 September 2025 following reported reconciliation among the key political actors, restoring Governor Fubara and the House of Assembly to office.

Profile of Channels Television

Channels Television is one of Nigeria's leading independently owned broadcast stations, established in 1995 by veteran journalist John Momoh during Nigeria's transition toward democratic governance and growing calls for press freedom. Unlike stations built around entertainment programming, Channels adopted a news-centred model anchored on accuracy, balance and ethical reporting, which helped it build credibility in a media environment often criticised for sensationalism and political interference (Oso, 2012). Headquartered in Lagos with correspondent bureaux across Nigeria and in international locations, the station operates a 24-hour news and current affairs service and has repeatedly won the Nigerian Media Merit Award for Television Station of the Year, reflecting its standing as a benchmark for professional broadcast journalism in Nigeria (Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017).

Profile of Rivers State Television (RSTV)

Rivers State Television is a state-owned station operating from Port Harcourt on UHF channel 22, established under the Rivers State Broadcasting Corporation created by Edict No. 8 of 1973 to inform, educate and promote cultural identity in the region (Sika, 2005). Commencing transmission in 1985 and upgrading its reach in 1991, RSTV's signal extends across Rivers State and into neighbouring states, and its programming is also carried on GOtv's free-to-air platform. As a public service broadcaster, RSTV's mandate extends beyond entertainment to civic engagement and the dissemination of government information, positioning it as a central channel through which the Sole Administrator's activities and messaging reached residents during the emergency period (Asemah, 2011; Ire, 2025).

Statement of the Research Problem

Despite television's centrality as a source of political information in Nigeria, empirical evidence on how citizens interpreted media coverage of the State of Emergency in Rivers State remains limited. Existing works on the crisis has examined newspaper framing (Ayara, Amadi, Dike & Njoku, 2025) and media workers' self-assessments of their own peace-journalism practice (Eguruze, Akarika & Mboho, 2025), but neither directly measures how television audiences in Rivers State understood, trusted, or emotionally responded to coverage of the emergency, nor whether such coverage translated into support for the government's intervention. This gap matters because sensational visuals, repetitive breaking news and politically inflected framing can heighten fear, anxiety or distrust among viewers even as coverage informs them (Nabi, 2003; Holman, Garfin & Silver, 2014), and because stories of political polarisation in Rivers State may intensify these effects. Therefore, to what extent did television coverage affect citizens' attitude towards the state of emergency in Rivers State?

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives were to: (i) determine the extent of television coverage of the state of emergency in Rivers State; (ii) examine the extent to which citizens were exposed to this coverage; (iii) determine the extent to which the coverage influenced citizens' attitudes toward the declaration; (iv) find out citizens' perceptions of the credibility of the television

reports; (v) find out the emotional and psychological effects of the coverage on residents; and (vi) identify the relationship between television framing and citizens' level of support for government emergency measures.

Research Questions

The following questions are pertinent for this study: (i) What was the extent of television coverage of the state of emergency in Rivers State? (ii) To what extent were citizens exposed to the coverage? (iii) To what extent did the coverage influence citizens' attitude towards the declaration? (iv) How did the citizens perceive the credibility of the reports? (v) What were the emotional and psychological effects of the coverage on residents? (vi) What is the relationship between television framing and citizens' level of support for government emergency measures?

Significance of the Study

The study is significant to government and policy makers seeking to design clearer, more transparent crisis communication strategies capable of enhancing public trust and reducing misinformation. It is significant to media practitioners, offering empirical evidence on how reporting style, framing and tone shape audiences' emotional and psychological responses, which can inform more responsible and ethical crisis reporting. For scholars and students of mass communication and political communication, the study contributes context-specific evidence from Rivers State. Finally, it is significant to the general public, since highlighting how coverage shapes attitude and emotion during emergencies promotes media literacy and more critical engagement with televised information.

Delimitations of the study

The study was delimited to two television stations, Channels Television and Rivers State Television (RSTV), and to adult regular television viewers resident in Rivers State during the period of the emergency (18 March to 17 September 2025). The findings are therefore most directly generalisable to Rivers State and could be extended cautiously to other Nigerian states with different media ecologies.

Review of Related Literature

This section situates the study within existing scholarship on television as a mass medium, citizen attitude formation, and the nature of states of emergency, before reviewing empirical work on the emotional, framing, credibility, agenda-setting and government-relations dimensions of crisis coverage, related studies on the Rivers State crisis specifically, and the two theories anchoring the study.

