CITIZENS' PRO- AND ANTI-GOVERNMENT MEGAPHONING DURING THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWN IN NIGERIA: THE ROLES OF INVOLVEMENT AND CONSTRAINT RECOGNITION

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Abstract

The Situational Theory of Problem Solving (STOPS) has been widely applied in public relations, strategic communication, and health communication research to explain when and why people take communicative action in response to problems. However, its application in Nigeria remains limited. This study applies STOPS to examine citizens' communication behaviours during the COVID-19 lockdown, focusing on two perceptual variables of involvement recognition and constraint recognition and their influence on pro- and anti-government megaphoning, as well as the implications of these behaviours for compliance with government lockdown regulations. An online survey was conducted with 401 respondents aged 16 years and above across six states in Southwest Nigeria. Data were analysed using structural equation modelling. The results show that higher involvement recognition increased anti-government megaphoning and reduced pro-government megaphoning, while higher constraint recognition increased pro-government megaphoning and reduced anti-government megaphoning. Furthermore, pro-government megaphoning was positively associated with compliance with lockdown regulations, whereas anti-government megaphoning did not significantly predict compliance. These findings confirm the utility of STOPS in predicting communication behaviours in the Nigerian context and extend its application to crisis communication in Sub-Saharan Africa. The study highlights the importance of citizens' perceptions in shaping their communication about government actions, particularly during health emergencies. It also suggests that government communication strategies that reduce perceived constraints and encourage citizen engagement may foster greater compliance with public policies.

Keywords: COVID-19, Lockdown, Megaphoning, Situational Theory of Problem Solving, Communication Behaviours

Declaration of conflicting interests: The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Introduction

The Situational Theory of Problem Solving (STOPS) is widely used in the field of public relations, strategic communications and health communications (Chon & Park, 2021; Jeong et al., 2018; J.-N. Kim & Krishna, 2014; Krishna, 2017, 2018; Li et al., 2019; Shen et al., 2019). It was propounded by Kim and Grunig (2011) as an improvement over the situational theory of publics (theory of publics, TOP), earlier developed by Grunig (1966, 1989). While the two theories explain when and why individuals take communication action, they are distinct in three ways. One, STOPS has a broader scope of communication behaviour than TOP. While TOP explain the information acquisition behaviour of an active public (being a theory that is limited to action related to decision making), STOPS describes information acquisition, information selection and information transmission (being a theory that is concerned with generalised action related to problem solving). Two, the referent criterion, which was excluded from TOP because it did not predict information acquisition, was reintroduced in STOPS. This was due to evidence that it may predict information selection and information transmission (which were variables that were not included in TOP). Three, an additional predictive variable, situational motivation in problem solving, was introduced to STOPS. This is besides the three perceptual variables (problem recognition, constraints recognition and level of involvement) of TOP, which the theory adopts. Situational motivation in problem solving was posited by STOPS as a mediating variable between the three independent variables of STOPS and its dependent variables, communication action in problem solving. In sum, STOPS is an improvement over TOP, and over other earlier theories of publics and public opinions Dewey (1927) and Blumer

(1966).

Situational theory of problem solving (STOPS) describes two forms of relationships. One, it describes how the three perceptual variables (Problem recognition, Constraint recognition and Involvement recognition) predict situational motivation in problem solving. And two, it describes how each of the three perceptual variables directly predicts communication action in problem solving, and how they do so through a mediating variable, situational motivation in problem solving. Explanations on the four variables of STOPS and their relationships are offered in the subsequent sections.

Problem recognition

Problem recognition is one of the perceptual variables of STOPS. It occurs when an individual notices a discrepancy between what she/he expected of or in a particular situation and what she/he experienced. The more discrepancies spotted, the greater the individual's level of problem recognition. Problems, in the context of STOPS, are conceptualised as being of two types: cognitive problems (metaproblems) and perceptual problems (problems). A cognitive problem ensues when an individual identifies a discrepancy between what she/he expect of or in a particular situation and what she/he experience. A perceptual problem ensues when an individual identifies a discrepancy between what is expected and what is experienced, and she/he cannot proffer an immediate solution to the problem from preconceived general solutions to problems. Problem recognition in STOPS is concerned with perceptual problems.

