

**Internal Crisis Communication and Implications for Employees' Health: A Study  
of Mobile Telephone Network (MTN) Nigeria \$1.6 Billion Fine and Etisalat \$1.2 Billion  
Debt**

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## **Abstract**

Communication is the foundation of all other strategies used by companies to respond to a crisis situation. Majority of organizations pay less attention to internal crisis communication when in a crisis situation. This in turn can have negative health implications on the employees. This study surveyed how internal crisis communication takes place within an organization, its overall effects on employees, and its effect on employees' health. The theoretical frameworks employed were Situational Crisis Communication Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Professional Identity Theory. The research survey had 90 respondents from both Etisalat and MTN. The results revealed that internal crisis communication is significant to crisis communication, as it affects employees in several aspects of their lives; such as, job security. However, contrary to previous research, the data presented does not show that internal crisis communication have negative impact on employees' health.

Keywords: employees' health, internal crisis communication, Nigeria, organizational crisis, survey

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the last three decades, the subject of crisis, its management, and communication process has progressively become a field of curiosity to many scholars (Heath & O'Hair, 2009). Organizational crisis on the other hand (which is one of the various forms in which a crisis can unfold) has no regard for any type of company, either a private, public, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), or whatsoever category. Neither does the number of years in which an organization has been existing for, or its financial capability makes it immune to a crisis situation; in other words, an organization is subject to experiencing a crisis at any time (Laurence, 1993). In order to escape being entangled to this cage of *crisis*, and knowing the effects, stigma, and disruptions that come with facing a crisis, some companies have tried to coin words to substitute the term crisis. Words such as *emergency response* have attempted to replace crisis; unfortunately, these alternative words does not change the effects a crisis can cause (Heath & O'Hair, 2009). That is, the name used to tag the *incident* does not change the damages this incident has created or can create; a crisis remains a crisis, and how much effects it can cause remains the same regardless of how you tag it.

In clarifying what organizational crisis is, Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger (2007) state that it is usually an unforeseen and unpredictable occurrence, or occurrences in some cases, which disrupt(s) and threaten(s) the normal activities of the organization in order to fulfill their vision and mission statement. Anthonissen (2008), on the other hand, argues that some crises are predictable. However, whether an organizational crisis is unforeseen, uncontrollable, or predictable, it is important to use effective communication to all stakeholders as a significant tool to respond and protect not just the organization's image, but also to overcome the crisis situation

(Bell, 2010; Seeger, Ulmer, & Sellnow, 2003; Ulmer et al., 2007; van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2014).

Although almost unavoidable, no organization desires to experience or have to deal with all the challenges that come with a *crisis*. Due to the fact that companies do not like to encounter crisis in their environment, they do as much as they can to get rid of their crisis as quickly as possible, and this is where organizational communication comes to play the role of a saviour. Organizational communication is a very broad field among other organizational related topics; with numerous branches (most of which are understudied) (Evans, 2016). Organizational communication generally is a part of communication that is used to organize and achieve organizational goals, coordinate activities within an organization, create a structure, and carry out all forms of interactions both internally and externally (Evans, 2016). Feldner and D'Urso (2010), saw organizational communication as the totality of human relations within a company, both externally and internally - it is a medium for interrelation among all stakeholders, units, and groups connected to an organization (Cacciattolo, 2015). Furthermore, organizational communication is a fundamental platform organizations use in tackling any disruptions they may encounter; for instance a crisis (Jiang, Huang, Wu, Choy, & Lin, 2015; Mazzei, Kim, & Dell'Oro, 2012). Hence, without communication, it is impossible to overcome a crisis.

However, despite the fact that all that have been mentioned above identifies crisis communication, its great importance, and the need for it to be channeled to all company's stakeholders (which includes external and internal- employees), most companies in reality are guilty of excluding their employees as an important group to communicate during crisis (David, 2011).

In order to keep this research on the track, within its aims, and questions it seeks to answer, organizational communication will mostly be streamlined through the lens of crisis communication, internal crisis communication, and employees' health.

### **Purpose of the Study**

There are countless types of organizational crisis and the degree of damage it can cause for the organization. It can range from an employee being kidnapped, to leaked information, to plant explosion, to financial mismanagement, to natural disaster, among several others (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). Among these various types of crises companies run into, economic and cultural crisis are the most common and most devastating of these crises (Verhoeven, Tench, Zerfass, Moreno, & Verčič, 2014).

Not until recently, companies did not usually reflect upon the effect of these crises on their employees (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015). Rather, employees are expected to double their work and pretend they are not affected by these crises (Giorgi, Arcangeli, Mucci, & Cupelli, 2015). According to Han, Sung, and Kim (2018), companies are much more interested in protecting both their brand disposition and approach of relationships with stakeholders from receiving negative perception. Studies have shown that these kinds of scenarios have negative effects on employees' health.

The purpose of this study therefore is to answer questions pertaining to the importance of internal crisis communication, its general effects on employees, and crisis implications on their health. In order to answer these questions, this study sought to carry out a survey with employees who have experienced crisis situation. Specifically, the study focused on employees who were present during the crisis of MTN Nigeria in 2015 and Etisalat Nigeria in 2017.

In West Africa, Nigeria to be precise, two telecommunications companies (i.e., MTN Nigeria and Etisalat Nigeria) ran into financial crisis (in 2015 and 2017, respectively).

MTN's 2015 crisis emerged as a result of a \$5.2bn (N1.4 trillion) fine from Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC), due to their failure to abide by the regulatory order placed by NCC in 2008 (Akwaja, 2015). This crisis was considered a big hit and came as a surprise to the telecoms company, as it did not only make MTN lose 25% of its market value in 6 weeks, but also led to the loss of about 18 million subscribers (Akwaja 2015; Shapshak 2015; Realista, 2017).

Etisalat's 2017 crisis, which is quite different from that of MTN stemmed from the company collecting a loan of \$1.2 billion from 13 banks in 2013 in order to expand, upgrade, and rehabilitate their existing platform (Bello, 2017; Udo, 2017). However, due to economic recession and devaluation of the currency (Naira) in Nigeria, repaying the full loan became problematic. The crisis rapidly affected the company's stability, and within three months of being unable to repay their debts, the banks Etisalat took a loan from announced their intention of taking over the company. Also, the three investors of the company pulled out, forcing the company to also change its brand name from Etisalat to 9Mobile (Bello, 2017; Ford, 2017; Okonji, 2017; Udo, 2017).

Both companies mentioned above are Multinational Companies (MNCs); an average Multinational Company has an average of 1000 employees outside their home-based companies (Edwards, Marginson, & Ferner, 2013). The implication is that when an MNC runs into a crisis, about 1000 employees are affected in several crucial aspects of their lives (for instance their health and job security). These crucial aspects of their lives that are adversely affected due to the crisis require further findings; thus, making the research topic worthy of study (Giorgi, Arcangeli, Mucci, & Cupelli, 2015). Although, various researchers have identified how crisis communication is an important tool in affecting employees' health during crisis, (Cropley & Devereux, 2010;

Devereux, Rydstedt, & Cromptley, 2011; Dorsey, Miller, Parrott, & Thompson, 2003; Goldstein, MacDonald, & Guirguis, 2015; Jones, Flynn, & Kelloway, 1995; Modrek & Cullen, 2013; Mucci, Giorgi, Roncaioli, Perez, & Arcangeli, 2016; Sniderman, Fenton-O'Creevy, & Searle, 2016; Wu, Lee, & Lin, 2012), there is little research that has findings on both general and health implications of these two crisis situations (MTN and Etisalat) on their employees.

### **Significance of the Study**

There are several topics that are connected to organizational communication. However, crisis communication, internal crisis communication, health communication, and its effects on the employees- among several other crisis related topic, continues to be of attraction not only to academics, but also professionals in related areas, such as public relations. Research shows that the major reason for this increment in interest is because only about one-eighth of an organization's crisis is observable and tangible to the public (Heath & O'Hair, 2009).

Furthermore, crisis communication in organizations remains a topic that is worthy of in-depth research because it is such a broad aspect of business management. *The World Bank Federation of Exchanges Database* in 2016 listed over 43,000 companies in the world on their stock exchange (World Bank, n.d.); the employees of these companies continue to play a major role in their survival, especially during crisis. Hence, the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle among employees through proper internal communication cannot be overemphasised. The information provided above shows that the focus of this study is a relevant one to communication, as it is important to have a smooth running organization with effective and efficient employees.

Interestingly, the subject of crisis communication continues to remain a discipline that is yet to be fully explored by researchers; it is an extremely wide sector to break down and tackle because communication is required all through the control and recovery process of crisis (Heath

& O'Hair, 2009). Lee (2004) stated in her article that majority of crisis communication publications has covered mainly two aspects of crisis communication: how companies analyse and respond to crisis on one hand, and the characteristics of a crisis and how companies use these characteristics to respond on the other hand. In addition, she explained that most of the already existing knowledge on crisis communication stemmed from Western data, thereby excluding the pattern of crisis communication in the non-Western part of the globe.

In summary, this study is significant not just because it adds to already existing knowledge, but also because it covers a crucial aspect of organizational communication that is under researched. Also, it includes a crucial part of human existence; health. Furthermore, it appears that a lot of researches in communication field focus their sample size for survey on the Western world. On the contrary, the non-Western demography make up a significant amount of the world population; scholars need to put various geographic locations in mind when carrying out their academic work. Hence, the area of research and the target population makes this research a very rich one that is worthy of study.

Before diving fully into all that this research hopes to uncover in the next chapters, it is vital to provide an overview of what these chapters will entail to prepare minds on what to expect in the research. As already discussed in this section, chapter one provides an introductory writing to the total work, including the purpose and significance of the study. As most expected, the literature review and theoretical framework proceed after the first chapter. This section will review past literature related to the research topic under investigation, and also give all necessary information on the theories that will guide the research and research questions. The third chapter focuses on the research methodology and research design. In this chapter, the work will be focused on giving background information on the research method that is chosen, and the application of

this research methodology in order to derive findings and answers to the research questions, such as sampling, data collection, and analysis. Chapter four will concentrate on findings and discussions based on the survey that was carried out for the research; for instance, health implications of proper internal crisis communication to employees. The final chapter, which is chapter five, entails the conclusions, research summary, and recommendations that will be beneficial to future research and finally the limitations that this study experienced during the process of the entire research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This literature review presents previous scholarly contributions to the chosen area of research, taking it from the general to the specific; beginning with the definition of what crisis is all about (including the stages), organizational crisis, what crisis communication is, internal crisis communication, how an employees' health can be affected as a result of a crisis situation, the contexts, and the theoretical framework.

### **Crisis**

Various scholars in the field of crisis management have contributed largely to what crisis means by giving different definitions (Dzenan, 2017). Crisis is a powerful occurrence that affects individuals whether personally or as a group, making them feel insecure (Laurence, 1993). Crises are present in various parts of human life; it can be present in politics, economics, social issues, psychology, family affairs, and in organizations, among other platforms (Seeger et al., 2003; Ulmer et al., 2007). In fact, Maloney (1971) in defining what crisis is, traces its occurrence back to biblical time when Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden.

Before proceeding into deep scholarly definitions (at the organizational level) of what a crisis is, Laurence (1993) and Ulmer et al., (2007) clarify that not all issues can be defined as crisis. In their clarification, they differentiate between what a problem is on the one hand, and what crisis is on the other. Ulmer et al., (2007) argued that problems are bad experiences that we encounter on a daily basis, either with our jobs, friends, family members, scenarios, or even with items / equipment. Laurence (1993) takes it further by stating:

Problems can be addressed in a limited time frame without arousing public attention and without draining the human resources of an organization. By contrast, the magnitude of

crises often takes considerable time to grasp; management may need to rely not only on many segments of the organization itself, but also on outside consultants. (p. 2)

While the above definition gives us a clear difference between a problem and a crisis, Seeger et al., (2003) explain that crises have become an occurrence that is largely recognized in recent times than ever before, as it affects more people and organizations. It has also gained high recognition in media overtime, and serves as an underlying factor for human distress, disaster, and loss. In addition, it also has the great power of creating rapid, unplanned sudden change in the society (Heath & O'Hair, 2009). It is a manifested threat that has the capability of causing opprobrium and future dangers to the company that is being affected (Heath & O'Hair, 2009). On the contrary, Milburn, Schuler, and Watman (1983) stress that crises are sometimes not sudden; though, the outcomes are usually uncertain. This implies that resolutions may not be needed immediately (although all crisis requires resolution); crisis generally intensifies the pressure the organization faces. They further state that these crises can either have positive or negative long-term effects on the organization.

According to Vardarlier (2016), a crisis can either be totally or partially disruptive, but irrespective of this, it has the ability to affect the importance, reputation, and property of the company negatively; affecting negatively the perception of the company's stakeholders (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2015).