- i. **Television Coverage:** Television combines audio and visual elements to reach large audiences effectively, enhancing message retention and rendering complex political developments accessible to the general public (McQuail, 2010). In Nigeria, where literacy levels and access to alternative media vary widely, television remains a primary information source, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas, and its capacity for immediate, real-time dissemination positions it as the preferred medium for reporting political crises (Norris, 2010). Beyond information delivery, television functions as a socialising agent that transmits political norms and can frame government action as either legitimate or controversial (McQuail, 2010), while its persuasive power stems from its ability to combine images, sound and narrative in ways that evoke emotional attention and recall (Gross & Brewer, 2007). Nigeria's expanding broadcast networks and satellite penetration have widened television's reach (Akinfeleye, 2008), even as

- regulatory oversight by bodies such as the National Broadcasting Commission and the commercial pressures of a competitive industry can both constrain and distort crisis reporting (Umechukwu, 2004).
- ii. **Citizen Attitude:** Citizen attitude refers to the opinions, beliefs, perceptions and evaluations individuals hold regarding political issues and government action, shaped by both cognitive engagement with information and the affective, emotional responses that information generates (Lee, 2020; Ajzen, 2020). Media exposure is among the most significant influences on attitude formation in modern societies: through repeated exposure to news reports and discussion, citizens develop perceptions that shape how they evaluate political actors and interventions (Lee, 2020). In this study, citizen attitude denotes the opinions, feelings and evaluations held by Rivers State residents concerning the declaration of the state of emergency and its presentation on television, manifesting as support, opposition, trust, concern or fear regarding the measures adopted.
 - iii. **State of Emergency:** A state of emergency is a legal mechanism allowing governments to exercise extraordinary powers to address threats to national security, public order or political stability, intended in democratic contexts to be temporary and constitutionally constrained (Ferejohn & Pasquino, 2004). Because such measures typically limit civil liberties, their acceptance depends heavily on citizens' perception of necessity, proportionality and legal grounding (Gross & Ní Aoláin, 2006). Public trust in government institutions is a key determinant of attitudes toward emergency measures, and television plays a central role in shaping that trust by informing citizens of the reasons for, and expected outcomes of, an emergency declaration (Norris, 2010). Historical grievances and political affiliation further mediate how citizens in politically tense contexts such as Rivers State interpret emergency declarations (Tamuno, 2011), making responsible, contextualising coverage particularly consequential.
 - iv. **Emotional and Psychological Effects of Media Exposure:** Audiovisual media exposure carries measurable emotional and psychological consequences. Repeated exposure to threatening information can heighten perceived risk and vulnerability (Witte, 1992), and extensive coverage of traumatic or unsettling events has been linked to acute stress reactions (Holman, Garfin & Silver, 2014). At the same time, sustained exposure can also produce desensitisation, in which initial fear gives way to habituation over the course of prolonged coverage (Oliver & Woolley, 2010). Framing mediates these emotional effects: coverage emphasising security and resilience tends to reassure viewers, while coverage emphasising chaos or blame heightens anxiety (Entman, 1993), and these emotional responses interact with cognitive appraisal to shape citizens' judgements about the necessity and legitimacy of government intervention (Slovic, 2000).
 - v. **Media Framing in Television Reporting:** Framing refers to the selection and emphasis of particular aspects of an issue to promote a specific interpretation (Entman, 1993). In television, framing operates through language, visuals, source selection and story structure, and can alter audience opinion even where the underlying facts remain constant (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Frames commonly identified in crisis coverage include conflict, human interest, responsibility and security frames (Iyengar, 1991); during a state of emergency, dominant security framing tends to foreground the seriousness of the situation, while responsibility framing assigns credit or blame to political actors. Because audiences are more receptive to frames consistent with pre-existing beliefs (Druckman, 2004), framing effects are moderated by citizens' prior trust in government and in the broadcaster itself.

