

Media Relations and Journalists' Coverage of Akwa Ibom State Government Activities

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ABSTRACT

This study examined media relations and journalists' coverage of the activities of the Akwa Ibom State Government between 2023 and 2025. The study was anchored on Relationship Management Theory and Agenda-Setting Theory. A mixed-methods research design was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. The population comprised 792 practicing journalists and public information officers in the state, from which a sample of 219 respondents was selected. Data were collected using questionnaires and a semi-structured interview guide. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson Product Moment Correlation, and simple linear regression, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings revealed that media relations between the government and journalists are generally cordial, with frequent use of press releases, press briefings, meetings, and social media platforms (mean scores above 2.50). However, delays in information dissemination, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and restricted access to government officials were identified as major challenges. The study recommended that the Akwa Ibom State Government ensure the full implementation of the Freedom of Information Act, as this would enable journalists to reap the benefits of the state government.

Keywords: *Media Relations, Government Activities, Journalist, Coverage*

1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary political systems, the media is usually regarded as the fourth-estate of the realm. The media play multifaceted roles that extends beyond information dissemination to include, agenda-setting, and moulding of public opinion, surveillance and integration (Idiong, 2021). According to Norris (2020, p.12), "the news media in a democracy "serves a civic forum for encouraging pluralistic debate about public affairs; as a watchdog against the abuse of power; and as a mobilising agent encouraging public learning and participation in the political process." Media promotes government transparency by revealing information to the public and, in doing so, holding policymakers accountable. The effectiveness of these roles is largely dependent upon the quality of interaction between government actors and media professionals. Gaining media attention is thus important for policymakers in order to win support, because news coverage greatly impacts public perceptions of policy problems (Iyengar & Kinder, 2019).

Relationship between the government and the media constitute a vital component of any democratic government. It serves as the interface through which government institutions communicate with the public via journalistic channels. The relationship between governments and the media is reciprocal in nature. This is so because the government cannot communicate with the citizens without the media. The media acts as the gateway through which the government communicate its policies, programmes and successes to the publics (Akpan et al., 2024). In the other way round, the media also needs access to information to inform and educate its audiences/readers, so they have to stay in touch with the government sources otherwise their news pages will be filled with irrelevant stories that are not of importance to the public. Hence, maintaining positive relations is key to the workings of both government and the media. The media can help propagate government policies and at same the government can also facilitate the workings of media by providing the information subsidies which make information gathering easier for the media.

The primary motivation for any organisation seeking media attention, be it an NGO, government or corporate, is the desire to capture the attention of large and widely dispersed audiences (Akpan, 2016; Asuquo et al., 2024). In these terms, the strategic value of media coverage lies in its potential to create broad public awareness, or a generalised knowledge of organisations, policies, actions, products and services. Satisfaction with government policies is nevertheless believed to be one of the key determinants not only of electoral choices but also of public participation (Mueller, 2020). Governments in Western democracies use the Internet, public libraries, press releases, and parliamentary debates to disclose policy information. Since most citizens obtain their information on policies from the news media, however, most public information efforts are targeted directly or indirectly at the media (Mueller, 2020). Politicians and public information officials spend time and effort to influence citizen perceptions and citizen satisfaction by framing the issues for journalists (Jacobs & Shapiro, 2020; Akpan et al., 2024).

Public information provision is the key to opening the gateways to the general public. Governments 'subsidize' the news industry with all types of facilities (press rooms, press meetings, interviews, press releases, leaking of confidential information) to get their information in the press (Cook 2018). "Regular press conferences, briefings and social events provide fertile ground for stabilizing the 'working relationship', even if both groups have a critical relationship as regards their professional norms and political objectives" (Pfetsch, 2017, p.74).