There are also different stages in which crisis takes place (David, 2011; Pangarkar, 2016). Heath and O'Hair (2009) identified Thomas Coombs stages of crisis which are: "pre-crisis, crisis response, and post-crisis" (p. 99).

a) **Pre-crisis:** this phase comprises of the decision(s) the organization make before the occurrence of the crisis; it is referred to as the “prevention and preparation stage” (Heath & O’Hair, 2009, p. 100). At this stage, the decision makers of the company do everything possible to discover and tackle risks that can transpire into crisis, even though these risks can be very challenging or almost impossible to overcome (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). Sometimes, it is even hard to tell what kind of crisis is forthcoming because an organization’s industry does not mean it will only experience certain types of crises (Sheehan & Quinn-Allan, 2015). Hence, in order for the risks not to develop into a crisis, the possibility of the risks manifesting needs to be reduced and all elements of threats have to be eradicated (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). A useful tip will be training some of the workers of the company to become communication representatives (David, 2011). Although, the crisis risks can be dealt with, it is important to note that not all crisis can be prevented; for example, natural disasters (Heath & O’Hair, 2009). Hence, it is not sufficient to be able to prevent any form of crisis, but also prepare for the crisis. The preparation process involves risk auditing, creating a crisis team, ranking the threats, training, and supplying the required facilities (Sheehan & Quinn-Allan, 2015). Preparation for the crisis does not hundred percent mean that the crisis will occur, rather it means that the company is ready to competently and swiftly respond to the crisis (Heath & O’Hair, 2009). At this stage, delegating responsibility to all members of the crisis team is important to avoid delay in eliminating the crisis. Communication to all necessary parties (e.g., through advertising) is extremely crucial in order to avoid miscommunication and leakage of private information (Heath & O’Hair, 2009; Ho, Shin, & Pang, 2017).

- b) **Crisis Response:** at this level, the company is confronted with the crisis situation, and the only possible option is to deal with the crisis through response in order to restore regular operations in the organization. In the process of responding to the crisis, it is appropriate that the information provided to the public is promptly, correctly, and constantly communicated (Heath & O'Hair, 2009; Le Roux, 2013). Quick response will help to reduce fake news to its barest minimum, secure a good consumer perception, and protect the reputation of the company (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2015; Mansor & KaderAli, 2017). At this stage, cooperation, observing the crisis, internal communication, and remaining relevant in media is very important (Sheehan & Quinn-Allan, 2015). Inclusively, disseminating truthful information will avoid error being created in the transmitted information and providing constant update is useful in eliminating contradictory information (Heath & O'Hair, 2009). However, it is not enough to be rapid, truthful, or consistent in responding to crisis; the content of what is being communicated is also exceptionally vital (Heath & O'Hair, 2009; Pangarkar, 2016). The message being circulated should aim at reducing the damage caused by the crisis and repair the company's image in all ramifications (Heath & O'Hair, 2009).
- c) **Post-crisis:** this is often referred to as the recovery and learning period. At this point, dealing with the crisis itself is no longer a priority, rather dealing with the aftermath of the crisis and reducing further harm becomes the goal (Grappi & Romani, 2015; Heath & O'Hair, 2009). The primary step to handling the crisis repercussion is for the company to carry out a follow-through process with all parties (for instance, customers and employees) associated with them. For this process to be successful, specific information has to be circulated to these groups of people at a speculated period of time (Heath & O'Hair, 2009);

this would determine the state of the company's accountability, status in the market, stability, and reliability (Coombs & Holladay, 2009; Grappi & Romani, 2015). As earlier mentioned, this is also a learning season for the management. Learning season means that the management committee should be able to identify what they should continue to do, what they need to stop doing, and what needs improvement (Heath & O'Hair, 2009). It is also extremely crucial at this stage to provide the staff of the company with communication and provide appropriate counselling, if needed, in order to ease existing tension, emotional imbalance, and create a safe work environment (David, 2011).

### **Organizational Crisis**

In order to further streamline what crisis is in an organizational setting, Han, Sung, and Kim (2018) provide a professional definition of crisis by explaining it as one or more occurrences that is caused by mistakes of those (people) attached to the organization. It can also be due to the breakdown of machineries in this present date. Although, it is usually precise and unforeseen, the intensity of its negative outcome are always huge; this in the long run limits the attainment of the company's objectives. Pearson and Mitroff (1993) identified how severe the effect(s) of crisis can be by stating:

“Survival of the whole organization is in jeopardy with a crisis. It imposes severe strain on the organization's financial, physical, and emotional structures....crises...are composed of five dimensions: high magnitude, require immediate attention, an element of surprise, the need for taking action, and are outside the organization's complete control. An incident or event must pose a threat to the organization's reputation and viability to be considered a crisis” (p. 49).

Milburn, Schuler, and Watman (1983) are of the view that organizational crisis can either be subjective or objective. Hence, they define organizational crisis in two folds; firstly as an avenue that gives the company an open floor to accomplish their objectives, and secondly as a terrifying situation that prevents, restricts, or limits the organization from achieving these goals. Regardless of the crisis being objective or subjective, the outcomes are usually unpredictable (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2015). Crisis in organizations is much more than day-to-day activities being negatively affected, it is usually an occurrence that endangers the whole existence of the company (Sheehan & Quinn-Allan, 2015).

### **Organizational Communication**

Organizational communication has continually changed and progressed from previous administrative setting to a more logical, theoretical, and broad field. In recent times, organizational communication has expanded to comprise of identity within a company, leadership, socialization, beliefs, and power among many other branches it carries (Evans, 2016).

Cacciattolo (2015) sees organizational communication as a binder of organizational survival. In addition, she states that organizational communication is an essential factor in a company; it is crucial for any company to succeed. This is because when there is proper communication in the organization, employees are able to function effectively and efficiently by carrying out the goals and objectives of the organization.

Shockley-Zalabak (2012) in defining crisis communication classify organizational communication into five different categories. The first is: organizational communication as a process. This states that communication in organizations is an ever progressive and culturally dependent process which involves several forms of interactions that constantly advance among the

employees and external stakeholder. This process involves decision making, planning, and scheme development work implementation. It is important to note that this process is also expected to take place when the organization is faced with a crisis. The second which is “organizational communication as a people” (Shockley-Zalabak, 2012, p.16) explain that organizational communication helps to create relationship among individuals in the organization; it takes place among several people who want to achieve the diverse objectives of the organization (Shockley-Zalabak, 2012). Organizational communication as messages is the third classification. This defines organizational communication as the transportation of information (both verbally and nonverbally) within an organization. With the advancement of technology, these messages can travel beyond a given location without time and space being a barrier. The fourth category identified reveal organizational communication as a meaning that involves the symbolic behaviour of individuals (Shockley-Zalabak, 2012). The interpretations of these symbols are multiple and affect every aspect of the organizational activity. Finally, the author defines organizational communication as a purpose. It is a purpose because it is intentional (sometimes unintentional), it seeks to reduce uncertainty in all areas and it is goal oriented (Shockley-Zalabak, 2012).

### **Crisis Communication**

Crisis communication is not a new strategy used by organizations in resolving crisis (David, 2011), and over the years, the topic has continually been of great interest to a lot of researchers because it is the key factor in determining how a company reacts to whatever crisis they find themselves in (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015). Crisis Communication usually takes the fundamental position in identifying, mitigating, and solving the risks attached to the crisis (Holmes, 2011).

David (2011) describes crisis communication simply as a tool that is valuable in resolving crisis in organizations. Since every organization is subject to facing crisis at one point or the other, it is pertinent for organizations to be competent and prepared to communicate to all its stakeholders when crisis occurs (Strandberg & Vigsø, 2016). It is not enough to just manage stakeholders in crisis situation, but communicating with these stakeholders is vital because it reveals how committed the company is to them (Pangarkar, 2016).

Holmes (2011) further argued that crisis communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is no longer a separate body (which mainly consisted of public relations, press, and media), but now in conjunction with other parties involved in resolving the crisis such as the staff of the company and data used as evidence. The reason for merging these bodies with crisis communication is because, it has been proven to support the company's image, reduce crisis damage, and stimulate a smooth recovery from the crisis.

According to Ulmer et al., (2007), the study of crisis communication is important because, without it, companies and its stakeholders (i.e., employees and the public) will be faced with fright, confusion, panic, and depression, leaving them with no clue as to what to do when faced with crisis; this in return questions credibility of the company's existence (Omilion-Hodges & McClain, 2016). On the other hand, Laurence (1993) identifies that communicating with all stakeholders is the first step to managing a crisis; this is done through continuous press / news release, press kits, news conference, etc. in order to keep the public informed, particularly on the steps to solving the problem.

In a more modern model, Anthonissen (2008) states that in recent times, the internet (digital communication) has become an extremely useful and valid tool for companies to use during crisis, both to communicate competently to the public and promote the image of the company

(Anthonissen, 2008; Omilion-Hodges & McClain, 2016). This can be done through the use of social media, blogs, broadcasts among other internet platforms (Lin, Spence, Sellnow, & Lachlan, 2016; Omilion-Hodges & McClain, 2016). Interestingly, crisis communication is not only important during the period of the crisis, but before, during, and even after- it is key in the lifespan of every company (David, 2011).

### **Internal Crisis Communication**

Recent research has shown that during a crisis situation, internal crisis communication should be addressed before external crisis communication, as the former can help to be the foundation of solving the problem (Mazzei, Kim, & Dell'Oro, 2012; Strandberg & Vigsø, 2016). Unfortunately, despite this, companies still focus on external communication rather than internal communication during a crisis situation (Mazzei et al., 2012; Strandberg & Vigsø, 2016).

According to Strandberg and Vigsø (2016), there is still a research gap in internal crisis communication. Internal crisis communication and communication management in the 21<sup>st</sup> century still remain a field that is under-researched, as there are many elements of it that have not been touched (Johansen, Aggerholm, & Frandsen, 2012). Employees are the “active information seeker” with the ability to protect the company’s image in the crisis period (Ravazzani, 2016, p. 76).

In defining what internal crisis communication is, Ravazzani (2016) says it is the intercommunication that occurs between the executives of an organization and the rest of the employees, either within a public or private organization. Internal crisis communication is important for managing workers’ reactions. As earlier stated, employees are the most active promoters of a company’s image (Mazzei et al., 2012); they are considered the “front-line ambassadors for the organization” (Sheehan & Quinn-Allan, 2015, p. 21). Hence, lack of proper

communication to employees in crisis is dangerous, as employees' reactions have a huge effect on the company's reputation and recovery from the crisis (Mazzei et al., 2012).

Ignoring internal crisis communication can be regarded as communication failure, because this to a large extent affects the reactions, emotions, attitudes, and mental states of the employees who are regarded as major players in ending the crisis (Ravazzani, 2016). According to Johansen et al., (2012) the way in which managers handle a crisis situation with the employees and the nature of the crisis are two key factors that can affect both the employees' confidence and perception of the company they work for. Not properly being communicated to sometimes make the employees feel disrespected, and this can further lead to private information of the company getting leaked (Sheehan & Quinn-Allan, 2015).

### **Health Implications of Crisis on Employees**

According to Milburn, Schuler, and Watman (1983), the well-being of a company's employees can be directly affected during a crisis situation. During organizations' hard times, such as crisis, companies tend to ignore stimulating a work environment that is healthy; instead, they focus on coming out of the crisis within the shortest possible period (Giorgi et al., 2015). However, due to this crisis, the work assigned to the employees in this phase may become more demanding, critical, and stressful (Wu, Lee, & Lin, 2012). In turn, this demanding and stressful environment affects the well-being and health of the employee negatively (Cropley & Devereux, 2010; Devereux, Rydstedt, & Cropley, 2011). Overall, crisis always produces individual stress on the workers (Milburn, Schuler, & Watman, 1983). Miller (2009) further explains that stress can lead to an employee experiencing burnout; burnout on the other hand, is a chronic condition that does not only affect the attitude and psychology of the employee, but also affects the organization negatively in the long run because the staff is unable to function properly.

The first reaction of employees when the company they work for gets into crisis, is that they begin to reduce their commitment to their work due to fear and doubts regarding the benefits and career advancement they can receive from the organization at this point; this implies that they begin to have job insecurity (Giorgi et al., 2015; Modrek & Cullen, 2013). According to Modrek and Cullen (2013), the job insecurity that these employees face produces worse physical and mental health results such as heart disease and blood pressure among other health related effects (Jones, Flynn, & Kelloway, 1995; Modrek & Cullen, 2013; Mucci, Giorgi, Roncaioli, Perez, & Arcangeli, 2016). Mucci et al., (2016) further discovered in their research that the mental health of employees is negatively affected during crisis, largely because of stress which is linked to increase in workload and pressure, employee layoff, and salary reduction. Some of the mental illnesses that arise from organizational financial crises include anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, and unbalanced mood (Mucci et al., 2016).

According to Giorgi et al. (2015), managers are usually reluctant to care for their employees' state of mind by properly communicating the crisis situation to them. This means that the employees are left confused, mostly with high feelings of job insecurity. Additionally, there is also a communication gap, which is a contributor to employee burnout. This is because management-employee expectations are not clearly spelled out, leading to abstruseness and role conflict (Miller, 2009). In turn, this does not only have negative consequences on the organization, but also on the health of the employees. Studies also show that crisis and recession contribute to the increase in the number of suicidal occurrences (Giorgi et al., 2015). In this period of stress, employees tend to experience a lot of emotional imbalances (Miller, 2009). According to Dorsey, Miller, Parrott, and Thompson (2003), crises that occur at workplaces continue to play a major

role in adversely stressing employees' health, due to the increase in the demand of work and productivity.