- vi. **Media Credibility and Public Trust:** Credibility, which incorporates accuracy, reliability and lack of bias, is central to whether televised crisis information translates into public compliance (Meyer, 1988). Audiences evaluate credibility along dimensions of accuracy, professionalism, objectivity and transparency of sourcing (McQuail, 2010; Coombs, 2015), and perceived bias or political alignment, a persistent concern in Nigeria's polarised media landscape, can erode public confidence even when factual accuracy is otherwise high (Hanitzsch et al., 2018). Because state-owned and privately owned broadcasters often occupy different positions in this credibility landscape, comparing their coverage offers useful insight into how ownership shapes both content and audience trust.
- vii. **Crisis and Emergency Communication, and Agenda-Setting:** Effective crisis communication reduces uncertainty, guides public behaviour and maintains trust between authorities and citizens (Coombs, 2015). Television's immediacy makes it a primary channel for such communication, but its effectiveness depends on the timeliness, clarity and consistency of the information conveyed (Covello, 2010). Television additionally performs an agenda-setting function: by repeatedly emphasising an issue, broadcasters increase its perceived importance to audiences, independent of whether opinions about the issue shift (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). During the Rivers State emergency, the intensity and duration of coverage across both stations plausibly ensured that governance and security issues remained highly salient in public discourse, even where coverage did not directly alter political allegiance.
- viii. **Television, Government-Media Relations and Political Legitimacy:** Government-media relations are characterised by mutual dependence: governments rely on media to disseminate information while media rely on government access for credible reporting (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). State-owned broadcasters often align coverage with official narratives, emphasising stability and government responsiveness, while privately owned broadcasters retain greater latitude for critical or investigative reporting (Folarin, 2002). This dynamic bears directly on political legitimacy: citizens' perception that government action is lawful, effective and justified is shaped by how television frames enforcement, transparency and accountability (Norris, 2010; Easton, 1965). Coverage that conveys organised, responsive governance tends to strengthen perceived legitimacy, while opaque or inconsistent coverage can erode it, a distinction directly relevant to comparing Channels Television's national vantage point with RSTV's position as an organ of the state government under emergency administration.

Review of Related Empirical Studies

Ayara, Amadi, Dike and Njoku (2025) examined how The Guardian, Punch and Vanguard covered the Rivers State political crisis between October 2023 and October 2024, finding out that Conflict/Power framing dominated Peace/Resolution framing across 312 sampled editions. Anchored on Conflict Theory and Agenda-Setting Theory, the study demonstrated newspapers' tendency to foreground elite competition. However, being confined to print media does not examine broadcast coverage or link content patterns to audience attitudes, a gap the present study addresses by focusing on television and measured citizen response. Eguruze, Akarika and Mboho (2025), surveying 320 media workers using Agenda-Setting and Peace Journalism theories, found that while some coverage of the 2025 crisis supported peacebuilding through collaboration with civil society, a substantial share, 78 percent by respondent estimate, was sensationalised rather than conflict-sensitive, reflecting structural weaknesses including limited peace-journalism training and political intimidation of

journalists. The study offers valuable insight into production-side constraints but does not explore how audiences interpreted the resulting coverage. Hanwa, Nuhu, Muhammad and Abdulkadir (2025) investigated audience perception of broadcast coverage of security agitation in Kaduna State using a descriptive survey of 364 respondents, finding generally positive perceptions of broadcast media's contribution to public safety awareness. The study is useful for establishing that Nigerian audiences broadly value security-related broadcast coverage, but it addresses security agitation rather than a formally declared state of emergency and does not link perception to specific attitudinal outcomes such as compliance or political support.

Opeyemi, Eke and Ofome (2025) examined public perceptions of President Tinubu's emergency declaration in Rivers State through qualitative interviews with communication experts, political analysts, journalists and members of the public, anchored in Situational Crisis Communication Theory. They found that government's own communication strategy was predominantly reactive, limiting public confidence and complicating efforts to counter misinformation. Because the study centres on government public relations rather than independent television coverage, and relies on expert testimony rather than direct audience measurement, it leaves open the question this study investigates: how television coverage itself, independent of government messaging, shaped citizen attitude. Collectively, these studies establish that the Rivers State crisis received substantial print, broadcast-worker and government-communication attention, and that Nigerian audiences generally value security-related broadcast coverage, but none directly measures the relationship between television content and citizen attitude toward the emergency specifically. This is the gap the present study fills.