Constraints recognition

Constraint recognition is another perceptual variable of STOPS. Constraint in STOPS is conceptualised as a limitation that is non-psychological (not based on ego or personality) but economic or managerial in nature. They are perceived by individuals as insurmountable external obstacles that could hinder her/him from succeeding in solving a particular problem. Adopting an earlier definition by Grunig (2003), Kim and Grunig (2011) define constraint recognition as a situation where "people perceive that there are obstacles in a situation that limit their ability to do anything about the situation"

Involvement recognition

The third perceptual variable of STOPS is involvement recognition. There are two schools of thought on the nature of involvement as a variable. One school of thought believes that it is a non-perceptual characteristic of an object. For instance, a child is connected to a mother or a teacher is connected to her students. The other school of thought, from which Kim and Grunig (2011) derived their concept of involvement recognition, believes that involvement is a perceptual variable. As Grunig (1997) posits, the level of involvement could be defined as "the extent to which people connect themselves with a situation" (p. 10). This argument sounds more logical. If involvement were to be a non-perceptual variable, then every mother would have the same level of association with all their children, and this is not usually the case.

Situational motivation

Past studies have established that individuals' motivation influences the way they seek and use information. Motivation could be situational or non-situational. Non-situational motivation includes drive for pleasure, escape, fulfilment of interpersonal goals, or a need for social interactions" (Graham, Barbato, & Perse, 1993). Situational motivation refers to specific, goal-oriented motivation to solve a particular problem. In STOPS, situational motivation is introduced as a mediating variable between the three perceptual variables and the communication action of individuals in problem solving. It is conceptualised as an individual's inquisitiveness to gain a better understanding of the problem, and defined as a state of being cognitively and emotionally ready to make efforts to solve a particular problem. They posit that an individual's level of problem recognition and involvement recognition is positively associated with his/her level of situational motivation in problem solving, while the level of an individual's constraint recognition is negatively associated with her/his level of situational motivation in problem solving.

Communication action in problem solving (CAPS)

Communication action in problem solving is the third domain of dependent variables of STOPS. They are different communicative behaviours that an individual can engage in while solving problems. They are information acquisition, information selection and information transmission. Based on the level of activeness of individuals in problem solving, each of these domains of communicative action is subdivided into two: information acquisition, which is subdivided into information seeking and information attending; information selection, which is subdivided into information forefending and information permitting; and information transmission, which is subdivided into information forwarding and information sharing. Active individuals in problem-solving have high levels of involvement in all six subdivisions, while passive individuals are generally low on all levels,

compared to them. However, passive individuals in problem solving may exhibit higher levels of information attending, permitting and sharing than they do with information seeking, forefending and forwarding """(Krishna, 2017; Li et al., 2019; Marfani et al., 2013; Mckeever et al., 2016; Shin & Han, 2016; Yan et al., 2018).

Information acquisition covers communication actions involved in gaining information to solve a problem. Information seeking is a deliberate, premeditated, conscious action taken by an individual to gain information to solve a problem, while information attending describes a situation whereby an individual stumbles on information that she/he consider useful to solve a problem. Information selection is a cognition-based activity of a problem solver. It involves the evaluation of the acquired pieces of information concerning a problem at hand with a view to discarding all or some portions of it (information forefending) and/or accepting them for use (information permitting). Information transmission covers communication actions that are connected to how an individual passes information, perceived to be useful in solving a particular problem, to other people. Passing information to other people, whether they demand the information or not, is referred to as information forwarding, while passing information to people when they demand it is referred to as information sharing """(Krishna, 2017; Li et al., 2019; Marfani et al., 2013; Mckeever et al., 2016; Shin & Han, 2016; Yan et al., 2018).