## **Context**

### **MTN Nigeria Financial Crisis in 2015**

In 2008, the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) was approached by the security agencies in Nigeria to look for ways in solving the continual increase in crime rate committed through mobile phones (Falake, 2015), such as Boko Haram terrorism and kidnapping (Cairns, 2015). After an agreement was reached between NCC and the Nigerian security agencies in 2011 to curb this challenge, NCC ordered all telecommunication companies in Nigeria to begin registration of all active Subscriber Identity Module (SIM) cards in Nigeria by collecting users identity (such as fingerprint and picture) latest by January 2012 (Cairns, 2015 & Falake, 2015), and then disconnect the unregistered subscribers from their network after the deadline had passed (Akwaja, 2015).

It was reported that the call to action was not taken seriously by these telecommunication companies at first; especially MTN, and after several warnings by NCC, a fine was placed on all four companies (about \$32,000 in total), which made the telecommunication companies serious about the law; except MTN which was still defaulting (Akwaja, 2015; Cairns, 2015; Falake, 2015). On October 26, 2015, MTN who is known as the largest telecommunication company in Nigeria, received a \$5.2bn (N1.4 trillion) fine from NCC, due to their failure to abide by the regulatory order placed by NCC (Akwaja, 2015). Akwaja (2015) further state that in the history of telecommunication infractions, the fine is the highest ever recorded, surpassing the 2015 budget of the entire country. Shapshak (2015), on the other hand reported, that the fine was over 37% of

MTN's total revenue. Six weeks after the news broke, MTN had lost 25% of its market value, serving as a huge shock to the company (Realista, 2017).

After several negotiations between MTN and NCC, the fine was reduced to \$1.7 billion which was to be paid over the period of three years. This negotiation and reduction still made no huge difference as it only increased their stock by 13% with about 18 million lost subscribers (Realista, 2017). MTN further claims that the crisis had hugely affected the company negatively, making 2015 a tough year for the company at large; not only was there loss in revenue and subscribers, but they also witnessed constraints by NCC on their new tariff plans and promotions to the market (Realista, 2017). All these created continual revenue decline and made survival for the organization as a whole very difficult (Realista, 2017).

In the MTN Group end of the year report in 2016, Phuthuma Nhleko, the executive chairman stated:

There can be little doubt that the last 18 months have been the most difficult period in MTN's 22-year history. We faced unprecedented challenges, precipitated by regulatory, macro-economic, political, and competitive forces in our two largest markets, Nigeria and South Africa...Given their impact on our performance and the risk of being left behind in a fast-moving industry, these findings necessitated a decisive and immediate response...There is still much to be done to transform the group and position it for the future, but also much to look forward to for the people and stakeholders of MTN. (p. 1)

### **Etisalat Nigeria Financial Crisis in 2017**

In 2013, Etisalat Nigeria, the fourth largest telecommunications company in Nigeria, holding about 13% of the country's telecoms revenue collected a syndicate loan of \$1.2 billion

(N377.4 billion) from 13 banks in order to expand, upgrade, and rehabilitate the existing platform (Bello, 2017; Udo, 2017 ). According to Bello (2017), after Etisalat had paid about half of the existing loan, it became almost impossible for the company to continue repaying their debt due to the depreciation in Naira, scarcity of dollars, and economic recession in Nigeria in 2016 (Ford, 2017). The loan was initially borrowed in dollars, but Etisalat Nigeria generates its revenue in Naira; this meant the dollar scarcity (cash flow) made paying back difficult for the company (Atuanya, 2017).

In a bid to solve the issue, Etisalat Nigeria requested for a loan reconstruction from its lenders who denied the request, rather threatening to take over the company if the loan was not refunded within the given timeframe (Bello, 2017). After rounds of discussion on the financial issue and attracting the intervention of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and NCC, there was still no reasonable conclusion or solution. This made the three shareholders of the company pull out of the company (Udo, 2017). The Emirates Telecommunications Group Company (Etisalat Group), United Arab Emirates was the first to pull out, transferring 45% of its stake and 25% of its preference shares to United Capital, and also gave three weeks notice for the company to stop using the name “Etisalat” as they were also withdrawing the right to use the brand name (Okonji, 2017). Mubadala Development Company, Abu Dhabi, and Emerging Markets Telecommunications Services, owned by former United Bank for Africa (UBA) Chairman, and Hakeem Bello-Osagie thereafter pulled out as well (Udo, 2017).

As a result of this, an interim Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Chief Financial Officer (CFO) was appointed to ensure the company was still functioning and a new name 9Mobile was adopted till new investors were found to buy the company (Okonji, 2017).

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)**

Situational Crisis Communication Theory was coined by Timothy Coombs; originally stemming from attribution theory, with the aim of identifying approaches suitable for countering crisis (Claeys, Cauberghe, & Vyncke, 2010; Coombs, 2007; Falake, 2015; Heath & O'Hair, 2009). In order to reduce crisis harm, SCCT as a theory also helps to plan and understand the various strategies that are useful in handling post crisis communication to different types of crisis (Grappi & Romani, 2015). According to Coombs (2007b), SCCT is the process where managers have the aim of measuring the rate of reputational threat a crisis posits. In order for this to be achieved, the crisis situation needs to be examined (Coombs, 2007a). Ham and Kim (2017) explain Coombs SCCT in simpler terms as a theory that states how organizations should react tactically to a crisis condition. SCCT provides an organization with tactics on how to respond to crisis situation(s), because the theory postulates that the company shareholders will make attribution about the fundamental cause(s) of the crisis (Heath & O'Hair, 2009). Through the understanding derived by companies on how stakeholders ascribe responsibility for the crisis, the organization's control over the crisis is strengthened (Ham & Kim, 2017).

SCCT theory also posits that the volume of reputational damage a crisis situation can cause should determine the crisis response approach from the affected company. (Claeys et al., 2010; Falake, 2015; Sheehan & Quinn-Allan, 2015). Three factors have been identified in SCCT to create probable threats to organizational reputation; these are: "initial crisis responsibility," "crisis history," and "prior relational reputation" (Coombs, 2007b, p. 166; Sisco, 2012, p. 2). SCCT states that every crisis situation can be assessed, and since this is so, the aforementioned factors enable managers to choose the suitable strategy to respond to the crisis (Sisco, 2012).

SCCT points out the fact that key factors surrounding the crisis situation affect the description and reputation that stakeholders hold about the company; and, being informed about stakeholders' response conveys post-crisis communication (Coombs, 2007b). This theory has been used mainly to examine how to match a type of crisis with the response tactics for the purpose of protecting the organization's reputation (Ham & Kim, 2017).

SCCT theory will guide the current research in understanding how MTN and Etisalat related with all stakeholders (primarily the employees) as a way of responding to the crisis. In other words, SCCT will guide this research to discover findings on how the employees were communicated to. However, this theory does not fully justify this research as it does not provide answers to how the crisis communication made by these companies affects their employees. This is because SCCT's major focus is on how an organization should handle and overcome crisis situations. Social Identity Theory is therefore used in conjunction with SCCT.

### **Social Identity Theory**

The groups that we find ourselves in or associate ourselves with (i.e., workplace / work environment) have a great hand in shaping us emotionally and psychologically (Haslam, Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009). Originally developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1986 (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Baker, 2012), Social Identity Theory (SIT) states that the social frameworks people find themselves in tend to affect their identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Haslam et al., 2009; Newton & Teo, 2014). Baker (2012) further explain it as the processes that occur between a person and their social groups. These social groups vary from age groups, to religious associations, to professional associations, nationality, political groups, among others (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Several social situations have been identified to affect how people identify themselves with these groups (Newton & Teo, 2014).

According to Ashforth and Mael (1989), SIT is useful to organizations because it has been linked with professional identification, which has several effects on employees' behaviour, effectiveness, and job satisfaction. Slade, Ribando, and Fortner (2016) connect their work with SIT by stating that an organization's culture is a strong determinant on how employees identify with the company they work for, that is, the culture in an organization affects how the employees perceive how compatible they are with their work environment- this in turn affects their productivity in the work environment.

Haslam et al., (2009) further connect how this theory can affect individuals' health by stating that when people find themselves in a group that has stability, positive trend, and good purpose, there is a higher tendency for such persons to have a stable health. In contrast, they also state that an individual's well-being is threatened when they belong to a group that is seen as disadvantaged or inferior. In Avanzi, Schuh, Fraccaroli, and van Dick (2015) research work, they identified that an individual's tie with a group has a great influence on burnout; that is identifying one's self with a workplace that is less organized and supportive will have adverse effect on the individual's health.

### **Professional Identity**

Dobrow and Higgins (2005) define professional identity as a stable pattern that defines people professionally, this pattern is built by various factors such as values, beliefs, experiences, motives, etc. Professional identity theory constitutes of the interpersonal and intrapersonal relationship an individual has with one's professional community which includes professional organization, accrediting agencies, licensing boards, etc. (Moss, Gibson, & Dollarhide, 2014). Dobrow and Higgins (2005) also explain that professional identity is a self-awareness process that shapes an individual's career over time; it is developed through exploration of "multiple selves,

relationships, or organizations” (p. 568). Caza and Creary (2016) build on explaining the construction of Professional Identity by stating that it is how individuals establish a particular view about themselves professionally. In the process of this identification, individuals are believed to be active and can negotiate to adjust to the professional environment (Caza & Creary, 2016).

SIT and professional identity will guide this research in measuring how employees’ health is affected when they find themselves in a group or organization that is battling with a crisis situation. In other words, because these theories aid the understanding of how individuals are affected by the associations or groups they fall into and thereby build their professional identity, this research will discover how the health of employees are affected when there is a crisis in the company (workplace) they identify with professionally. Due to the fact that employees are considered as active, with the ability to make meanings (or draw conclusions) from their professional environment (e.g., their experiences), the professional identity will guide this research to understand employees’ experience with the crisis, and the effects the crisis had on them (Caza & Creary, 2016).

Based on the above literature review, the following research questions are posed to help guide this research:

**Research Questions:**

- 1) To what extent did internal communication take place during MTN and Etisalat crisis?
- 2) What were the general effects of MTN 2015 and Etisalat 2017 crises on their employees?
- 3) What were the health implications of MTN 2015 and Etisalat 2017 crises on their employees?

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Research Method**

The purpose of collecting data from the sample population of this research was to provide answers to the research questions that were earlier stated (see chapter 2). To this end, a quantitative method was employed, using a descriptive online survey. Survey method is recognized as one of the important research methods used in the social science field, mainly because it is core for an efficient empirical analysis; it is realistic in terms of its practicability in this field (Kuechler, 1998).

Survey method is mostly used for the collection of required and relevant information, usually from a large set of people to be used for sampling. The sample is recruited from a particular population, while the researcher determines the set of people relevant to the research. The information collected from the chosen sample is then used to make conclusions about the larger population (Kelley, Clark, Brown, & Sitzia, 2003). However, it is important to note that the standard format in collecting the required data from the sample may vary, depending on the research goal; this may take the form of an interview or questionnaire. In the process of trying to gather as much data and information as possible in order to get the best results, it is also extremely important for data collection to be done in an ethical way; using the ethical code of conduct in the location where the survey will be conducted (Kelley et al., 2003). Although survey research method comes with some limitations such as uncertainty regarding the kind of outcome to expect from the research (Gable, 1994; Kelley et al., 2003; Wright, 2005), its findings are extremely valid, making room for credibility of research conclusions and generalizations because the data gotten are from real-world scenarios (Kelley et al., 2003).

For the current study, an online survey was conducted with both current and previous employees of MTN Nigeria and Etisalat Nigeria (e.g., those who were employees of the companies during the crisis). These employees were reached through social media platforms such as LinkedIn and WhatsApp, and the researcher's personal and professional networks. LinkedIn was useful because individuals' current and previous profession was accessible through the information on their profile (Bonometti & Tang, 2006; Sue & Ritter, 2011).

The survey aimed at measuring how communication took place between the companies' executives and the rest of the employees during the crisis, if there was proper communication during the crisis to the employees, and how the crisis situation affected the employees. As earlier stated, the questionnaire was conducted to get answers to the research questions and also foster the implications of findings for future research.

The online survey was useful in data collection so as to fill the gap of time difference, location (e.g., the distance between the researcher and the location of the sample population), financial constraints, and mobility. With technological advancement, the internet has provided researchers to conveniently use survey method in research studies without having to be physically present at the location where the data is being collected (Wright, 2005).

### **Sample Recruitment**

Participants of this study were recruited through snowball sampling technique. Snowball sampling technique is basically a form of acquiring a larger group of participants through referral from the first set of respondents who were contacted (Cohen & Arieli, 2011; Polonsky & Waller, 2015). The first set of participants were contacted both online and through social media platforms; mainly LinkedIn and WhatsApp (personal network inclusive). The major reason why this method

was used is because the researcher does not reside in the same location where the sample resides; hence some concealed population were not accessible (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). Snowball sampling was particularly effective because primary contacts were able to distribute the questionnaire to co-workers, friends, and teammates who worked in either MTN Nigeria or Etisalat Nigeria. Additionally, it created an opportunity for widespread use of the survey questions to the unreachable target population online within a short period of time. Furthermore, snowball sampling contributed to reducing the challenge most studies face in terms of finding and accessing participants in the related research (McClain & Yingling, 2015).