Theoretical Framework

- i. **Framing Theory:** Introduced by Goffman (1974) and adapted to media studies by Entman (1993), Framing Theory holds that individuals interpret reality through cognitive frames, and that media select and emphasise particular aspects of events to promote a specific problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation or treatment recommendation. Episodic frames, which focus on discrete events, tend to generate stronger emotional reactions than thematic frames, which situate events within broader context (Iyengar, 1991). Thus, the framing of government and institutional actors as competent or coercive, shapes legitimacy perceptions directly (Reese, 2007). Framing Theory is directly relevant here because it explains how the same underlying facts, the declaration, administration and lifting of emergency rule, could be rendered by Channels Television and RSTV in ways that differently foregrounded security necessity, political conflict or administrative competence, with consequences for how citizens interpreted the crisis.
- ii. **Uses and Gratifications Theory:** Developed by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974), building on earlier work by Herzog in the 1940s, Uses and Gratifications Theory shifts attention from what media do to people toward what people do with media, treating audiences as active participants who select media to satisfy cognitive, affective, social-integrative, personal-integrative and tension-release needs (Ruggiero, 2000). During a crisis, several needs typically dominate, as citizens actively turn to television for updates on security measures and legal directives (Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1985). This theory accounts for the high levels of exposure recorded in this study as the product of active audience choice rather than passive media exposure, and because differing

gratifications are sought, help explain why the same coverage could simultaneously inform, reassure and unsettle different viewers.

Methodology

Research Design: The study adopted a mixed-method research design combining content analysis and a descriptive survey. This approach was chosen because the study sought to examine both the content of television coverage and citizens' attitudinal responses to it; content analysis systematically identified patterns of coverage, framing, tone and prominence, while the descriptive survey collected quantitative data on residents' perceptions and attitudes. Mixed-methods designs are considered suitable for studies integrating media content with audience response (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Population of the Study

The population comprised two groups. For content analysis, the population consisted of all news reports, bulletins, current affairs programmes and special broadcasts relating to the state of emergency aired by Channels Television and Rivers State Television (RSTV) during the six-month emergency period (18 March to 17 September 2025); based on the monitoring schedule of the two stations over this 184-day period, an estimated 368 relevant items constituted the population. For the survey, the population consisted of 4,120,000 adult residents of Rivers State aged 18 and above who are exposed to television news and eligible to form opinions on governance issues.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

For content analysis, the study adopted a census of all retrievable reports available through the stations' official digital archives, websites and social media platforms during the study period, yielding 40 usable items: 14 from Channels Television and 26 from RSTV. For the survey, sample size of 399 was determined using the Taro Yamane (1973) formula for finite populations. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed: the researcher purposively selected three urban centres, Port Harcourt, Obio-Akpor and Bonny, for their high concentration of television viewers and accessibility, then selected individual respondents within households using simple random sampling to ensure proportional representation of gender, age and socio-economic background.

Instrument for Data Collection

The main instrument was a structured questionnaire, the Television Coverage and Citizens' Attitudes Questionnaire (TCCAQ), divided into two sections: Section A collected demographic information (age, gender, education, occupation, senatorial district and frequency of watching television news), while Section B measured extent of coverage, exposure, influence on attitudes, perceived credibility, and emotional/psychological effects using items structured on a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1). The instrument was self-administered with the assistance of trained research assistants.

Validity and Reliability of the Research Instrument

The questionnaire copies were submitted to experts in Mass Communication and research methodology for critical evaluation. Their observations regarding relevance, clarity, appropriateness and comprehensiveness were incorporated into the final instrument. In Reliability of the Research Instrument a pilot study was conducted with 30 respondents from urban communities not included in the main sample. The resulting data were subjected to Cronbach's Alpha reliability testing using SPSS version 25. The analysis produced a reliability

coefficient of 0.95, indicating that the instrument demonstrated acceptable consistency, and therefore reliable.

Content Analysis Coding Procedure

Each of the 40 sampled television items was coded with the unit of analysis, covering individual news stories, bulletin items, feature reports, interviews, discussion segments or current-affairs items relating to the emergency. Coding captured identification variables (station, and type of programme: news bulletin, current affairs programme, interview, special report/documentary, or discussion programme); extent-of-coverage variables (length of story, categorised as under 2 minutes, 2–5 minutes, or over 5 minutes; and frequency of mention); prominence variables (placement within the bulletin, from lead story to end segment; and visual prominence, rated high, moderate or low); the dominant frame employed (security, political conflict, responsibility, human interest, economic consequences, peace/conflict-resolution, etc); overall tone (positive/supportive, neutral/balanced, or negative/critical); the categories of source quoted (government officials, security agencies, political party representatives, community leaders, civil society organisations, legal experts, ordinary citizens, or traditional rulers); and the story's directional stance toward the emergency measures (supportive, neutral, or critical) alongside its main substantive focus (security and law enforcement, political developments, governance issues, public reactions, economic implications, human rights concerns, etc). This coding scheme allowed the qualitative pattern, notably the contrast between Channels Television's multi-actor, chronologically structured coverage and RSTV's administrator-centred emphasis, to be traced systematically rather than impressionistically.