Akwa Ibom State, has emerged as a focal point for development initiatives, with significant investments in infrastructure, tourism, and human capital development. The state government's efforts to communicate these achievements to its citizens and stakeholders rely heavily on media engagement. Through the Ministry of Information and Strategy, the Office of the Chief Press Secretary, and other designated spokespersons, the state government frequently disseminates statements to inform, explain, and promote its initiatives. Also, the Akwa Ibom State government actively engages with the media through organised events. For instance, Governor Umo Eno recently participated in his 2nd Anniversary Media Parley, where he addressed various state matters and interacted directly with journalists. Furthermore, the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) Akwa Ibom State Council regularly hosts conferences and events, such as yearly Press Week and Freedom of Information Day celebration, which featured government officials as guest's speaker. These interactions underscore the commitment to maintaining a collaborative relationship between the government and the media.

Idiong (2021) argues that the relationship between the media and government in Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria at large is often adversarial. For instance, government officials have at various

times, accused journalists of biased, sensational, or politically motivated reporting, particularly when news coverage appears to challenge official narratives or highlight policy shortcomings. Conversely, media professionals in the state have expressed growing concern over what they describe as high-handed tactics employed by the government to suppress dissent and restrict press freedom. These concerns are not abstract. A prominent example is the case of Kufre Carter, a sports journalist and media personality who, in April 2020, was arrested and detained for several weeks by the administration of Governor Udom Emmanuel. His arrest followed the circulation of an audio recording in which he allegedly criticised the state government's handling of COVID-19-related health issues.

Also, coverage of government activities by the media in Akwa Ibom State lacks in-depth analysis on government programmes. For instance, Oha, et al. (2022) analysed news content from Comfort 95.1 FM, Planet 101.5 FM, and Inspiration 105.9 FM from January 2019 to June 2022. Their study found a striking lack of critical analysis in the reportage of the activities of the Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly. This study explored how the Akwa Ibom State government can enhance its media relations through optimised media relations strategies, drawing on global best practices. The research was situated within the broader discourse on public relations and governance. It recognised that effective media relations can strengthen democratic processes by fostering informed citizenry and accountability. By focusing on Akwa Ibom State, this study sought to contribute to the understanding of how subnational governments in Nigeria can leverage PR tools to achieve governance objectives.

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, the relationship between government institutions and the media has remained an important factor in shaping how the public understands governance and public affairs. Ideally, effective media relations should promote openness, timely access to information, and balanced reporting of government activities. However, this does not always appear to be the case in practice.

In Akwa Ibom State, there have been growing concerns about how journalists cover government activities and how the government relates with the media. In some instances, journalists complain of limited access to information, delayed responses, and lack of transparency from government officials. On the other hand, government representatives sometimes accuse the media of misrepresentation, sensationalism, or biased reporting. These tensions suggest that the relationship between both parties may not be as smooth or effective as expected. However, there is limited empirical research that clearly explains how media relations actually influence journalists' coverage of government activities in Akwa Ibom State. It is this gap that the study examined by investigating the nature of media relations between the Akwa Ibom State Government and journalists and how this relationship influenced the pattern and quality of media coverage.

Objectives of the Study:

This were to:

1. examine the current state of media relations between the government of Akwa Ibom State and the media;
2. identify the communication strategies employed by the Akwa Ibom State government in managing its relationship with the media;
3. identify the challenges faced by journalists in covering government activities;

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Richard (2022) examined the role of media advisers in political communication through surveys and 65 interviews across major Australian cities. The study found that advisers played a significant role in shaping government-media relations and managing public perception. Many advisers admitted withholding unfavorable information and strategically timing the release of bad news to reduce media attention. Governments were found to rely heavily on public relations tactics to counter negative publicity. The study concluded that media advisers often influence how political information reaches the public, sometimes at the expense of transparency.

VanSlyke (2022) investigated the influence of government public relations materials on newspaper content in Australia. The study found that journalists used about 51% of the information subsidies provided by government agencies, mainly when the information was considered newsworthy. Agencies that presented information objectively were more successful than those that used persuasive or “spin” tactics. Findings also showed that PR sources influenced nearly half of the news stories about government agencies. The study concluded that public relations practitioners are important agenda-setters in the news process.