The survey was available for participants to complete from September 7, 2018, to October 26, 2018. From the commencement of data collection, the researcher also began to monitor the responses of the participants. The online survey platform that was used to carry out the survey was Survey Monkey (<https://www.surveymonkey.com>). Before the survey was distributed to the sample population, the research proposal passed through the Research Ethics Board (REB) of the University of Ottawa for approval. After approval, a certificate was received from REB to carry out the proposed research. As part of the rules and policies guiding REB, the respondents' information was highly protected. In order to ensure this protection was effected, a strong password was created on the Survey Monkey account, and only the researcher's personal electronic devices were used to access the account (for instance, the researcher never logged into the account with a public laptop). The survey was strictly anonymous, with no access to the Internet Protocol (IP) addresses where responses were coming from (e.g., this feature was disabled). All participants were clearly informed that their willingness to participate was totally voluntary (regardless of their relationship with the researcher), with the option of skipping questions they were not comfortable answering.

Finally, to ensure that the questionnaire was understandable and clear to the staff of Etisalat Nigeria and MTN Nigeria (without being too academic in structure), a questionnaire pretest was carried out (Mohorko & Hlebec, 2016). The sample of the questionnaire was shared with two professionals to access (one was an employee within the sample, while the other was an employee outside the sample).

In order for a participant to be eligible to participate in the survey, he or she was expected to meet the following criteria:

- Be a past or present employee of either MTN Nigeria or Etisalat Nigeria.
- Must have been an employee when the crisis took place in either MTN Nigeria or Etisalat Nigeria.
- Possess the ability to read and respond in English.
- Have access to an electronic device and internet.
- Willing to consent to participate.

During the period of time when the survey was open, the researcher received 115 responses from qualified respondents, 86 were Etisalat Nigeria employees, while 27 were MTN Nigeria employees (two respondents did not identify what company they worked for). However, only 90 respondents completed the survey which brought about 78% completion rate. Hence, only the fully completed responses were considered usable.

## **Research Instruments**

Measurement and collection of data in this quantitative research were done in a systematic and controlled way (Hagan, 2014). To achieve this, questions drafted to answer the research questions were informed and guided by earlier published articles related to the field of research.

The instrument for this survey is an online questionnaire that was organized into five sections with the primary aim of answering the research questions.

Section one was the background information section. As earlier stated, this research is totally anonymous; however, this section was created to assist the researcher to be able to allocate some information to the appropriate group and understand the pattern of information collected from the survey (for instance if the respondent A is an employee of Etisalat Nigeria or MTN Nigeria). This section was also useful in enabling categorizations of the sub-groups each respondent belonged to; for example, "are you a full-time employee or not". This can be useful in drawing conclusions like "only full-time employees received proper communication" if needed.

The second section of the question was focused on asking questions related to the level of communication that took place during the crisis. This section was aimed at answering the first research question which was: *to what extent did internal crisis communication take place during MTN Nigeria and Etisalat Nigeria crisis?* The questions focused on the various channels in which communication should and should not take place internally during a crisis (for example, if external source of information seemed more reliable than external source of information for the employees).

Questions about how the employees perceived the whole crisis and the means they were used to communicate with shaped the third section of the survey question. This section aimed at understanding how the employees felt about the crisis situation and the internal communication (if there was any). This would help to interpret how internal crisis communication took place in these two companies, and how much effect it had on the employees.

The next section focused on the general implications the crisis had on the employees. The questions were framed to understand if the crisis had effect(s) on the employees' lifestyle in general (for instance, job insecurity, lack of trust in the company, etc.). This section was channeled towards answering the second research question: *What were the general effects of MTN 2015 and Etisalat 2017 crises on their employees?*

The final section was designed to answer the third research question: *What were the health implications of MTN 2015 and Etisalat 2017 crises on their employees?* To answer these question, employees were asked how their health was affected by the crisis using various health-related symptoms that previous scholars have linked with organizational crisis (see literature review in chapter 2). The questions were related to stress level, mental illness among several other health-related issues.

### **Data Collection**

After the research proposal was approved by REB to proceed with data collection, the drafted survey questions were generated and made open for sample size to respond. However, before answering any research question, the survey contained an introductory section where potential participants could read the consent form which detailed all necessary information and policies guiding the entire research and survey process. Also, due to the sensitivity of some of the questions asked, participants were provided with information on a renowned counsellor they can visit in the country (Nigeria) in case they experienced any psychological discomfort.

The language used to communicate with the participants was English. The reason for this is because the formal language of communication in the country is English. Approximately, the

survey question was expected to take between 10-15 minutes, and survey questions could only be accessed when participants were connected to the internet, using any electronic device.

### **Data Analysis**

Due to the fact that there is no accurate figure on the number of employees working in the two companies, this research followed the information provided by Edwards, Marginson, and Ferner (2013) that an average MNC has 1000 employee (see chapter 1). This information made conclusion to be drawn that the population of both companies should be 2000. A confidence level of 90% was used with a margin error of 6%.

**RQ1:** *To what extent did internal communication take place during MTN and Etisalat crisis?* The second and third section of the survey question was designed to analyze this question. Questions related to the level of communication and how these employees received or comprehended it was asked. For example, employees were asked if they constantly received emails and if they think they should have been more communicated to. If for instance the majority still believed they needed more communication, despite the emails, then the communication level was not sufficient.

**RQ2:** *What were the general effects of MTN 2015 and Etisalat 2017 crises on their employees?* Although, the title of the research is to find out the implication of internal crisis communication on the health of the employees, it is important to analyse other possible implications the crisis might have on the employees. Responses from the analysis could also be a fundamental guide for future researches. To achieve this, employees were asked about other aspects of their life that the crisis could affect negatively. These questions were administered in section four of the questionnaire.

**RQ3:** *What were the health implications of MTN 2015 and Etisalat 2017 crises on their employees?* Section five of the survey question covered the area of health to analyze how the crisis affected the well-being of the office staff. Questions related to stress level, blood pressure, and so on were designed for this part of the questionnaire.

### **Limitations**

Despite the importance of this study to the field of communication, some limitations have been identified.

The first identified limitation is related to the fact that the researcher was not in the same location where the research took place. According to Lee, Leung, Lo, Xiong, & Wu (2011) and Okdie, Guadagno, Bernieri, Geers, & Mclarney-Vesotski (2011), reaching out to people face-to-face is more efficient than the internet as it creates room for quality interactions that yield more results. Therefore, there could have been a higher level of responses if the researcher was physically present at the same location. Also, participants could have had the opportunity to clarify from the researcher questions that were not clear to them.

Another limitation of this study is derived from the smaller number of responses recruited from MTN Nigeria when compared to Etisalat Nigeria. Despite the fact employees of both companies were both reached out to simultaneously, MTN employees were more reluctant and reductant towards filling out the survey question (e.g., only about 24% respondents were MTN Nigeria employee). This makes the research not richly representative of the MTN Nigeria employee community. Although, deVilliers (2018) reported that a more recent crisis broke out in MTN Nigeria with the Nigerian Auditor General (NAG) and Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) fining them for inappropriate monetary transaction. The first allegation took place on August 29, 2018,

with a fine of \$8.1 billion for conversion of shareholder loan to preference shares, and the second was a \$2 billion fine on September 4, 2015, over inadequate tax payment (Okonji, 2018; Talevi, 2018; Vanguard, 2018). Coincidentally, this survey question was carried during the period the company (and its employees) were dealing with a crisis situation. Hence, it is possible that this is the reason for their reluctance (this is not a proven claim, but requires further research).

## Chapter 4: Results and Analysis

### Demographic Characteristics

The total number of survey participants were 115, although only 90 surveys were valid due to the fact that the participants completed all questions in those surveys. As seen in Table 1, 79% (n=71) of the participants were Etisalat staff, while the remaining 21% (n=19) constituted MTN staff. In total, 86% were full-time employees (78.3% Etisalat and 20.7% MTN), 13% were contract staff (75% Etisalat, 25% MTN), and the remaining 1% identified as a part-time staff of Etisalat.

Male participants are more represented in the research than female participants. 64% were male and the 36% were female. Of the Etisalat respondents, 62% were male and 38% were females. MTN, on the other hand, was represented by 74% male and 26% female. The findings showed that Etisalat had more married staff than MTN; 61% of Etisalat respondents were married, while 39% were single, and 37% of MTN employees were married, while 63% were single.

The findings also showed that most of the employees of both companies were at specialist level. For Etisalat, 35% were entry level, 51% were specialists, 10% were managers and the remaining 4% were senior managers. Following a similar trend, 37% of MTN staff were at the entry level, 53% were specialist, and both manager and senior manager level was separately represented at 5% each. For the number of years the employees have been working for in the company, most of MTN employees seem to be new to the company (meaning they were most likely new employees of the company at the outbreak of the crisis). In MTN, 68% of the respondents had been in the company between 0-3 years, 11% between 6-9 years, and 21% had been in the company for over 9 years. Etisalat had employees whose years of experience in the company was spread across each range of the questionnaire; 18% had been in the company

between 0-3 years, 38% between 3-6 years, 31% between 6-9 years, and 13% has been working in the company for over 9 years.

Responses to the research questions were within a 5-point Likert-type scale that ranged from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” (e.g., 1 was “strongly agree” and 5 was “strongly disagree”) so as to show respondents’ level of agreement or opposition to a question. In order for responses to be better analyzed, “strongly agree” and “agree” were joined together and interpreted as participants assenting with the question, and “strongly disagree” and “disagree” were merged together to indicate that the participants were not in agreement with the question.

**Table 1** Selected demographic characteristics of respondents ( $N=90$ )

	All participant ( $N=90$ )		Etisalat ( $n_1=71$ )		MTN ( $n_2=19$ )	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Employment status</b>						
Contract	12	13.3	9	12.7	3	15.8
Full-time	77	85.6	61	85.9	16	84.2
Part-time	1	1.1	1	1.4		0.0
<b>How long have you been working for Etisalat/MTN</b>						
0-3 years	26	28.9	13	18.3	13	68.4
3-6 years	27	30.0	27	38.0		0.0
6-9 years	24	26.7	22	31.0	2	10.5
9 years+	13	14.4	9	12.7	4	21.1
<b>Employment Level</b>						
Entry level	32	35.6	25	35.2	7	36.8
Manager	8	8.9	7	9.9	1	5.3
Senior manager	4	4.4	3	4.2	1	5.3
Specialist	46	51.1	36	50.7	10	52.6
<b>Gender</b>						
Female	32	35.6	27	38.0	5	26.3
Male	58	64.4	44	62.0	14	73.7
<b>Marital Status</b>						
Married	50	55.6	43	60.6	7	36.8
Single	40	44.4	28	39.4	12	63.2

$N$  = respondents from both companies;  $n_1$ ,  $n_2$  = respondents from each company

## Research Question 1

*To what extent did internal communication take place during MTN and Etisalat crisis?*

The questions in section two and three were designed to answer this question.

As shown in Table 2, most employees of both Etisalat and MTN generally agree that they were well communicated to during the crisis; however, the mode of communication in both companies varied. While, most of the employees of Etisalat and MTN agree (61% and 74% respectively) that they constantly received emails from the companies to provide them with update on the crisis, there were slight differences in other modes of communication. Regarding receiving text messages to provide the employees with update on the crisis, only 18% of Etisalat employees agreed that they received text messages, 70% disagreed and 11% were neutral about the question. On the contrary, 63% of MTN employees agreed that they constantly received text messages, while 26% disagreed and 11% equally were neutral. In addition, 63% of MTN staff consented to regularly receiving meeting invites from the company to provide them with update on the crisis, while only 23% respondents from Etisalat agreed to consistently receive meeting invitation. Majority of MTN employees (84%) had also agreed they consistently received update through other means that were not listed in the questionnaire, while only 32% of Etisalat employees agreed to have consistently received update on the crisis from the company through other means; 45% had disagreed to receiving information through other platforms other than meeting invite, emails, and text messages.

Employees of MTN (68% consenting) reported in Table 2 that there was a team in the company that they could meet with to get update on the crisis from. Contrastingly, only 34% of Etisalat participants agreed to having a communication team to get update from (49% disagreed). Furthermore, most employees revealed that they were informed to not communicate the

information / update they had received to external parties; 70% of Etisalat respondents agreed, and 53% MTN participants also agreed. 10% and 32%, respectively disagreed, while 20% and 16%, respectively were neutral.

Although employees of both companies agreed to have been well communicated to, they still somewhat relied on external source of information to provide them with update on the crisis. While it is difficult to draw fine line for MTN, as 42% participants, respectively agreed and disagreed to have relied on external source of information, 63% staff in Etisalat relied more on external source of information. Similarly, 68% of Etisalat employees approved that they heard more rumour from their colleagues than factual information; 24% disagreed and 8% were indifferent. On the other hand, most of the MTN employees disagreed to have heard more rumour from their colleagues (63%), while only 26% agreed and 11% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Interestingly, 83% of Etisalat respondents answered that they would have preferred more communication during the crisis, while 8% disagreed, and 8% also were neutral. For MTN staff, it was impossible to draw conclusions, as 42% agreed and 42% disagreed to prefer more communication during the crisis period. Additionally, 44% of Etisalat staff agreed that they perceived some sort of communication reluctance from the company, 32% were indifferent, and 24% disagreed. Contrastingly, 68% of MTN employees disagreed that their company was reluctant to communicate with them, 16% agreed and 16% neither agreed nor disagreed.