Method of Data Collection

The researcher and trained assistants administered the questionnaire directly to respondents, explaining the purpose of the study to ensure informed consent and assuring participants of anonymity and confidentiality. Completed questionnaires were retrieved immediately or within one week to minimise loss or incomplete responses.

Method of Data Analysis

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, frequency, percentage and mean, to summarise responses and describe exposure, perceived credibility and attitude. An average mean of 2.50 was used to determine acceptance or rejection of each item and construct, consistent with a four-point Likert scale.

Questionnaire Data Presentation and Analysis

i. Extent of Television coverage of the State of Emergency

Table 2. Extent of Television Coverage of the State of Emergency

Statement	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	Decision
Television stations provided frequent reports	145 (580)	158 (474)	61 (122)	35 (35)	3.03	Accept
News received prominent attention	139 (556)	164 (492)	58 (116)	58 (38)	3.01	Accept
Stations provided regular updates	148 (592)	155 (465)	59 (118)	37 (37)	3.04	Accept
Reports offered detailed explanations	128 (512)	149 (447)	77 (154)	45 (45)	2.90	Accept
Discussions/programmes extensively covered the issue	136 (544)	153 (459)	69 (138)	41 (41)	2.96	Accept

All five items measuring extent of coverage exceeded the average mean of 2.50 and were accepted. This pattern suggests that television prioritised frequency and prominence of coverage over depth of contextual explanation.

Table 3. Exposure to Television Coverage of the State of Emergency

Statement	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	Decision
Frequently watched relevant television programmes	141 (564)	156 (468)	64 (128)	38 (38)	3.00	Accept
Followed television updates regularly	149 (596)	151 (453)	61 (122)	38 (38)	3.03	Accept
Spent considerable time watching reports	126 (504)	163 (489)	70 (140)	40 (40)	2.94	Accept
Watched more television than usual	132 (528)	155 (465)	72 (144)	40 (40)	2.95	Accept
Television was a major source of information	144 (576)	149 (447)	65 (130)	41 (41)	2.99	Accept

Exposure was similarly high across all five items. Respondents most strongly agreed they followed television updates regularly (3.03) and relied on television as a major information source (2.99), consistent with active, need-driven media use during the crisis period.

Table 4. Influence of Television Coverage on Citizens' Attitudes

Statement	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	Decision
Coverage influenced my opinion about the state of emergency	138 (522)	156 (468)	67 (134)	38 (38)	2.99	Accept
Television information affected my perception of government's actions	134 (536)	161 (483)	65 (130)	39 (39)	2.98	Accept
Reports shaped my understanding of the reasons for the emergency	145 (580)	153 (459)	62 (124)	39 (39)	3.01	Accept
My attitude changed after watching television coverage	95 (380)	102 (306)	131 (262)	71 (71)	2.55	Accept
Coverage influenced my level of support or opposition	79 (316)	101 (303)	140 (280)	79 (79)	2.45	Reject

Four of the five items were accepted as their rate of agreement was above an average of 2.50. Television most strongly shaped respondents' understanding of the reasons for the declaration. Critically, the item asking whether coverage influenced respondents' level of support or opposition to the emergency was rejected (mean = 2.45), indicating that television shaped comprehension of events more than it shaped political allegiance.

Table 5. Perceived Credibility of Television Reports

Statement	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	Decision
Reports were accurate and reliable	121 (484)	168 (504)	69 (138)	41 (41)	2.92	Accept
Journalists reported the emergency objectively	83 (332)	112 (336)	127 (254)	77 (77)	2.50	Accept
Coverage presented balanced views on the emergency	74 (296)	105 (315)	138 (276)	82 (82)	2.43	Reject
I trust the information provided by television stations	125 (500)	162 (486)	71 (142)	41 (41)	2.93	Accept
Sources cited in reports were credible and verifiable	112 (448)	145 (435)	90 (180)	52 (52)	2.79	Accept

Four of the five items on Table 5 were accepted, being above 2.5 average mean and confirmed the credibility of television reports on the emergency. However, the claim that coverage presented balanced views across competing perspectives (mean = 2.43), was rejected.