Herman and Chomsky (2016) examined journalists’ dependence on government sources for news gathering. They found that media organisations often rely on government information because it is reliable, accessible, and cost-effective. This dependence creates a symbiotic relationship between the media and powerful institutions. However, the authors argued that such reliance can undermine media objectivity and independence. The study concluded that government sources can significantly shape news content and public opinion.

Alrashid (2021) explored media relations practices in Saudi governmental organisations using a survey of 280 public and media relations employees. The study assessed the importance of media competencies and strategic media relations planning. Findings revealed that qualified media professionals and structured media relations plans are essential for effective communication. Respondents emphasized the role of professional media relations in disseminating organizational information. The study concluded that strong media relations capacities enhance government communication effectiveness.

Khalid, Ahmed and Munawar (2021) examined how political and economic conditions affect media-government relations in Pakistan. Using a descriptive analytical approach, the study found that political instability and economic challenges weakened media independence. Government advertising was identified as a major source of financial influence over media organisations. The researchers observed that governments often increased efforts to influence media coverage during periods of declining public support. The study concluded that healthy media-government relations depend on stable political and economic institutions.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted Relationship Management Theory and the Agenda Setting Theory for its framework. Relationship Management Theory was propounded by Ledingham (2002) and holds that the effectiveness of public relations is measured by the quality of relationships an organisation maintains with its stakeholders. According to Ledingham (2003), organisations and their publics are interdependent and therefore require mutual trust, understanding, and cooperation. Asemah (2022), citing Grunig and Dozier (2002), explains that the theory positions public relations as a strategic management function responsible for managing relationships with key publics. The theory is particularly relevant to media relations, which Ohiagu (2016) identifies as a core public relations function. Ferguson (2022) argues that practitioners should focus more on relationship building and maintenance than on message dissemination and control. Relationship Management Theory views public relations practitioners as mediators who facilitate mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics. Ledingham

and Bruning (2003) define organisation-public relationships as interactions in which the actions of either party can affect the well-being of the other. Similarly, Broom, Casey, and Ritchey (2018) emphasize the exchange of resources and mutual benefits in such relationships. The theory is applicable to Public Information Officers (PIOs), who serve as liaisons between government agencies, journalists, and the public. Maintaining positive relationships with journalists helps ensure accurate dissemination of information and enhances organisational reputation. Ledingham and Bruning (2019) further maintain that honesty, transparency, and responsiveness are essential for strengthening media relationships and reducing antagonism between journalists and public relations practitioners.

On the other hand, the Agenda Setting Theory was propounded by McCombs and Shaw in 1972 and 1993. Its core idea is that “the news media indicate to the public what the main issues of the day are and this is reflected in what the public perceives as the main issues” (McQuail, 2010, p.512). Also, what the media repeatedly focus on – for instance, insecurity – tend to become what their audiences give added attention to. In their exposition of the theory, Baran and Davis (2016) explain that in the choice and display of news, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play important part in shaping political reality, adding that the audience does not just learn about a given issue in the media but the importance it attaches to that issue depends on the amount of information given by the media. Asemah (2020) explains that theory implies that the mass media can determine what issues are regarded as important at a particular time in a given society. He enumerated elements in the theory to include: the quantity or frequency of reporting; prominence given to the reports – through headline display, pictures and layout in newspapers, magazines, film, graphics, or timing on radio and television; the degree of conflict generated in the reports; and cumulative media-specific effects over time. The implication of this is that the media set agenda for public discuss.

Agenda-setting theory is apt for this study because it will act as a framework in understanding the roles of the media as the fourth estate of the realm. In the any society, the media have specific roles to play with an ultimate goal of attaining an egalitarian society. The media in its agenda setting role can help propagate the governments agenda thereby making it a public agenda. Through its coverage of government activities, awareness could be created and this will in turn lead to participation of citizens in government programmes.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed-method research design that combined survey and in-depth interview techniques to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The population comprised 792 participants, including registered journalists and key government communication officials in Akwa Ibom State. Using Taro Yamane’s formula, a sample size of 266 respondents was determined. Simple random sampling was employed for the survey, while purposive sampling was used to select four key informants for the interviews. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide, with questionnaires personally administered and interviews conducted face-to-face. The instruments were validated by experts and the project supervisor, while a pilot study produced a Cronbach’s Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.792, indicating acceptable reliability, as recommended by (Uford, 2017; Uford et al., 2023). Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including frequencies, percentages, mean scores, Pearson Product Moment Correlation, and Simple Linear Regression. Qualitative data were analysed thematically through coding and categorization of recurring themes. A four-point Likert scale with a criterion mean of 2.50 was used for decision-making, while hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The integration of both methods enhanced the reliability, depth, and comprehensiveness of the study findings.