Megaphoning as a communication action of the public during the COVID–19 lockdown

Megaphoning is conceptualised as a form of public communication action in solving problems. The concept is common in day-to-day activities of people; we use a megaphone when we are involved in transmitting information to other people concerning an entity with which we have a relationship. For example, a staff member of an organisation who gets home and talks about how poorly the organisation's management is treating its staff is megaphoning. A student who gets home and talks about how their class teacher teaches beautifully is megaphoning about the school to their parents. Such a person is transmitting information about the organisation they have a relationship with, and the pieces of information being transmitted can shape how recipients of the information afterwards perceive the organisation and relate with it. Daily, a lot of megaphoning happens on social media where different organisations' stakeholders speak for or against different organisations to other individuals. What marks a communication megaphoning is the fact that the one speaking about the organisation is not officially commissioned, paid or authorised to do so; they are doing it voluntarily. This is because megaphoning is a voluntary act in response to what one believes about the entity or one's relationship with it, and it plays an important role in shaping the public's attitudes and perception "––""––"(Beach et al., 2016; Chon, 2019; J. Kim & Rhee, 2011; S. Kim et al., 2018; Lee, 2020).

During the COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria, which wreaked a lot of havoc (Contreras et al., 2025; Edwards, 2022; Elom et al., 2021; M. W. Hussain, 2020; Lanre et al., 2020; Nabin et al., 2021; Obasi & Anierobi, 2021), there was much megaphoning about the government in the neighbourhoods. While some people were speaking for the government and praising their efforts at curtailing the spread of the coronavirus, others were speaking against the government and their policies, leading to heated arguments sometimes. However, these acts have not been captured in the literature, which is the gap this study also seeks to fill, besides assessing the usefulness of the situational theory of problem solving in explaining the public's communication behaviours in Nigeria. The benefit of this study is twofold: one, it will broaden the scope of the use of STOPS in communication studies in Nigeria; and two, evidence from the study will deepen understanding about predictors of citizens' communication behaviours towards government during the COVID-19 lockdown and how their communication behaviours translate to compliance with the lockdown regulations. Knowing Nigerians' communication behaviours during the lockdown is important because such knowledge is needed for improving government citizen-oriented strategic communication planning and execution, especially during crises such as pandemics or any other disaster.

Crisis Communication studies in Africa

Africa is a continent with many crises; however, crisis communication in Africa has not enjoyed much attention that it deserves from communication scholars '(Nwogwugwu, 2018). The foci of a few literature found on the subject include the use of social media in crisis communication (Napakol et al., 2024; Ramluckan, 2016). the need for the adoption of strategic communication approach in managing crisis (Mhute et al., 2024), how institutions of higher learning managed crisis among their stakeholders (S. B. Hussain & Rawje, 2014; Muindi & Kiarie, 2021), how international corporate organisations operating in Africa managed communication with their stakeholders during crises '(Calzati, 2020), and factors than enhanced or mitigated against the success of past risk communication strategies of organisations (Bastide, 2018). All the reviewed studies focused on

communication in and of corporate organisations and not the government, which this study focused on while contributing to the literature.

Study hypotheses

This study is framed by the situational theory of problem solving. It assessed how the Nigerian public perceived the lockdown and how that influenced their communication action in solving the problem of the lockdown. Specifically, the study's main objective was to assess whether or not the levels of the public's perception of their involvement with the COVID-19 lockdown (involvement recognition) and their perception of the ease of changing the government's position on the lockdown policy (constraint recognition) influenced their communication behaviour during the lockdown. The communication behaviours explored in the study are in the domain of information transmission according to STOPS. They are pro-government communication/megaphoning and anti-government communication/ megaphoning. The study has six hypotheses, which are borne out of the expected relationship between public perception of the lockdown and their pro- and anti-government communication behaviours. Based on STOPS, it is hypothesised that the extent to which citizens and their loved ones are impacted negatively by the lockdown (which STOPS construes as high involvement recognition) will determine the way they speak in favour of the government (pro-government megaphoning) and speak against the government (anti-government megaphoning). Therefore, for the relationship between involvement recognition and megaphoning, two hypotheses were drawn, which are stated below.