The survey also showed that more MTN staff than Etisalat staff had some clue of what the outcome of the crisis would be. 59% of Etisalat participants agreed that they had no clue what the outcome of the crisis would be, 24% disagreed and 17% were neutral. For MTN, 42% disagreed not to have had any clue, 26% agreed and 32% were neutral.

Regarding productivity, 46% of Etisalat respondents agreed that they would have been more productive if the company communicated more to them, while 37% of MTN participants on the other hand agreed to this. Only 20% of Etisalat respondents disagreed that they would have been more productive if they had received more communication from the company and 34% were neutral to the question. MTN on the other hand had 47% staff disagreeing that they would have been more productive if they received more communication and 16% were indifferent to the same question. Most of Etisalat and MTN participants (97% and 84%, respectively) reported that they deserve to be properly communicated to as employees of the company; while 16% of MTN participants disagreed to this, only 1% Etisalat participant disagreed.

**Table 2** Extent to which internal communication took place during MTN and Etisalat crisis (N= 90)

	All participant (N= 90)		Etisalat (n <sub>t</sub> = 71)		MTN (n <sub>t</sub> = 19)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>I was well communicated to by the company during the crisis</b>						
Agree	58	64.4	41	57.7	17	89.5
Disagree	14	15.6	13	18.3	1	5.3
Neither agree nor disagree	18	20.0	17	23.9	1	5.3
<b>I constantly received emails from the company to provide update on the crisis</b>						
Agree	57	63.3	43	60.6	14	73.7
Disagree	18	20.0	14	19.7	4	21.1
Neither agree nor disagree	15	16.7	14	19.7	1	5.3
<b>I constantly received text messages from the company to provide update on the crisis</b>						
Agree	25	27.8	13	18.3	12	63.2
Disagree	55	61.1	50	70.4	5	26.3
Neither agree nor disagree	10	11.1	8	11.3	2	10.5
<b>I constantly received meeting and program invitations from the company to provide update on the crisis</b>						
Agree	28	31.1	16	22.5	12	63.2
Disagree	45	50.0	40	56.3	5	26.3
Neither agree nor disagree	17	18.9	15	21.1	2	10.5
<b>I constantly received information through other means by the company to provide update on the crisis</b>						
Agree	39	43.3	23	32.4	16	84.2
Disagree	33	36.7	32	45.1	1	5.3

Table 2 (continued)

	All participant (N= 90)		Etisalat (n <sub>t</sub> = 71)		MTN (n <sub>t</sub> = 19)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Neither agree nor disagree	18	20.0	16	22.5	2	10.5
<b>I relied more on external source of information than internal source of information for update on the crisis</b>						
Agree	53	58.9	45	63.4	8	42.1
Disagree	25	27.8	17	23.9	8	42.1
Neither agree nor disagree	12	13.3	9	12.7	3	15.8
<b>I was told by the company not to disclose information communicated to me to external stakeholders</b>						
Agree	60	66.7	50	70.4	10	52.6
Disagree	13	14.4	7	9.9	6	31.6
Neither agree nor disagree	17	18.9	14	19.7	3	15.8
<b>There was an available team in the company I could communicate with to provide me with updated information about the crisis (i.e., crisis communication department)</b>						
Agree	37	41.1	24	33.8	13	68.4
Disagree	39	43.3	35	49.3	4	21.1
Neither agree nor disagree	14	15.6	12	16.9	2	10.5
<b>I would have preferred more communication during the crisis</b>						
Agree	67	74.4	59	83.1	8	42.1
Disagree	14	15.6	6	8.5	8	42.1
Neither agree nor disagree	9	10.0	6	8.5	3	15.8
<b>I had no clue what was going to come out of the crisis</b>						
Agree	47	52.2	42	59.2	5	26.3
Disagree	25	27.8	17	23.9	8	42.1
Neither agree nor disagree	18	20.0	12	16.9	6	31.6
<b>I would have been more productive if the company communicated more to me regarding the crisis</b>						
Agree	40	44.4	33	46.5	7	36.8
Disagree	23	25.6	14	19.7	9	47.4
Neither agree nor disagree	27	30.0	24	33.8	3	15.8
<b>I heard more rumour (false information) than factual information from my colleagues during the crisis</b>						
Agree	53	58.9	48	67.6	5	26.3
Disagree	29	32.2	17	23.9	12	63.2
Neither agree nor disagree	8	8.9	6	8.5	2	10.5
<b>I deserve to be properly communicated to as an employee of the company</b>						
Agree	85	94.4	69	97.2	16	84.2
Disagree	4	4.4	1	1.4	3	15.8
Neither agree nor disagree	1	1.1	1	1.4		0.0

**Table 2** (continued)

	All participant ( <i>N</i> = 90)		Etisalat ( <i>n</i> <sub>1</sub> = 71)		MTN ( <i>n</i> <sub>1</sub> = 19)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<b>I perceived the company was reluctant to communicate to me as an employee during the crisis</b>						
Agree	34	37.8	31	43.7	3	15.8
Disagree	30	33.3	17	23.9	13	68.4
Neither agree nor disagree	26	28.9	23	32.4	3	15.8

*N* = respondents from both companies; *n*<sub>1</sub>, *n*<sub>2</sub> = respondents from each company

## Research Question 2

*What were the general effects of MTN 2015 and Etisalat 2017 crises on their employees?*

In order to understand the general effects the crisis had on the employees, several questions were constructed (see Table 3).

70% of Etisalat employees were worried about their job security during the crisis, and this made 65% of them to also start looking for job opportunities, 14% of the company's participants disagreed to have been worried, and 17% disagreed to have started looking for job opportunities; the results also showed that 15% respondents were neutral about being worried on job security, and 18% were also indifferent about searching for new job opportunities. For MTN, the results were quite different as only 32% respondents agreed to have worried about their job security, 53% disagreed and 16% were neutral. In the same trend, only 21% of MTN respondents started looking for new job opportunities due to the crisis outbreak, 11% were neutral and 68% reported the crisis did not make them start looking for job opportunities.

The research findings also revealed that more Etisalat staff (45%) than MTN staff (32%) had less confidence in the company during the crisis period. A higher number of MTN participants (58%) than Etisalat participants (34%) disagreed to have developed less confidence in the

company, with a total of 21% (Etisalat) and 11% (MTN) as neutral. However, their level of confidence did not seem to affect their level of interest in their job. Only 21% of Etisalat respondents agreed that their job was less of an interest to them during the crisis; 54% disagreed and 25% were indifferent about how the crisis affected their job interest. None of the MTN employees had less interest in their job as a result of the crisis, as 79% disagreed and 21% were neutral.

The crisis did not seem to have any serious effect on employees' productivity and morale in both Etisalat and MTN. Only 21% and 25% of Etisalat participants agreed to have had reduced productivity and morale, respectively during the crisis. For lower productivity and lower morale among MTN staff, only 21% and 16% agreed. 54% Etisalat respondents disagreed to have been less productive and 48% disagreed to have had their morale reduced. For MTN, 63% opposed being less productive due to the crisis, and 74% disagreed for their morale being negatively affected.

The survey findings did not seem to present any connection between crisis outbreak and delay in promotion for MTN staff, only 5% agreed to have had delayed promotion due to the crisis and 79% disagreed. For Etisalat, 32% stated that they were supposed to be promoted before the outbreak of the crisis and 38% disagreed. 32% also agreed that their promotion was delayed due to the crisis, with 41% disagreeing. Out of the 32% that agreed that they ought to be promoted before the crisis outbreak, 27% asserted that there was a delay in their promotion due to the crisis.

Although, a higher percentage of MTN respondents identified themselves as the breadwinner of their family (58%), a lesser percentage (42%) identified that their family members were worried or bothered about their job status. The result was quite different for Etisalat, as 90%

of participants mentioned that their family members were worried/bothered/scared about their job status, even though only 46% of them identified to be the breadwinner of their home.

There was no link between crisis outbreak and reduction or delay in the salary of the employees of both companies. For reduction in salary, only 1% of Etisalat participants agreed to have had reduced salary and 5% of respondents from MTN agreed to have had salary reduction, 93% disagreed for Etisalat and 95% for MTN, while 5% of Etisalat respondents were indifferent. Regarding the delay in salary payment, 14% respondents from Etisalat agreed to have had delayed salary, while 5% agreed for MTN. 79% Etisalat respondents disagreed to have had delayed salary and 95% MTN staff disagreed, while the remaining 7% from Etisalat chose not to either agree or disagree.

**Table 3** General effects of MTN 2015 and Etisalat 2017 crisis on their employees (N= 90)

	All participant (N= 90)		Etisalat (n <sub>t</sub> = 71)		MTN (n <sub>t</sub> = 19)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>I was more worried about my job security during crisis</b>						
Agree	56	62.2	50	70.4	6	31.6
Disagree	20	22.2	10	14.1	10	52.6
Neither agree nor disagree	14	15.6	11	15.5	3	15.8
<b>I had less confidence in the company during the crisis</b>						
Agree	38	42.2	32	45.1	6	31.6
Disagree	35	38.9	24	33.8	11	57.9
Neither agree nor disagree	17	18.9	15	21.1	2	10.5
<b>I started looking for new job opportunities outside the company during the crisis</b>						
Agree	50	55.6	46	64.8	4	21.1
Disagree	25	27.8	12	16.9	13	68.4
Neither agree nor disagree	15	16.7	13	18.3	2	10.5
<b>I became less interested in my job when the crisis emerged</b>						
Agree	15	16.7	15	21.1	0	0.0
Disagree	53	58.9	38	53.5	15	78.9
Neither agree nor disagree	22	24.4	18	25.4	4	21.1
<b>I was less productive during the crisis</b>						
Agree	19	21.1	15	21.1	4	21.1

**Table 3** (continued)

	<b>All participant (N= 90)</b>		<b>Etisalat (n<sub>1</sub>= 71)</b>		<b>MTN (n<sub>1</sub>= 19)</b>	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Disagree	50	55.6	38	53.5	12	63.2
Neither agree nor disagree	21	23.3	18	25.4	3	15.8
<b>My morale and performance reduced drastically when the crisis broke out</b>						
Agree	21	23.3	18	25.4	3	15.8
Disagree	48	53.3	34	47.9	14	73.7
Neither agree nor disagree	21	23.3	19	26.8	2	10.5
<b>I was supposed to be promoted before the crisis broke out</b>						
Agree	23	25.6	23	32.4	0	0.0
Disagree	42	46.7	27	38.0	15	78.9
Neither agree nor disagree	25	27.8	21	29.6	4	21.1
<b>My promotion was delayed due to the crisis</b>						
Agree	24	26.7	23	32.4	1	5.3
Disagree	44	48.9	29	40.8	15	78.9
Neither agree nor disagree	22	24.4	19	26.8	3	15.8
<b>My family members were worried/bothered/scared about my job status</b>						
Agree	72	80.0	64	90.1	8	42.1
Disagree	15	16.7	6	8.5	9	47.4
Neither agree nor disagree	3	3.3	1	1.4	2	10.5
<b>I am the breadwinner of my family</b>						
Agree	44	48.9	33	46.5	11	57.9
Disagree	28	31.1	22	31.0	6	31.6
Neither agree nor disagree	18	20.0	16	22.5	2	10.5
<b>My salary was reduced during the crisis</b>						
Agree	2	2.2	1	1.4	1	5.3
Disagree	84	93.3	66	93.0	18	94.7
Neither agree nor disagree	4	4.4	4	5.6		0.0
<b>The payment of my salary started getting delayed during the crisis</b>						
Agree	11	12.2	10	14.1	1	5.3
Disagree	74	82.2	56	78.9	18	94.7
Neither agree nor disagree	5	5.6	5	7.0	0	0.0

*N* = respondents from both companies; *n*<sub>1</sub>, *n*<sub>2</sub> = respondents from each company

### Research Question 3

*What were the health implications of MTN 2015 and Etisalat 2017 crisis on their employees?*

In this section, several work related health problems and health challenges that employees face (using existing information) was used to draft questions that would help to draw the link between crisis and employees health.

Despite the fact that some employees were affected by the crises (i.e., MTN's \$1.6 billion fine and Etisalat's \$1.2 billion Debt) in other areas of their lives, there seems to be a lower impact of the crisis on their stress level. For physical stress, 24% of Etisalat employees revealed they were stressed, 55% disagreed and 21% were neutral; on the other hand, 32% MTN employees agreed, 58% disagreed and 11% preferred not to choose side. There was a very slight difference in the responses for mental stress. 39% of participants from Etisalat were more stressed mentally, 51% were not stressed and 10% had no definite response; on the other hand, for MTN, 37% agreed, 58% disagreed, and 5% were neutral.

Interestingly, the survey results also showed that most participants' blood pressure was not affected; 11% from Etisalat and 26% from MTN agreed to have had increased blood pressure. 80% participants from Etisalat and 68% participants from MTN disagreed to have experienced any sort of increased blood pressure during the crisis.

Quite a significant number of participants for both companies reported to have experienced anxiety during the crisis. For Etisalat, 55% of respondents stated they were more anxious during the crisis, 28% disagreed, and 17% were indifferent. MTN on the other hand had 42% respondents claim to have experienced anxiety, 53% disagreed, and only 5% were indifferent.