4. RESULTS

In this study, 266 copies of questionnaires were distributed to respondents, 219(82.3%) were correctly filled and found useful for the study. 47(17.7%) were either not returned or incorrectly filled.

Table 1: Mean rating of responses on the perceived Government- Media Relations Practices in Akwa Ibom State

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean Score	Decision Rule
1	The state government maintains regular contact with journalists	82	96	27	14	3.12	Accepted
2	Government officials are accessible to journalists when needed	46	70	73	30	2.60	Accepted
3	Press releases are issued promptly during important events	93	74	37	15	3.11	Accepted
4	The government organises press briefings frequently	76	67	57	17	2.90	Accepted
5	Journalists receive adequate information from government sources	73	68	66	13	2.92	Accepted
6	There is mutual trust between journalists and government officials	63	96	54	6	2.98	Accepted
7	The relationship between the media and the government is cordial	84	105	30	-	3.24	Accepted

Table 1 presents respondents' ratings of government-media relations practices. All the listed items recorded mean scores above the decision benchmark and were therefore accepted.

Table 2: Mean ratings of responses on Journalists' Coverage of Government Activities

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean score	Decision rule
8	I regularly report government activities in my organization	91	83	38	7	3.17	Accepted
9	Government stories are given adequate attention in my newsroom	84	95	31	9	3.15	Accepted
10	Coverage of government activities is usually objective	86	78	26	29	3.00	Accepted
11	Reports go beyond official statements to include independent investigation	90	87	26	16	3.14	Accepted

12	Editorial decisions influence how government activities are reported	96	81	35	7	3.21	Accepted
13	Journalists maintain professional independence when covering government activities	107	81	25	6	3.31	Accepted

Table 2 presents respondents' ratings on the nature of journalists' coverage of government activities in the state. All the listed items recorded mean scores above the decision benchmark and were therefore accepted, indicating general agreement among respondents regarding the patterns of newsroom practices and reporting behaviour.

Table 3: Mean Rating of Responses on the Influence of Media Relations on journalist Coverage of Akwa Ibom State Government Activities

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean score	Decision rule
14	Good media relations improve the coverage of government activities	101	76	27	15	3.20	Accepted
15	Easy access to information leads to more balanced reporting	77	96	36	10	3.09	Accepted
16	Poor government–media relations affect objectivity of coverage	76	100	26	17	3.07	Accepted
17	Friendly relationships influence how journalists frame government stories	83	97	32	7	3.16	Accepted
18	Transparency from government enhances credibility of reports	90	85	32	12	3.15	Accepted
19	Media relations directly determine the tone of coverage	63	96	54	6	2.98	Accepted

Table 3 examined respondents' perceptions of how media relations practices influence journalists' coverage of government activities. Similar to the previous table, all the items recorded mean scores above the decision benchmark and were accepted, demonstrating consensus that government–media relations significantly influenced reportage of government activities.

Table 4: Showing the challenges faced by journalist in covering the activities of Akwa Ibom State Government

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean score	Decision rule
20	Government often withholds important information from journalists	101	76	27	15	3.20	Accepted
21	Journalists experience delays in obtaining official responses	77	96	36	10	3.09	Accepted
22	Political interference affects media independence	76	100	26	17	3.07	Accepted
23	Financial constraints affect coverage of government activities	83	97	32	7	3.16	Accepted

Table 4 presents respondents' ratings on the challenges affecting media relations and journalists' coverage of government activities in Akwa Ibom State. The results show that several constraints were identified by the respondents. Withholding of important information by government sources recorded a relatively high mean score of 3.20, indicating that many journalists experience difficulty accessing necessary information. Delay in official responses and restricted access to key officials also recorded notable mean ratings of 3.09. Political interference and external influence on media operations were equally identified as significant challenges affecting objective reportage. Furthermore, lack of adequate training and financial constraints were reported as factors limiting effective coverage of government activities.