H_1: Involvement recognition negatively predicted pro-government megaphoning

H_2: Involvement recognition positively predicted anti-government megaphoning

In the same vein, according to STOPS proposition, it is expected the extent to which the citizens believe that their voices or agitations (offline and online) can change the perspectives of the politicians in power on government policies to manage the COVID-19 pandemic (which STOPS construed as constraints recognition) will influence the way they speak in favour of the government or against the government. Thus, for the relationship between constraints recognition and megaphoning, two hypotheses were drawn, which are stated below.

H_3: Constraint recognition positively predicted pro-government megaphoning

H_4: Constraint recognition negatively predicted anti-government megaphoning

Lastly, the research expected that the way people speak about government policies influences the way they relate to the policies, in terms of compliance or any other support. Therefore, two hypotheses, stated below, were formulated to assess citizens' communication and actual compliance with the lockdown regulations.

H_5: Pro-government megaphoning positively predicted compliance with COVID-19 lockdown regulations

H_6: Anti-government megaphoning negatively predicted compliance with COVID-19 lockdown regulations

The methods engaged in testing the study hypotheses and the results and discussion of the results follow in subsequent sections.

Methodology

This study was an online survey conducted during the pandemic in May 2020. The study adopted an online survey method because it is considered the safest method to gather data for the study, as COVID-19 regulations were in force, which include the need for social and physical distancing. This limitation of the adopted online survey method is that only Nigerians who were digitally literate and had access to the Internet were recruited for this study. The recruited participants were 401 Nigerian youths and adults, out of whom 141 (35.2%) self-identified themselves as females and 260 (64.8%) self-identified themselves as males. The participants lived in six states in Nigeria during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown: 146 (36.4%) lived in Osun State, 104 (25.9%) lived in Oyo State, 99 (24.7%) lived in Lagos State, while 35 (8.7%), 10 (2.5%), and 7 (1.7%) lived in Ogun, Ondo, and Ekiti States respectively. All the states were in Southwest Nigeria. The majority of the participants were Christians (383; 95.5%), 16 (4.0%) were Muslims, and 2 (claimed not to have any religion). Only 10 (2.5%) of the participants had secondary/technical college/vocational college level of education; the rest (391; 97.5%) had post-secondary school education: 36 (9%) had tertiary education that is less than first degree/Higher National Diploma); 163 (40.6%) had a First Degree or Higher National Diploma); and 192 (47.9%) had a Masters or PhD degree. The students among the participants were 49 (12.2%), the retirees were 28 (7.0%), the unemployed were 21 (5.2%), the employees of private organisations were 140 (34.9%), government workers were 94 (23.4%), and those who were self-employed were 69 (17.2%). The participants between the age 16 and 24 years were 48 (12.0%), those between 25 and 34 years were 76 (19%), those between 35 and 44 years were 132 (32.9%), those between 45 and 54 years were 76 (19%), and those who were 55 years and above were 69 (17.2%).

Nearly equal volumes of the participants voted in the last elections in their states: 202 (50.4%) voted, while 199 (49.6%) did not vote. The online questionnaire for the study was designed on Google Form, and the link was shared among the social media networks of the researcher for voluntary participation. The questionnaire had an introduction which explained the study to the prospective participants and asked for their consent before they participated willingly. The data gathered for the study were analysed with SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) and the AMOS SEM (Structural Equation Modelling) package.