The survey findings further revealed that almost no employee had heart attacks during the crisis, even though a few had reported to have panicked during the crisis outbreak. Only 1%

respondent (from Etisalat) reported to have had heart attack during the crisis; 100% of MTN employees disagreed to this and 96% of Etisalat employees also disagreed. The crisis also did not seem to make the employees more exhausted. Only 15% participants from Etisalat and 16% from MTN agreed to have been more exhausted; 66% from Etisalat and 79% from MTN disagreed.

Additionally, majority of the respondents disagreed to have been through depression during the crisis, with 83% from Etisalat and 74% from MTN. 4% participants from Etisalat and 16% from MTN agreed to have been through depression.

Finally, almost none of the employees went to visit the hospital during the crisis; 4% from Etisalat and 5% from MTN agreed to have visited the hospital. 87% participants from Etisalat disagreed and 95% from MTN disagreed.

**Table 4** Health implications of MTN 2015 and Etisalat 2017 crisis on their employees ( $N=90$ )

	All participant ( $N=90$ )		Etisalat ( $n=71$ )		MTN ( $n=19$ )	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<b>My blood pressure increased during the crisis</b>						
Agree	13	14.4	8	11.3	5	26.3
Disagree	70	77.8	57	80.3	13	68.4
Neither agree nor disagree	7	7.8	6	8.5	1	5.3
<b>I was more stressed mentally during the crisis</b>						
Agree	35	38.9	28	39.4	7	36.8
Disagree	47	52.2	36	50.7	11	57.9
Neither agree nor disagree	8	8.9	7	9.9	1	5.3
<b>I was more stressed physically during the crisis</b>						
Agree	23	25.6	17	23.9	6	31.6
Disagree	50	55.6	39	54.9	11	57.9
Neither agree nor disagree	17	18.9	15	21.1	2	10.5
<b>I was more anxious about work during the crisis</b>						
Agree	47	52.2	39	54.9	8	42.1
Disagree	30	33.3	20	28.2	10	52.6
Neither agree nor disagree	13	14.4	12	16.9	1	5.3
<b>I went through depression due to the crisis</b>						
Agree	6	6.7	3	4.2	3	15.8

Table 4 (continued)

	All participant (N= 90)		Etisalat (n <sub>1</sub> = 71)		MTN (n <sub>1</sub> = 19)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Disagree	73	81.1	59	83.1	14	73.7
Neither agree nor disagree	11	12.2	9	12.7	2	10.5
<b>I had to visit the hospital / clinic more often during the crisis period because of stress, worry and depression</b>						
Agree	4	4.4	3	4.2	1	5.3
Disagree	80	88.9	62	87.3	18	94.7
Neither agree nor disagree	6	6.7	6	8.5		0.0
<b>I became more frequently exhausted during the crisis</b>						
Agree	14	15.6	11	15.5	3	15.8
Disagree	62	68.9	47	66.2	15	78.9
Neither agree nor disagree	14	15.6	13	18.3	1	5.3
<b>I began to panic at the outbreak of the crisis</b>						
Agree	18	20.0	16	22.5	2	10.5
Disagree	58	64.4	43	60.6	15	78.9
Neither agree nor disagree	14	15.6	12	16.9	2	10.5
<b>I had heart attacks due to the crisis at work</b>						
Agree	1	1.1	1	1.4		0.0
Disagree	87	96.7	68	95.8	19	100.0
Neither agree nor disagree	2	2.2	2	2.8		0.0

N = respondents from both companies; n<sub>1</sub>, n<sub>2</sub> = respondents from each company

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

### Discussion

The core purpose of this study was to examine how important internal crisis communication is and its effects on employees. To this end, the study posed three research questions and conducted a survey within the framework of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), Social Identity Theory (SIT), and Professional Identity. The main findings are discussed below.

Concerning the first research question, results revealed that employees of both Etisalat and MTN agreed that they were communicated to during the crisis. However, the trends of answers differed as the questions went further. First, the results of the presented that more MTN employees were more communicated to during the crisis when compared to Etisalat employees. A larger number of MTN staff reported to have received more communication than Etisalat staff, including emails, text messages, meeting invites, and other means of communication. In fact, 68% of MTN respondents also mentioned that there was also an available team in the company they could meet with to receive update on the crisis. On the contrary, more Etisalat respondents (49%) reported that there was no team available to meet with in order to get update on the crisis. As result of this, most of Etisalat employees (84%) revealed that they would have preferred more communication from the company during the crisis. Additionally, a higher number of employees of Etisalat reported that they perceived the company as reluctant to communicate to them during the crisis. Interestingly, the case was different for MTN staff. Although, it is difficult to draw conclusions as to whether or not they would have preferred more communication from the company because 42% agree and 42% disagree equally to this question, a higher number of responses (68%) disagreed to perceive any form of communication reluctance from the company. Furthermore, the

communication gap for the Etisalat staff made most of them (59%) clueless about the outcome of the crisis. For MTN staff a much lesser percentage (26%) mentioned that they were clueless about the crisis outcome. These findings support the claims of Johansen et al., (2012) and Ravazzani (2016) that internal crisis communication has a great effect on employee's reaction and perception towards their company.

The results also presented that the improper communication to Etisalat employees affected how they rely on external source of information and the circulation of rumour among their colleagues. A larger group of the respondents relied more on external sources of information than internal source of information to receive update on the crisis. This reliance on external information seemed to have affected their access to factual update about the crisis, because more respondents also mentioned that they heard more rumour from their fellow colleagues than factual information. The results presented on their reliance on external information can be linked with Ravazzani's (2016) statement that employees are "active information seeker" (p.76), as we can see Etisalat employees seeking from external source the essential information that their company ought to provide during the crisis. This result was quite different for MTN respondents. Again, it is difficult to draw conclusions from how much MTN employees relied on external source of information as 42% agreed to have relied more on external source of information, and 42% equally disagreed to have relied more on external sources of information. In spite of this, majority of them shared they did not hear more rumour than factual information from their colleague.

A significant number of Etisalat respondents also mentioned that they would have been more productive if the company communicated more to them during the crisis. The responses from MTN employees was very different as they disagreed to this. The responses of both groups of respondents to this question is not surprising when linked with how they have responded to other

questions that pertain to how frequently they were communicated to by their companies; it seems that the communication climate in the two companies are different. This presented result closely connects with Cacciattolo (2015) assertion that when proper communication takes place within an organization, there is more efficiency and effectiveness. Additionally, this finding supports Slade, Ribando, and Fortner's (2016) argument that the culture of an organization affects the productivity of employees.

The second research question to understand the general effects of the crises on the employees also presented interesting results. For example, it was revealed despite the fact that most of MTN respondents were employed between 0-3 years (68%), they were less worried about their job security when compared to Etisalat employees. In other words, although these MTN employees were most likely new hires to the company when the crisis broke out (see chapter one and two), they were less worried about their job security; only 32% reported to have been worried about their job security. Most Etisalat staff however, regardless of how long they had been working in the company were more worried about their job security (70% of them). In turn, this affected their approach towards looking for new job opportunities, 65% of Etisalat employees reported started looking for jobs outside the company at the outbreak of the crisis. The implication of the crisis outbreak on search for new job positions was extremely low for MTN employees, as most of them were less worried about their job security; just 17% of the respondents revealed to have started external job search when the crisis broke out. The results presented here largely supports the research of Giorgi et al., (2015), and Modrek and Cullen (2013) which found that communication gap gives employees a high level of job insecurity.

The results of the crisis on employees' level of confidence for Etisalat employees closely relate to Johansen et al.'s (2012) assertion that crisis has a huge effect on the employees' level of

confidence in the company. Majority Etisalat employees stated that they had less confidence in the company during the crisis. On a significantly different note, most of MTN employees did not agree to have had less confidence in the company during the crisis.

Although unexpected, the result did not present any connection between crisis outbreak and interest in their job. A large number of employees of Etisalat and MTN stated that their interest in the job was not affected by the crisis. Following the same pattern, a higher number of people did not identify to have had lower performance and morale, or less productiveness to their job at the outbreak of the crisis.

The crisis seems to have an impact on the promotion of Etisalat employees. Though majority of the respondents did not mention that they were supposed to be promoted before the crisis, most of those who stated they were due for promotion before the crisis mentioned that their promotion was delayed before the crisis. In other words, 32% participants from Etisalat acknowledged that they were supposed to be promoted before the crisis, and out of these 32%, 27% agreed that their promotion was delayed.

In seeking answers to the general effects of crisis on employees, another aspect that the study considered was to see how the crisis affected relatives of the employees of both Etisalat and MTN. The results revealed that there is a difference between how Etisalat family members felt about the crisis versus how MTN relatives felt about the crisis. Though, most of the respondents of Etisalat and MTN identified themselves as the breadwinner of their family (with a higher percentage from MTN), most of Etisalat family members (90%) than MTN (42%) were either worried, bothered, or scared about their job status. This finding reveals that the crisis in an organization can have negative effect on those related to the employees of the company.

The study findings did not reveal any effect of the crisis situation on salary reduction or salary delay for the employees. Most staff of Etisalat and MTN did not identify to have had either delayed salary or reduced salary during the crisis. This finding seems to contradict Mucci et al.'s (2016) finding that crisis can lead to reduction of employees' salary.

Surprising and contradictory to what previous research has revealed on how crisis can affect the health of the employees, the results of the current study do not show any effect of the crisis on employees' health. Majority of the participants of both companies stated that they were neither stressed mentally nor physically. The crisis did not also create any increment in blood pressure, heart attack, panic, depression, exhaustion, and hospital visits for most of the respondents. The only health related issue that the crisis seem to contribute to was anxiety, and this was mostly for the Etisalat employees. 55% of Etisalat employees said they experienced anxiety at the outbreak of the crisis, only 42% of MTN employees agreed with this. These results contradict the research findings of some scholars such as Jones, Flynn, and Kelloway (1995), Modrek and Cullen (2013), and Mucci et al., (2016) who found that some health effects were brought upon employees as a result of organizational crisis (see chapter two).

### **Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

This research has a number of limitations. First, the data are not representative of MTN Nigeria staff community. Although the data gathered from this group allows for comparisons with Etisalat, it makes it difficult to be able to draw conclusions for MTN participants on some questions (for instance, whether or not a larger number relied on external source of information). In addition to this, the results cannot be used to generalize for all employees of this company. Hence, future research should ensure that a larger sample size is recruited for stronger conclusions and generalizations to be made.

Also, the survey was open to participants only for a short period of time (from September 7, 2018 to October 26, 2018). Perhaps, if the survey was open for a longer period of time, there would have been a larger number of representation that would have made the data richer for the entire population of the participants and for more interesting comparisons. Prospective researchers should consider spanning the timeframe of data collection for a longer period of time.

In addition, the study encountered a high level of unwillingness from MTN employees to complete the survey. This unwillingness further contributed to the low number of respondents, resulting in underrepresentation of MTN staff. On the other hand, this could be related to the fact that MTN was currently going through a new crisis at the time of data collection for this study. Therefore, further studies should conduct research on employees' willingness to answer questions that pertain to the crisis their company is currently facing. Most research conducts surveys to examine effects and employee's reaction after the crisis has taken place, not during the crisis.

As mentioned earlier (see chapter 3 for more details) another crisis broke out in MTN during the period when this current study was collecting data. This means that future research should not only consider exploring crisis communication and its effect in different companies, but also different crisis situations in a particular company (for instance MTN), the crisis communication, and its effects on employees.

The results also showed that there are differences in how Etisalat employees were communicated to when compared with that of MTN; this in return affected or shaped how they responded to a lot of questions. This provides opportunity for future researchers to look into conducting an in-depth research on the type of organizational culture that exists in both Etisalat and MTN, and if these cultures affected how communication took place in both companies.

## Conclusions

This study has provided relevant and important results that can advance understanding of crisis, crisis communication, internal crisis communication, effects of crisis on employees, and health implications of crisis on employees.

This research concludes that compared to Etisalat employees, MTN employees were more and properly communicated to by their employers during the period of the crisis. . This proper internal communication is clearly linked to and largely affects employees in various areas such as trust and confidence in their company, and how they perceive certain things about the company- for example, the company's transparency.

Crisis situations also affect employees negatively in various areas, especially when there is lack of proper communication. This implies that there is an important link between communication level and implication of crisis on employees. When the employees are well communicated to, there is less probability for anxiety, job insecurity, worry, cluelessness, reliance on external information, and so on.

In addition, when employees do not receive proper internal communication, they tend to rely more on external source of information which can be considered incredible or untrue. In other words, employees are more exposed to false information that might give them false update about the crisis and the company as a whole when the company does not provide them with proper communication.

Although internal crisis communication is important, and does affect other areas of employees' life, there does not seem to be any connection between crises, how internal crisis communication takes place, and employees' health. Based on the current study findings, although,

employees' health can be affected in few instances, a crisis is not an important situation in determining the state of their health.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Survey Questions

**Researcher's Name:** Oluwaseun Deborah Akisanmi

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**Research Topic:** Internal Crisis Communication and Implications for Employees' Health: A Study of Mobile Telephone Network (MTN) Nigeria \$1.6 billion fine and Etisalat Nigeria \$1.2 billion Debt

**Supervisor:** Dr. Rukhsana Ahmed, Department of Communication, Faculty of Arts, University of Ottawa

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You are invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Oluwaseun Deborah Akisanmi, who is being supervised by Dr. Rukhsana Ahmed.