Presentation of Data from Interviews

The interviews were conducted to complement the quantitative findings and provide deeper insight into government–media relations and information management practices within Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the interviews were designed to:

- i. examine the nature of the relationship between the state government and journalists;
- ii. assess the level of access journalists have to government information;
- iii. determine the channels used by the government to disseminate information;
- iv. evaluate the level of objectivity in media reportage of government activities; and
- v. identify the challenges and possible strategies for improving balanced and truthful reporting.

Four key informants were purposively selected based on their professional involvement in information dissemination and media practice. For the purpose of this study, the participants were assigned tags as identifiers to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The tags were labelled Y1 to Y4. Y1 is a practicing journalist with Censor Newspaper; Y2 is a broadcast editor with Passion 94.5 FM; Y3 is a Government Information Officer; and Y4 is a Senior Special Adviser on media to the governor of the state. All the respondents provided information based on their practical experience and firsthand knowledge of the state's media and communication environment.

According to the respondents, the relationship between the government and journalists can generally be described as cordial but inconsistent. Both Y1 and Y2 explained that although cooperation exists during official programmes and events, the relationship is sometimes characterised by tension and mutual suspicion. They noted that some government officials perceive journalists as overly critical, while journalists often feel excluded from important information. However, Y3 and Y4 maintained that the government recognises the media as partners in development and has made conscious efforts to improve engagement and dialogue with practitioners.

With regard to access to information, the responses revealed that journalists still experience certain difficulties. Y1 stated that accessing officials or obtaining clarifications often involves repeated calls and visits, which can delay reporting and affect deadlines. Similarly, Y2 observed that broadcast journalism is particularly affected because news production is time-sensitive and requires immediate updates. In contrast, Y3 and Y4 explained that delays are usually due to bureaucratic procedures and the need for verification before releasing official information, rather than deliberate attempts to restrict journalists. Nonetheless, both government representatives admitted that faster and more transparent communication would enhance media relations.

On the channels of information dissemination, all respondents highlighted the increasing reliance on digital platforms. Y3 and Y4 indicated that press releases and social media platforms are frequently used to circulate government information because they ensure speed and wider coverage. They explained that these platforms enable the government to reach both journalists

and the public simultaneously. However, Y2 expressed concern that overdependence on online communication limits physical access to events and reduces opportunities for broadcast journalists to obtain visuals and conduct direct interviews. Y1 similarly noted that the reduction in face-to-face interactions sometimes affects depth and clarity in reporting.

Concerning the objectivity of reportage, mixed opinions were expressed. Both Y1 and Y2 acknowledged that while many journalists strive to remain professional, some local media organisations struggle with bias due to financial constraints and political influence. They observed that certain reports tend to promote specific interests rather than present balanced perspectives, thereby undermining public trust. On their part, Y3 and Y4 emphasised that the government does not dictate editorial decisions but expects journalists to adhere to professional ethics and accuracy. They maintained that credible journalism is essential for democratic accountability.

Regarding challenges faced by both parties, the respondents identified several common issues. Journalists cited limited access to government officials, inadequate logistics, tight deadlines, and occasional pressure from political actors as obstacles to effective reporting. Government officials, on the other hand, pointed to misinformation, rumours, and the rapid spread of unverified content on social media as major difficulties in managing public communication. Y4 particularly noted that false reports often circulate before official statements are released, creating confusion among citizens.

In terms of strategies for improvement, all respondents emphasised the need for greater transparency and collaboration. Y1 and Y2 recommended regular press briefings, easier access to officials, and more inclusive engagement during government activities. Similarly, Y3 and Y4 advocated for consistent interaction, mutual trust, and professional respect between the media and government representatives. They suggested that when communication is timely and open, speculation and misinformation are reduced, leading to more balanced and accurate reporting.