Measures

The study had five variables that were measured. They were involvement recognition, constraints recognition, pro-government megaphoning, anti-government megaphoning, and compliance with COVID-19 lockdown regulations. Scales used to measure the first four variables were adapted from the study of ––(Chon, 2019). The scale to measure compliance with COVID-19 regulations was developed by the researcher. To measure involvement recognition, participants were asked to respond to two statements (considered to be appropriate (Eisinga et al., 2013)) about the severity of the impact of lockdown on them: "Lockdown is affecting me seriously." And "Lockdown is affecting my loved ones seriously." To measure constraints recognition, they were also asked to respond to two statements: "The state government (where I currently reside) will consider opinions from persons like me on lockdown issues." And "If I try, opinions from persons like me on lockdown in the state where I currently reside can affect state government regulations related to lockdown." Responses to the four statements were rated on a Likert Scale: Strongly agree (5), Agree (4), I can't say (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1), with higher values indicating higher levels of involvement recognition and constraints recognition.

To measure participants' levels of pro-government and anti-government megaphoning, they were asked to respond to four questions on the frequency of their communication behaviours (megaphoning) during the lockdown. For pro-government megaphoning, they were asked to state how often they love news about government efforts during the lockdown and argue in support of them, and they were asked how often they were asked how often they expressed their opinion in support of lockdown to people and shared their reasons for supporting their state government's position on lockdown during interpersonal or group communication online or face-to-face. For anti-government megaphoning participants were asked to state how often they rejected news about government efforts during the lockdown and argue against them, and they were asked how often they expressed their opinions against lockdown to people and shared their reasons for not supporting their state government's position on lockdown during interpersonal or group communication online or face-to-face. The frequency of their engagement in both forms of megaphoning was measure on a Likert Scale ranging from Never (0) to Very often (5), with higher values indicating higher levels of megaphoning.

To measure compliance, participants responded to two statements: one, "I obey every state government lockdown regulations." And two, "I tell others to obey every state government lockdown regulations." Their response were rated on a Likert Scale: Never (0), Rarely (2), Sometimes (3), Often (4), Very often (5), with higher values indicating higher levels of compliance with COVID-19 lockdown regulations.

Measures' validity and reliability

All the scales used were confirmed to be valid and reliable for the study. The Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was used to confirm the validity of each measure, while the Cronbach Alpha values of the reliability test were used to confirm the reliability of each measure. The EFA results revealed that all the scales were valid; all items for each of the scales loaded on one component in the exploratory factor analysis results and accounted for over 70% of the variance. Similarly, all the scales had acceptable Chronbach Alpha (α) values, which confirmed that they were reliable '"(Chen et al., 2017; Ursachi et al., 2015). The α for involvement recognition was .76, the α for constraints recognition was .64, the α for pro-government megaphoning was .59, the α for anti-government megaphoning was .69, and α for compliance with COVID-19 lockdown regulations was .79.

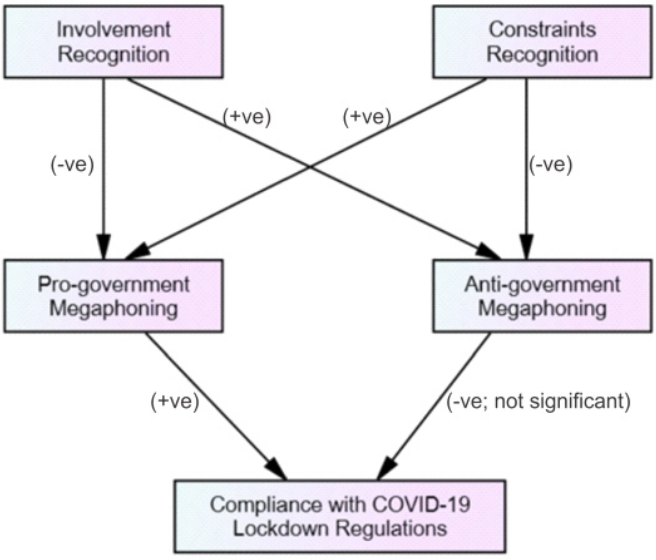
Ethical Consideration

The researchers ensured high ethical standards in the conduct of the study. First, the researcher ensured that no harm was done to any of the stakeholders involved in the study; that was what informed the choice of the online survey, which ensured the health safety of the participants and the researchers. Also, the online questionnaire had an introduction that explained the study and its purposes to the would-be participants. In addition, the introduction stated that participation is by voluntary choice and not by force or coercion of any form. Also, to ensure the safety of the respondents, the responses were anonymised and not linked to the participants or their online accounts/addresses.