If you wish to participate in this study, please complete the attached survey. Your decision to complete and return this survey will be interpreted as an indication of your consent to participate. The survey should take you approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. Once you have completed the survey, please click submit and your response will be automatically received by the researcher anonymously. We would appreciate receiving it before October 15, 2018. However, due to the anonymity of participants in this research, a polite reminder will be sent to all participants which you may disregard if you have completed.

The purpose of this study is to understand how crucial internal communication is to employees during a period of crisis, and also to identify the implications crisis have on employees of the organization, especially their health. This research is conducted as part of the requirements to complete my graduate degree at the University of Ottawa; Masters of Arts, Communication.

The information that you will share will remain strictly confidential and will be used solely for the purposes of this research. The only people who will have access to the research data are the researcher and the supervisor whose names have been stated above. The online software that will be employed is Survey Monkey which is highly confidential and secure to protect your information. In addition to this, kindly note that this is an American based software which is guided by the Patriot Act.

Your answers to close-ended questions may be used verbatim in presentations and publications but you will not be identified. Results will be published in pooled format. Anonymity is guaranteed since you are not being asked to provide your name or any personal information. The surveys will be kept in a computer solely owned by the researcher, which will be securely protected with a password that is also only known to the researcher, and will be kept for a maximum of one

year at which time they will be permanently deleted. You are under no obligation to participate and if you choose to participate, you may refuse to answer questions that you do not want to answer.

Due to the fact that this questionnaire is anonymous in nature, participants will not be able to withdraw from this research once the questionnaire has been completed and submitted. Completion and return of the questionnaire by you implies consent. If you experience any form of psychological discomfort during the completion of this questionnaire, please refer to the final page of this questionnaire for information about a counselling organization that can help provide help.

The research findings will be available to the participants upon request. In order to receive this, participants may send an email to the researcher and (or) the supervisor. If you have any questions or require more information about the study itself, you may contact the researcher or the supervisor at the numbers mentioned herein.

If you have any questions with regards to the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON, Canada K1N 6N5, tel.: +1 (613) 562-5387 or [ethics@uottawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uottawa.ca).

Please print or save this form for your records.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

- 1) Employment Status: Full-time , Part-time , Contract , Others  (please specify)
- 2) How long have you been working for Etisalat/MTN: 0-3 years , 3-6 years , 6-9 years , 9 years & above
- 3) Employment Level: Entry , Specialist , Manager , Senior Manager
- 4) Gender: Male  Female
- 5) Marital Status: Married , Single , Divorced , Cohabiting

Section	Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	<b>Level of Communication</b>					
	I was well communicated to by the company during the crisis					
	I constantly received emails from the company to provide update on the crisis					
	I constantly received text messages from the company to provide update on the crisis					
	I constantly received meeting and program invitations from the company to provide update on the crisis					
	I constantly received information through other means by the					

	company to provide update on the crisis					
	I relied more on external source of information than internal source of information for update on the crisis					
	I was told by the company not to disclose information communicated to me to external stakeholders					
	There was an available team in the company I could communicate with to provide me with updated information about the crisis (i.e., crisis communication department)					
2	<b>Communication Perception</b>					
	I would have preferred more communication during the crisis					
	I had no clue what was going to come out of the crisis					
	I would have been more productive if the company communicated more to me					

	I heard more rumour (false information) than factual information from my colleagues during the crisis					
	I deserve to be properly communicated to as an employee of the company					
	I perceived the company was reluctant to communicate to me as an employee during the crisis					
3	<b>Implications of crisis</b>					
	I was more worried about my job security during crisis					
	I had less confidence in the company during the crisis					
	I started looking for new job opportunities outside the company during the crisis					
	I became less interested in my job when the crisis emerged					
	I was less productive during the crisis					

	My morale and performance reduced drastically when the crisis broke out					
	I was supposed to be promoted before the crisis broke out					
	My promotion was delayed due to the crisis					
	My family members were worried/bothered/scared about my job status					
	I am the breadwinner of my family					
	My salary was reduced during the crisis					
	The payment of my salary started getting delayed during the crisis					
4	<b>Health Implications of the Crisis</b>					
	My blood pressure increased during the crisis					
	I was more stressed mentally during the crisis					
	I was more stressed physically during the crisis					

I was more anxious about work during the crisis					
I went through depression due to the crisis					
I had to visit the hospital / clinic more often during the crisis period because of stress, worry and depression					
I became more frequently exhausted during the crisis					
I began to panic at the outbreak of the crisis					
I had heart attacks due to the crisis at work					

### Note

The survey questions above are informed and guided by published articles related to the field of research (references below):

Avanzi, L., Schuh, S. C., Fraccaroli, F., & van Dick, R. (2015). Why does organizational identification relate to reduced employee burnout? The mediating influence of social support and collective efficacy. *Work & Stress*, 29(1), 1-10.

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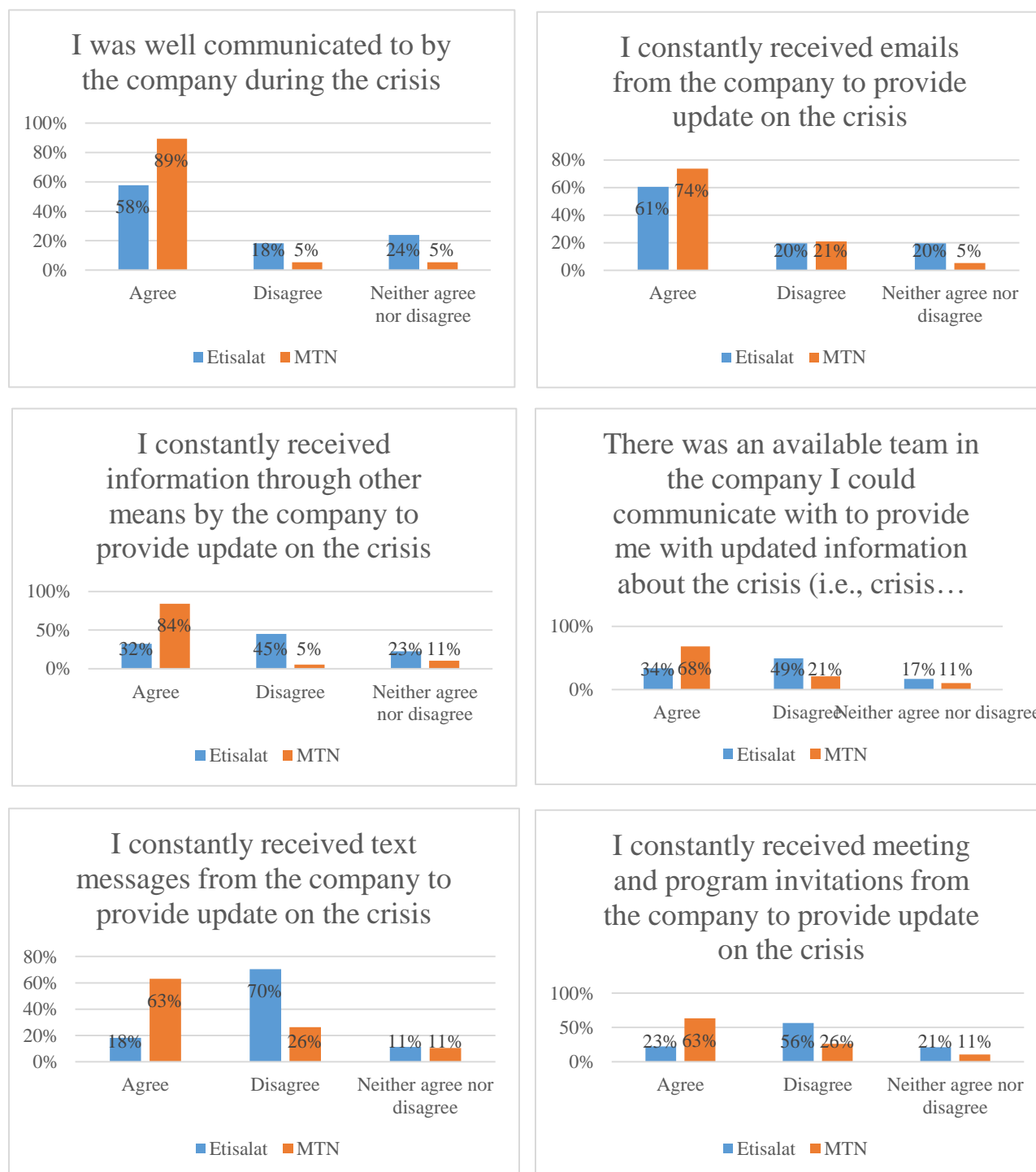
**Resource about Counselling**

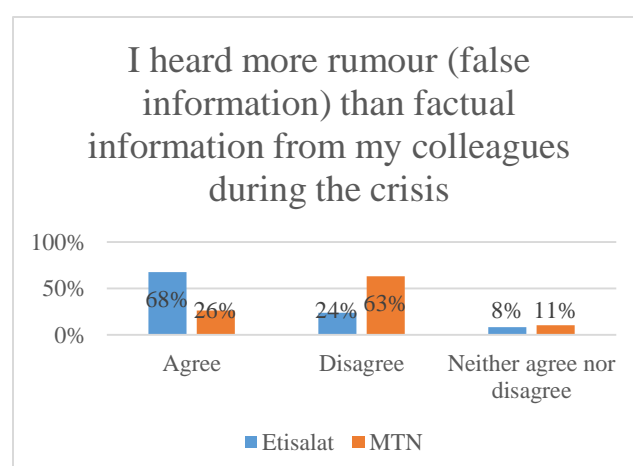
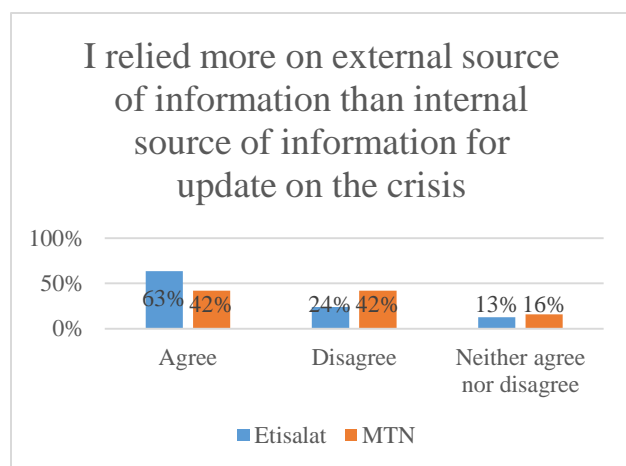
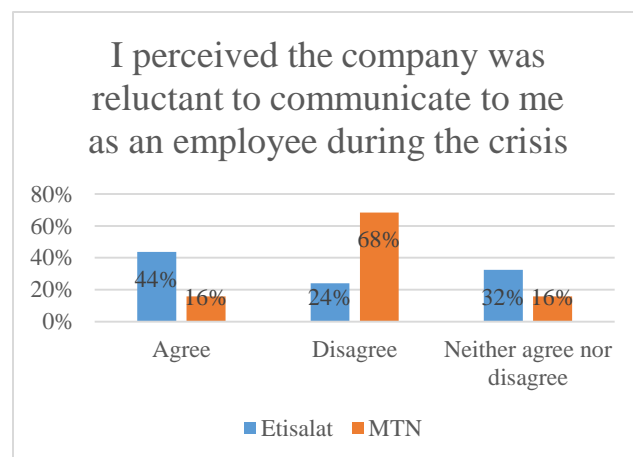
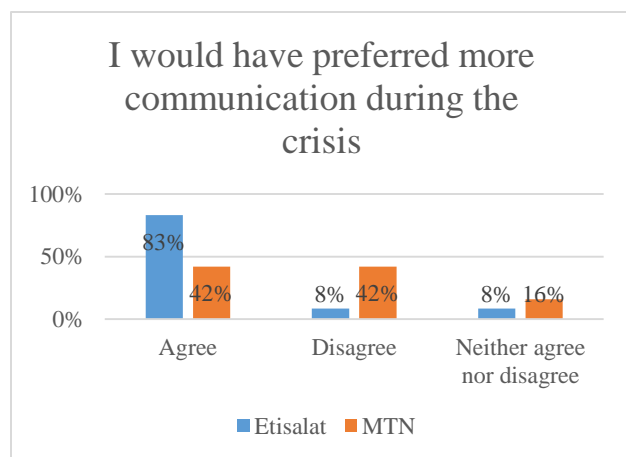
- Company Name: BTH Integrated Wellness & Therapy
- Address: The Perez Building, Plot 3 Rock Drive, off C & I Leasing Drive, Central Business District, Lekki Phase 1, – Lagos Nigeria.
- Email: ask@bththerapy.com
- Phone: +234 (0) 9098587959, +234 (01) 7000609