Discussion of Findings

The first objective of this study was to examine the current state of media relationship between the Akwa Ibom State Government and the media. Specifically, it aimed to determine the general pattern of interaction, level of cooperation, and the overall nature of the relationship existing between government officials and journalists within the state's communication environment. The findings of this study revealed that the relationship between the Akwa Ibom State Government and journalists can generally be described as cordial. The quantitative results presented table 1 show that most of the items measuring the nature of media relations recorded mean scores above the decision benchmark on the four-point Likert scale, suggesting general agreement among respondents that government–media interactions are present in the state. Specifically, items relating to regular contact with journalists, issuance of press releases, accessibility of information officers, and organisation of press briefings all attracted favourable ratings. This indicates that the Akwa Ibom government has institutionalised certain media relations mechanisms and it constantly gets in touch with the press.

The qualitative findings provide deeper insight into this situation. Several interview participants acknowledged that government officials make efforts to engage the media through press statements, media parley sessions, and official events. One of the interviewees is a mid-level broadcast journalist in the state explained that “we relate with them because our job demands it.” This finding corroborates views on the transactional relationship that exists between the government and the media (Herman and Chomsky, 2016).

The second objective of the study was to identify the communication strategies adopted by the Akwa Ibom State Government in managing its relationship with the media. The focus was on

uncovering the specific tools, channels, and approaches used to disseminate information, engage journalists, and maintain consistent communication with news professionals across the state. The findings of this study show that the Akwa Ibom State Government adopts a combination of traditional and digital communication tools/ strategies in managing its relationship with the media. However, the dominant approach still leans more toward formal, conventional public relations practices rather than fully interactive or technology-driven engagement. Both the quantitative results and the interview evidence point to the same reality that government communication with journalists is structured and regular, but still evolving. The data indicate that the government relies primarily on structured and formal strategies such as press releases, press briefings, and organised events to disseminate information.

From the descriptive statistics presented in table 2, all the listed communication strategies recorded mean scores above the 2.50 decision benchmark on the four-point Likert scale rating. This indicated that respondents generally agreed that these strategies are actively used. In particular, the issuance of press releases emerged as one of the most frequently utilised strategies, recording one of the highest mean scores in the table. This suggests that press statements remain the government's primary means of passing information to journalists. Closely following this were regular press briefings and media conferences, which also attracted high mean ratings, showing that the government frequently engages journalists through scheduled meetings and official interactions. Similarly, items relating to regular contact with journalists and accessibility of government information officers were positively rated. These results imply that journalists do not operate in isolation but maintain continuous lines of communication with government representatives. In practical terms, the government appears to have institutionalised formal mechanisms for information dissemination, ensuring that journalists receive updates about policies, programmes, and official activities.

Interestingly, the qualitative data revealed an emerging dimension that the quantitative items did not fully capture. Some participants noted that government officials increasingly use digital platforms, especially social media, to circulate information quickly. One participant specifically mentioned that government agencies now “post updates on its Facebook page and on X to pass information faster.” Clearly of the participants who is senior government official noted that the state government has its official social media handles and at some points the top government officials make use of their personal social media handles to pass information to the public. This suggests that beyond formal releases and briefings, the Akwa Ibom State government has integrated newer communication channels to complement traditional channels. This finding reflects a gradual shift toward more technology-driven engagements with the journalist in the state.

The combination of old and new approaches demonstrates that government media relations in the state are in a transitional phase. While press releases and conferences still dominate, social media platforms are beginning to serve as supplementary tools for faster dissemination and broader reach. Thus, communication is no longer limited strictly to physical meetings or printed statements. Empirically, these findings support the work of Udouo and Amaechi (2023), who reported that public institutions in Nigeria rely heavily on press releases, media briefings, and structured information dissemination to manage media relations. Similarly, Cutlip, Center and Broom have long argued that press conferences and releases remain core instruments of media relations.