Table 6. Emotional and Psychological Effects of Television Coverage

Statement	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	Decision
Coverage made me feel more informed about events	151 (604)	162 (486)	52 (104)	34 (34)	3.08	Accept
Reports created feelings of anxiety or fear	102 (408)	139 (417)	98 (196)	60 (60)	2.71	Accept
Coverage increased my concern about security and governance	144 (576)	154 (462)	63 (126)	38 (38)	3.01	Accept

Reports influenced my discussions with others	138 (552)	159 (477)	65 (130)	37 (37)	3.00	Accept
Coverage gave me confidence in government's ability to manage the situation	72 (288)	101 (202)	144 (288)	82 (82)	2.41	Reject

Four of the five items were accepted as shown on Table 6. This means that emotional and psychological effects on residents were above average. The item asking whether coverage gave respondents confidence in government's ability to manage the situation was rejected (mean = 2.41), the lowest mean recorded in the entire study.

Table 7. Television Framing and Support for Government Emergency Measures

Statement	SA (4)	A (3)	D (3)	SD (1)	Mean	Decision
Reports presented the emergency primarily as a security measure	149 (596)	154 (462)	58 (116)	38 (38)	3.04	Accept
Coverage emphasised government's responsibility to restore order	142 (568)	157 (471)	61 (122)	39 (39)	3.01	Accept
Reports highlighted benefits of the emergency more than drawbacks	88 (352)	104 (312)	136 (272)	71 (71)	2.52	Accept
Presentation increased my support for government actions	75 (300)	98 (294)	145 (290)	81 (81)	2.42	Reject
Framing influenced my willingness to comply with directives	91 (364)	117 (351)	126 (252)	65 (65)	2.59	Accept

Four of the five items were accepted on the table. The statement on whether the manner of presentation increased respondents' personal support for government actions was rejected (mean = 2.42). This distinguishes shaped understanding from political endorsement.

Presentation of Content Analysis Data

The content analysis traced how each station covered the emergency across its full six-month duration. Data from Channels Television and Rivers State Television (RSTV) are hereby presented and analysed.

Table 8. Sample of Channels Television Stories on the Rivers State Emergency

S/N	Story Title	Date
1	Tinubu Declares State of Emergency in Rivers, Suspends Fubara	18 Mar 2025
2	What Really Led to State of Emergency in Rivers State?	18 Mar 2025
3	Reactions Trail Fubara's Removal, State of Emergency	19 Mar 2025
4	Senate Approves Emergency Rule in Rivers	20 Mar 2025
5	National Assembly Backs Rivers Emergency Rule	Mar 2025
6	Coalition of Lecturers Backs Tinubu's State of Emergency in Rivers	24 Apr 2025
7	Stakeholders Debate as State of Emergency Remains Three Months On	20 Jun 2025
8	Tinubu Meets Fubara, Wike, Rivers Assembly Members	Jun 2025
9	Wike, Fubara Speak After Reconciliation Meeting	Jun 2025
10	Rivers People Not Happy but Waiting for End of State of Emergency	22 Jul 2025
11	Rivers LG Elections Conducted Under Emergency Administration	Aug 2025
12	Fubara, Amaewhule Resume as Tinubu Ends Emergency Rule in Rivers	17 Sep 2025
13	End of Rivers Emergency Rule a Breath of Fresh Air	17 Sep 2025
14	Tinubu Ends Emergency Rule in Rivers	17 Sep 2025

Channels Television's 14 sampled reports are presented on Table 8. The coverage opened with the declaration itself and its immediate political reactions, including legislative and stakeholder responses. The reported reconciliation efforts between Fubara and Wike, as well as the Rivers Assembly in June 2025, are covered. It closed with the restoration of democratic governance in September 2025, reflecting a broadly chronological, event-driven structure that tracked the crisis from rupture through resolution.