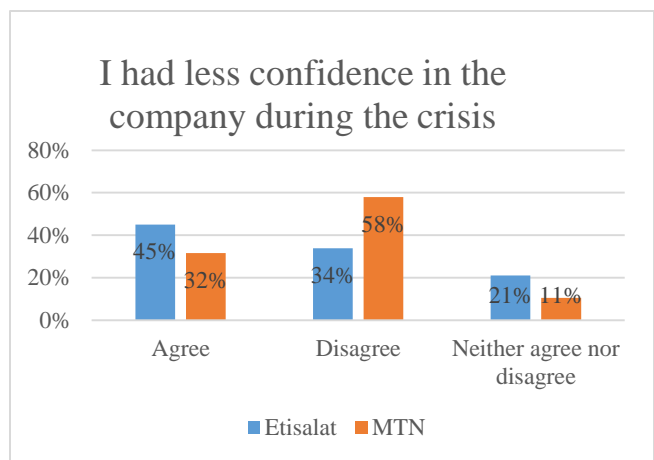
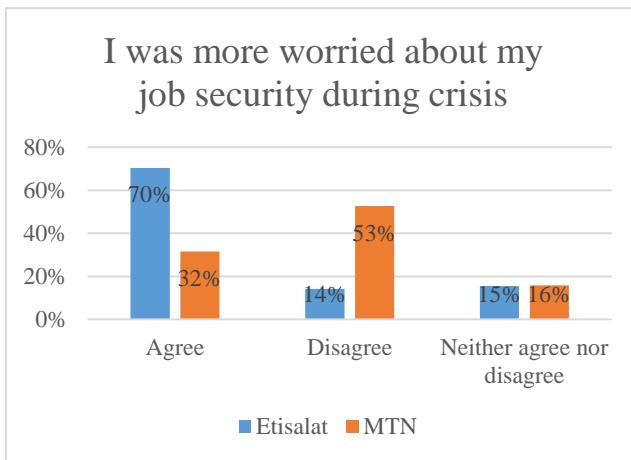
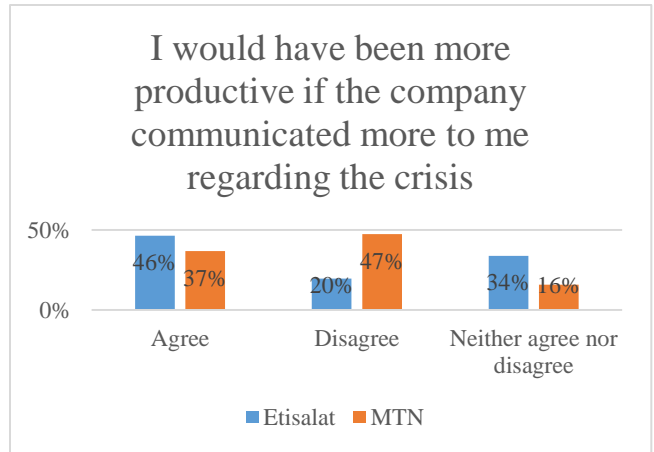
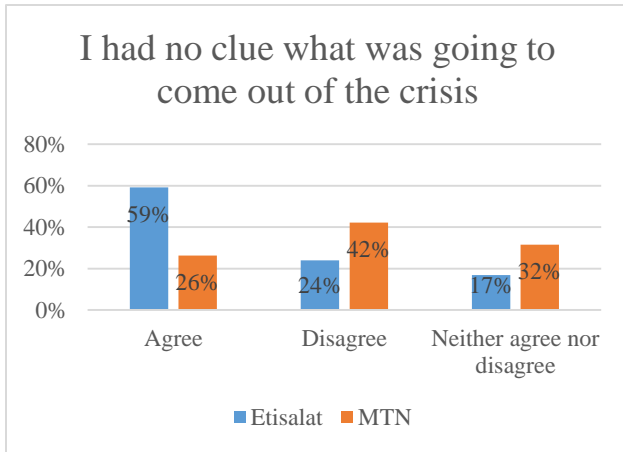
## Appendix B

## Research Question 1

*To what extent did internal communication take place during MTN and Etisalat crisis?*

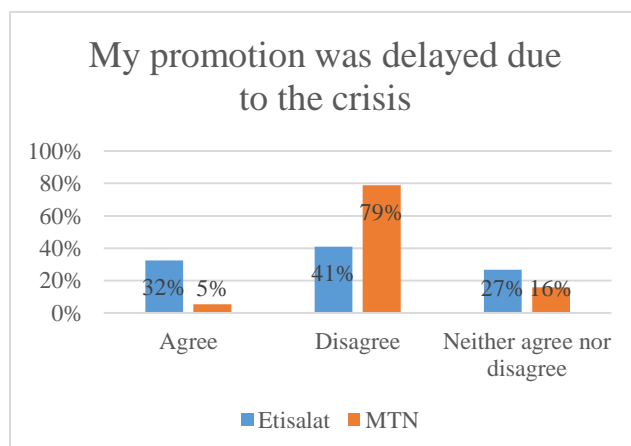
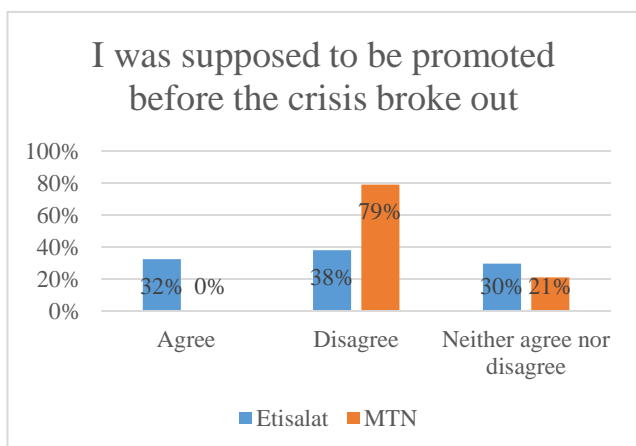
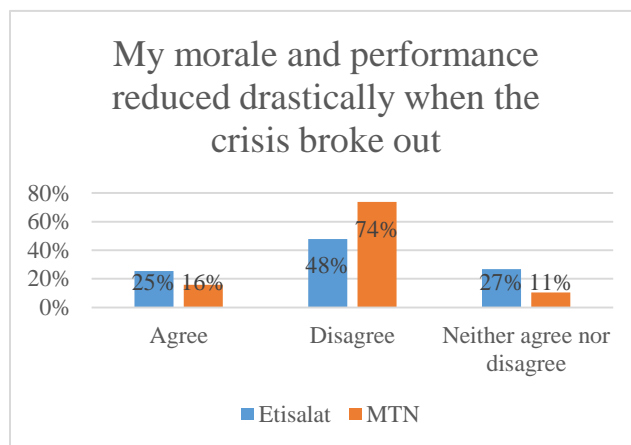
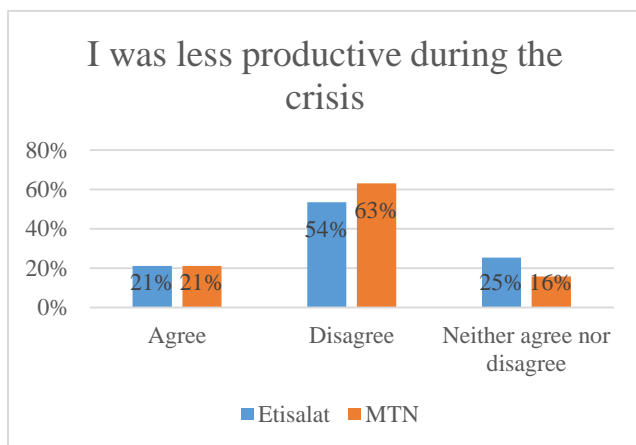
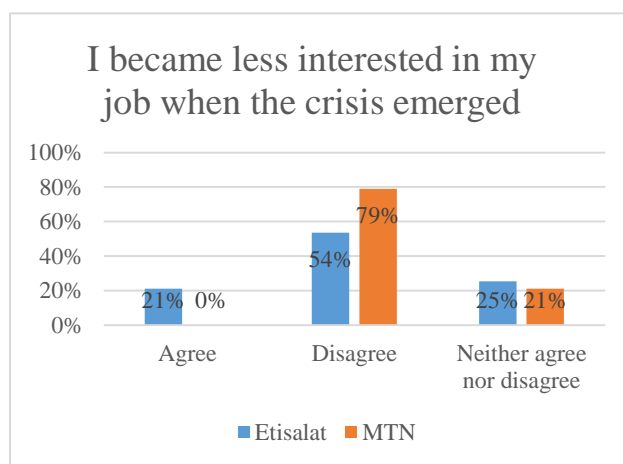
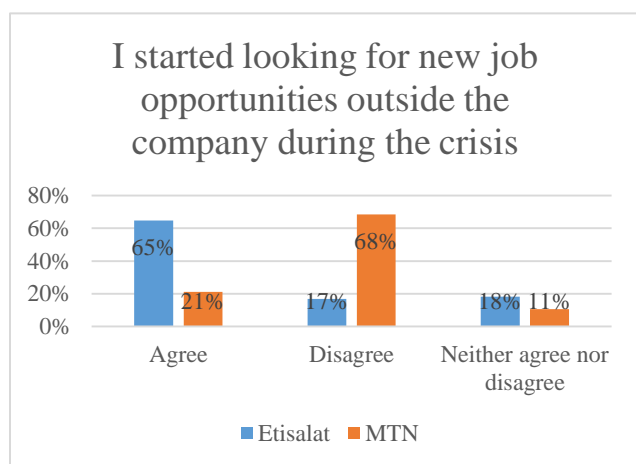


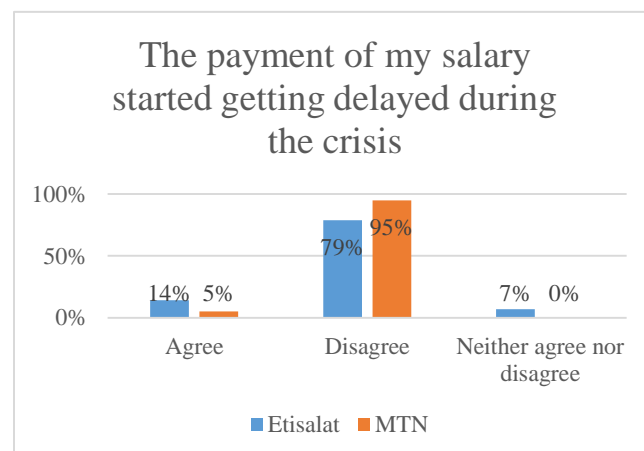
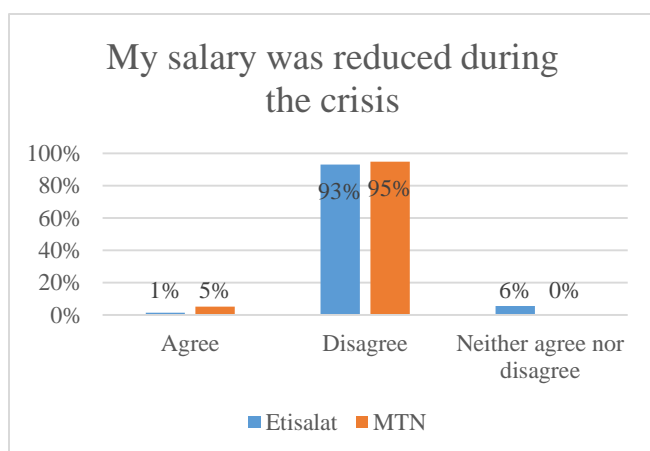
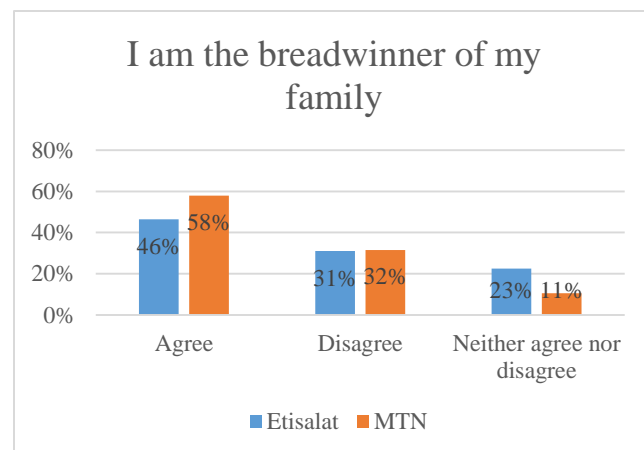
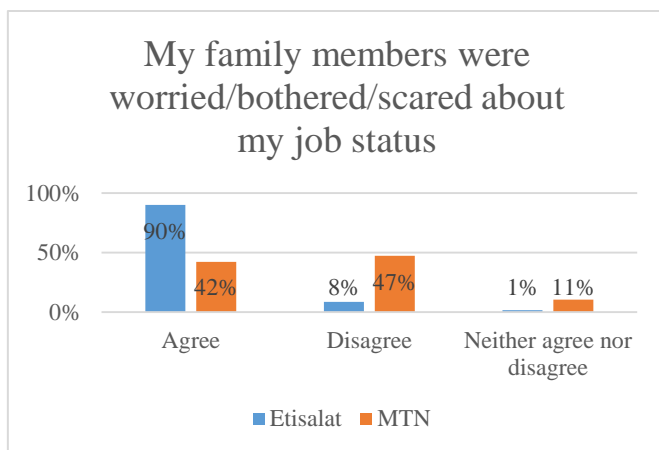




## Research Question 2

*What were the general effects of MTN 2015 and Etisalat 2017 crisis on their employees?*





### Research Question 3

*What were the health implications of MTN 2015 and Etisalat 2017 crisis on their employees?*