Results and Discussion

The AMOS (Analysis of Moment Structures) structural equation modelling (SEM) package was engaged to test the six hypotheses of the study. SEM was adopted for the analysis because of its many benefits including its ability to analyse complex relationships among study variables (Hooper et al., 2008). Prior to testing the hypotheses, the mean and standard deviation values of the variables were first analysed in SPSS. The analysis showed that the mean for involvement recognitions was 4.2 (SD = .78); the mean for constraints recognition was 2.9 (SD = .96); the mean for pro-government megaphoning was 2.6 (SD = .88); the mean for anti-government megaphoning was 2.5 (SD = .91), and the mean for compliance with COVID-19 regulations was 4.0 (SD = .81). The Hu and Bentler criteria for good fit –(Hu & Bentler, 1999), which is one of the widely acceptable criteria for good fit, was used as the standard for the study's model. The criteria posits that for a structural equation model to have a good fit, the comparative fit index (CFI) must be less than or equal to .95, the standard root mean squared residual (SRMR) must be less than or equal to .08, or the root mean squared error approximation (RMSEA) must be less than or equal to .06, with SRMR less than or equal to .08. These criteria were met by this study's model. The study model's CFI was .976; SRMR was .028, and RMSEA was .023, which were indices of a good fit from which the hypothesised relationships among the study variables can be interpreted.

Having confirmed that the study model had a good fit, the following results were drawn to each of the six hypotheses. Hypothesis H_1, which stated that involvement recognition negatively predicted pro-government megaphoning was accepted ($\beta = -.11$; $p < .05$). Hypothesis H_2, which stated that involvement recognition positively predicted anti-government megaphoning was accepted ($\beta = .12$; $p < .05$). Hypothesis H_3, which stated that constraint recognition positively predicted pro-government megaphoning was accepted ($\beta = .14$; $p < .01$). Hypothesis H_4, which stated that constraint recognition negatively predicted anti-government megaphoning ($\beta = -.14$; $p < .01$). Hypothesis H_5, which stated that pro-government megaphoning positively predicted compliance with COVID-19 lockdown regulations was accepted ($\beta = .18$; $p < .001$). Lastly, hypothesis H_6, which stated that anti-government megaphoning negatively predicted compliance with COVID-19 lockdown regulations, was rejected ($\beta = -.20$; $p > .05$).



among the variables as hypothesised in the structural equation model in AMOS

This study contributes to knowledge in the public relations and strategic communication field, which is interested in studying the communication actions of the public ""--"---"(Chon, 2019; Chon & Park, 2021; J.-N. Kim & Krishna, 2014; Krishna, 2017, 2018). The study particularly extends the application of the Situational Theory of Problem Solving to understanding public communication behaviours in Nigeria, Sub-Saharan Africa, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Such studies do not exist currently, and they are needed to improve the scholarship and practice of government strategic communication. Specifically, the study had the main objective of assessing whether or not two of the STOPS independent variables (involvement recognition and constraints recognition) predicted two communication behaviours of Nigerians (pro-government megaphoning and anti-government megaphoning) during the pandemic. And secondarily, the study assessed whether or not pro- and anti-government megaphoning predicted citizens' compliance with COVID-19 lockdown regulations. The study has six hypotheses, which will guide the discussion.