Table 9. Sample of RSTV Stories on the Rivers State Emergency

S/N	Story Title	Date
1	Presidential Declaration of State of Emergency in Rivers State	18 Mar 2025
2	Ibas Meets Labour, Assures of Sustained Welfare Packages to Rivers Workers	30 Apr 2025
3	Nigerian Senate Constitutes 18-Man Committee to Oversight Rivers Emergency Rule	6 May 2025
4	Ibas Declares Open 4-Day Training Workshop for Rivers Civil Servants	19 May 2025
5	Tinubu Transmits Rivers 2025 Budget of N1.481trn to National Assembly	22 May 2025
6	Administrator Calls for Stronger Prosecution of Oil Thieves	23 May 2025
7	I'll Return to Office Soon, Says Fubara	29 May 2025
8	Democracy Day: Fubara Reaffirms Commitment to Rule of Law	12 Jun 2025
9	Rivers Remains Willing Partner for Enhanced Maritime Operations – Ibas	23 Jun 2025
10	We Need Total Reconciliation to Move Forward – Fubara	28 Jun 2025
11	Ibas Advocates Tailored Socioeconomic Projects for Community Needs	29 Jul 2025
12	Ibas Pledges Support to Rural Electrification Agency	7 Aug 2025
13	Administrator Reaffirms Commitment to Nutrition Security	12 Aug 2025
14	Inclusive Dialogue Restoring Political Calm in Rivers – Ibas	14 Aug 2025
15	Ibas Approves Reconstitution of Eight Boards, Councils	14 Aug 2025
16	Courtesy Call by House of Representatives Ad-Hoc Committee	14 Aug 2025
17	Ibas Launches Flood Sensitisation Campaign	15 Aug 2025
18	"Serve Selflessly, Leave Legacies" – Ibas Charges NYSC Corps Members	20 Aug 2025
19	"Serve With Integrity, Innovation" – Ibas Tells Newly Inaugurated Boards	22 Aug 2025
20	Administrator Meets Labour, LG Administrators Ahead of Elections	29 Aug 2025
21	Ibas Monitors LG Polls, Describes It as Peaceful	30 Aug 2025
22	Ibas: Human Capital Is Our Biggest Investment	3 Sep 2025
23	My Mandate: Re-Establish State Institutions – Ibas	12 Sep 2025
24	Rivers Transition to Democratic Governance Thanksgiving Service Announced	13 Sep 2025
25	I've Planted Seeds of Love and Peace, Nurture Them – Ibas	14 Sep 2025
26	Rivers State Stabilised, Can Be a National Model of Good Governance – Ibas	17 Sep 2025

RSTV's 26 sampled items (Table 9) present a remarkably different emphasis: after an initial report on the presidential declaration, coverage concentrated overwhelmingly on the Sole Administrator's activities, welfare interventions, infrastructure commitments, board reconstitutions and appeals for reconciliation and unity, with comparatively little attention to political conflict or dissenting perspectives. This pattern is consistent with the literature's observation that state-owned broadcasters tend to align coverage with official government narratives (Folarin, 2002). This offers a plausible explanation for respondents' simultaneous trust in television's accuracy and their rejection of the claim that coverage was balanced across competing viewpoints (Table 5).

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: What was the extent of television coverage of the state of emergency in Rivers State?

Television stations were found to have reported the emergency extensively and consistently, a finding corroborated by the content analysis, tracking both stations from the initial declaration to the eventual restoration of governance. Stories sampled indicate that Channels Television reported fourteen (14) stories between the 17th of March 2025, when the emergency was declared, and 18th of September when it ended (Table 8). Similarly, Table 9 indicates that Rivers State Television (RSTV) reported twenty six (26) stories within the same period. Also in Table 2 respondents indicated very high extent of coverage by stations with all 5 statements accepted at the Weighted Mean Score (WMS) of between 2.90 and 3.04. This is consistent with the agenda-setting logic, whereby repeated media emphasis increases an issue's perceived importance to audiences (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Entman,

1993), and mirrors Ayara et al.'s (2025) finding of heavy print coverage of the same crisis. This suggests the emergency received sustained attention across Nigeria's media ecology.

Research Question 2: To what Extent were Citizens exposed to the Coverage?

Citizens' exposure to this coverage was correspondingly high as indicated in Table 3. All 5 statements were accepted with television serving as a major information source for most respondents. The statements were accepted within the Weighted Mean Score (WMS) of between 2.94 and 3.03, above the Average Mean Score of 2.50. This means that their exposure was extensive and above average. This pattern aligns with the Uses and Gratifications theory which says in part that facing political uncertainty, citizens actively sought television as a surveillance tool to satisfy information needs (Katz et al., 1974). This is also consistent with Nwabueze and Ebeze's (2013) observation that Nigerians intensify reliance on broadcast media during periods of national uncertainty.

Research Question 3: To what Extent did the Coverage influence Citizens' attitude towards the Declaration?