The use of press releases and social media platforms by the Akwa Ibom State Government may have been informed by the need to communicate information quickly, efficiently, and in a controlled manner to both journalists and the wider public. Press releases provide an official and documented channel through which government policies, programmes, and activities can be

clearly articulated and uniformly disseminated to multiple media outlets at the same time. This approach helps to maintain consistency of message, reduce misinterpretation, and ensure that the government's position is accurately presented. Similarly, the growing use of social media platforms may be driven by their speed, low cost, and broad reach, which allow government agencies to circulate updates instantly and engage directly with audiences beyond the limitations of traditional media. Scholars have observed that these channels enable organisations to bypass delays associated with conventional gatekeeping processes and to reach geographically dispersed publics in real time, thereby enhancing visibility and responsiveness.

However, while these strategies offer clear advantages for timely dissemination, they also carry important implications for public information. The heavy press releases may encourage one-way communication, where journalists simply reproduce official statements without sufficient interrogation or independent verification, potentially limiting depth and critical analysis in reportage.

The third objective of this study sought to investigate the challenges encountered by journalists when covering government activities in Akwa Ibom State. The findings of this study revealed that journalists in Akwa Ibom State encounter several practical challenges in the course of covering government activities in Akwa Ibom State. Although government–media relations appear cordial and communication channels are formally established, the process of gathering, verifying, and reporting government information is constrained by limitations relating to accessibility, and institutional bureaucratic policies. Both the quantitative and qualitative evidence suggest that these challenges significantly affect the depth, speed, and objectivity of reportage.

The data presented in table 3 clearly indicated that respondents agreed that multiple obstacles hinder the coverage of government activities in the state. On the four-point Likert scale, most of the items measuring challenges recorded mean scores above the 2.50 benchmark, demonstrating general consensus that these problems are real and recurring. Specifically, items relating to delayed release of information, restricted access to key government officials, inadequate responses to enquiries, and bureaucratic procedures attracted relatively high mean values. This implication here are that journalists in the state frequently experience difficulties in obtaining government information necessary for balanced reporting.

The qualitative findings strongly reinforce these statistical results for the challenges identified in the study. Some interview participants explained that while they are invited to official events, obtaining clarification after events can be frustrating. Some of the journalist interviewed noted that enquiries sometimes pass through several administrative layers before responses are received. Another mentioned that sensitive issues are avoided or unanswered. One participant remarked that “getting the full detail can take time because you have to wait for approvals,” while another explained that “sometimes you only get what they want you to know.” These statements revealed that journalists perceive the system as bureaucratic and controlled rather than fully open. This finding corroborates earlier submission by Davis (2016) who notes that political actors often practice “information management” releasing only what supports their agenda while withholding sensitive details.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study indicate that media relations play a significant role in shaping journalists' reportage of government activities in Akwa Ibom State. Although communication channels already exist between the government and the media, their effectiveness largely depends on the level of transparency, accessibility, and timeliness of information provided. Where these elements are present, journalists are better positioned to report accurately and

objectively; however, where they are lacking, the quality and credibility of coverage may be compromised.

The existence of cordial relationships alone is not sufficient to guarantee objective coverage. Rather, access to reliable information and mutual trust between both parties are necessary for journalists to perform their professional responsibilities effectively. The statistical evidence obtained from this study confirms that media relations significantly influence journalists' coverage of government activities. This finding reinforces the view that strategic communication and relationship-building are not peripheral activities but fundamental components of democratic governance and responsible journalism. In essence, strengthening media relations will not only improve government image management but will also enhance the quality, credibility, and objectivity of news reporting, thereby promoting transparency and informed public discourse. The study, therefore recommended as follows:

- i. The existing cordial relationship between the Akwa Ibom State Government and journalists should be sustained and strengthened to maintain effective communication and mutual cooperation.
- ii. While traditional communication channels remain effective, the government should deepen its use of digital and interactive platforms to improve the speed and accessibility of information dissemination.
- iii. Clear and consistent procedures should be established to reduce delays in information release and improve journalists' access to relevant officials and documents.

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