The first and second hypotheses are about involvement recognition, which is the citizens' perception of how much their livelihood engagements were influenced by the COVID-19 lockdown declared by their state government. As the study findings showed, the higher the perceived impact of the lockdown, the higher the citizens' anti-government megaphoning and the lower the citizens' pro-government megaphoning. These

findings agree with the findings of earlier studies, which posited that involvement recognition predicts the public's communication actions when looking for solutions to their problems '(Kim & Tam, 2025; Kim & Krishna, 2014; Kim & Grunig, 2011). In the same vein, hypotheses three and four assessed the predictive relationship of constraints recognition on the nature of citizens' megaphoning during the pandemic. Similar to findings of earlier studies on the impact of constraints recognition on communication behaviours '(Kim & Krishna, 2014; Kim & Grunig, 2011), the study findings showed that citizens who are low in constraints recognition (i.e those who felt their voices can change the government's policy and positions on lockdown) engaged more frequently in anti-government megaphoning. And lastly, the findings based on the last two hypotheses, five and six, showed that the more citizens communicated in favour of the lockdown policy, the more compliant they were in obeying the lockdown regulations.

There is one of the study's hypotheses that had a non-significant result: negative megaphoning does not predict compliance. This result, though not consistent with the literature on negative megaphoning, is not unexpected, given the context of the study. Ordinarily, one would have expected that people who talk against government policies on lockdown would not obey the lockdown regulations. However, the study did not show that they did not obey it. Instead, it showed that their talking against the policy had no relationship with whether or not they obeyed the lockdown regulations. Reasons for the non-significant finding can most most-likely be linked to the heavy presence of law enforcement agencies to ensure compliance with COVID-19 lockdown regulations. This finding might perhaps suggest that, in the Nigerian context, one cannot assume that people will not comply with government policies/regulations because they were loud in speaking against them.

In summary, there are three main deductions from the study findings, based on the focus of the study. One, overall, the study findings showed that STOPS is useful in understanding Nigerians' communication behaviours (megaphoning) during the pandemic: both involvement recognition and constraints recognition predicted expected publics' communication behaviours, as posited by the theory. Two, it can also be deduced that Nigerians' communication against the government during the pandemic was not just because the lockdown brought discomfort, but because they wanted the government to consider their voices. And three, when citizens speak favourably about government policies, they have a tendency to obey the regulations legislated by the policies.

Conclusion

This study examined the predictive roles of involvement recognition and constraint recognition on Nigerian citizens' pro- and anti-government megaphoning during the COVID-19 lockdown, as well as the influence of megaphoning on compliance with government regulations. By applying the Situational Theory of Problem Solving (STOPS), the study provides empirical evidence that perceptual variables shape citizens' communicative behaviours in crises. Specifically, when citizens felt more affected by the lockdown (high involvement recognition), they were more likely to engage in anti-government megaphoning and less likely to speak in favour of government policies. Conversely, when citizens perceived lower constraints (i.e., that their voices could influence government decisions), they engaged more in anti-government megaphoning, while higher perceived constraints encouraged pro-government megaphoning. Importantly, pro-government megaphoning was positively associated with compliance, whereas anti-government megaphoning did not significantly predict compliance.

Theoretically, these findings extend the application of STOPS to the Sub-Saharan African context and to a global health crisis, demonstrating its relevance beyond Western settings where it has predominantly been tested. The study also refines the conceptualisation of megaphoning by distinguishing between pro- and anti-government communication, showing that citizens' oppositional voices may not always translate into non-compliance, but instead reflect demands for inclusion in decision-making.

Practically, the findings highlight the importance of government communication strategies that reduce citizens' perception of constraints. When citizens believe their voices matter, they may express criticism, but this engagement can foster legitimacy rather than erode it. Governments should therefore create participatory platforms for dialogue during crises, ensuring that both supportive and critical voices are heard and addressed. Strengthening trust through transparent communication may enhance compliance with public health regulations and reduce resistance. This study is limited by its non-probability sample, skewed toward educated respondents in Southwest Nigeria, and by relatively low reliability scores for some measures. Future research should employ more representative sampling across diverse Nigerian regions and explore megaphoning in other crisis contexts. Comparative studies across countries would further clarify cultural and political factors that shape pro- and anti-government communication

behaviours. In conclusion, this study affirms that STOPS is a useful framework for understanding citizens' communication actions in Nigeria during crises, while also underscoring the need for governments to design inclusive, citizen-centred communication strategies that recognise the value of both supportive and critical megaphoning.

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