The most consequential finding concerns the gap between television's influence on citizens' understanding and its influence on political support. This distinction suggests that framing, as Scheufele (1999) argues, shapes how citizens think about an issue rather than dictating what position they take on it. Audiences appear to have processed televised information critically rather than adopting it wholly. Table 4 indicates that apart from the 2.45 below average mean score rejected by respondents, the other 4 statements were accepted at the WMS of between 2.55 and 3.01. This is consistent with de Vreese's (2005) account of frames as interpretive resources rather than persuasive instructions. This finding also qualifies Opeyemi, Eke and Ofome's (2025) observation that government's crisis communication was reactive and inconsistent, even as the coverage did not generate active political support.

Research Question 4: How did the citizens perceive the credibility of the report?

The credibility findings cut in two directions simultaneously. In Table 5, respondents trusted the accuracy, reliability and sourcing of coverage, yet clearly rejected the claim that the coverage presented balanced views across competing perspectives. Four (4) of the statement on perceived credibility were accepted at the WMS of between 2.50 and 2.93, while the 2.43 below average mean score was rejected, echoing Eguruze et al.'s (2025) finding that a majority of media workers themselves perceive crisis coverage as sensationalised rather than conflict-sensitive. The content analysis offers a plausible explanation: RSTV's heavy concentration on the Sole Administrator's activities and welfare messaging, set against Channels Television's more chronologically balanced, multi-actor coverage, suggests that the balance deficit respondents perceived may derive disproportionately from the state-owned station's alignment with government (Folarin, 2002), even as its factual reporting was still broadly trusted.

Research Question 5: What were the emotional and psychological effects of the coverage on residents?

The emotional findings heightened awareness and concern, and for many respondents anxiety, without a corresponding increase in confidence in government's handling of the crisis. Table 6 shows that one statement was rejected at a mean score of 2.41, while 4 were accepted at the WMS of between 2.71 and 3.08. These are consistent with Nabi's (2003) account of crisis coverage as an emotionally consequential experience distinct from its informational function, and support Holman, Garfin and Silver's (2014) broader observation

that repeated crisis exposure carries a measurable affective cost. That television succeeded in informing residents while failing to build confidence in government, suggests that Rivers State residents were able to distinguish sharply between being informed about a crisis and being reassured by it.

Research Question 6: What is the relationship between television framing and citizens' level of support for government emergency measures?

Findings on Framing indicate that coverage consistently cast the emergency as a security-driven order, restoring intervention, and that this framing shaped compliance with directives, but did not translate into increased personal support for government action (Table 7). Out of 5 statements, 5 were accepted at WMS of between 2.52 and 3.04, while rejecting 2.42 which was below the AMS of 2.50. This is consistent with the broader finding above and reinforces the conclusion that Rivers State citizens engaged with televised crisis information as an active, evaluative audience rather than as passive recipients of government-aligned messaging, a pattern the Uses and Gratifications framework anticipates (Ruggiero, 2000).

Conclusion

Channels Television and RSTV, which were used as the test case, played a substantial informational role during the State of Emergency in Rivers State. Their coverage was extensive, and audiences were highly exposed to it. It was broadly trusted for its accuracy and sourcing. However, its influence operated chiefly on citizens' understanding of events and their willingness to comply with directives rather than on their political support for the emergency measures themselves. The coverage also carried a measurable emotional cost without correspondingly building confidence in government's crisis management. These findings support the Framing Theory in showing that repeated frames shaped interpretation and compliance without dictating political allegiance, and the Uses and Gratifications Theory in showing that citizens actively sought television for surveillance purposes throughout the crisis. Both hypotheses were accepted, confirming significant relationships between exposure and attitude, and between framing and support, though the item-level evidence shows these relationships to be more modest and more mediated by citizens' independent judgement than a simple media-effects account would predict.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

- i. broadcast stations, particularly state-owned outlets such as RSTV, deliberately incorporate a wider range of sources and perspectives, including dissenting voices, to address the balance deficit identified in this study;
- ii. government communication during future emergencies be proactive and consistent rather than reactive, since improved television information alone did not build public confidence in government's handling of the crisis;
- iii. journalists covering political crises receive structured training in conflict-sensitive and trauma-aware reporting to mitigate the anxiety-inducing effects of sustained crisis coverage while preserving its informational value;
- iv. regulatory and journalism-training institutions promote regular capacity-building on crisis communication and political journalism, consistent with the structural weaknesses identified by Eguruze et al. (2025); and
- v. future research extend this audience-side inquiry to radio and social media, which increasingly mediate crisis information alongside television in Nigeria.

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