ACADEMIC SCIENCE PRESS

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SOCIETY, CULTURE AND HUMAN SCIENCES
ISSN: 3143-6463

A Framing Analysis of Dangote Group's Press Releases Deployed During the 2020–2025 Organisational Crises

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
crisis communication,
framing theory,
press releases,
national interest frame,
dangote group.

Vol. 01, **No**. 05, 2026

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23562276

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ABSTRACT

Crisis texts do more than report events. They tell publics what the problem is, who caused it, how to judge it and what should happen next. This article applies Entman's framing theory to one question: what framing types and patterns characterise the press releases Dangote Group issued during its 2020 to 2025 organisational crises? The Group is Africa's largest industrial conglomerate. Its crises spanned a pandemic, regulatory disputes, rival attacks and a labour confrontation. Critical case sampling produced ten press releases from a population of twelve. This study identified six frame types and traced Entman's four framing functions through ten excerpts. Three clear patterns emerged. First, no release carried an apologetic frame, because no causal interpretation ever located the cause of a crisis in the Group's own conduct. Second, frame intensity tracked the identity of the accuser rather than the seriousness of the charge. Unattributed reports drew plain denial and state agencies drew defensive frames with procedural victimhood. Named individuals and rival associations drew personal moral accusation, and organised labour drew national interest frames couched in the language of national security. This paper calls this pattern adversary-contingent framing. Third, the national interest frame worked as a master frame across all four crisis categories, and the treatment recommendations repeatedly placed the remedy with the state or the public. The study shows how a market-dominant firm uses all four framing functions to keep responsibility away from itself.

1.0 Introduction

Every organisational crisis produces a contest over meaning. Someone must say what happened, who caused it, whether it was wrong and what should follow. Entman (1993) calls these four tasks the functions of a frame. A frame defines a problem, diagnoses its cause, makes a moral judgement and recommends a remedy. Boin et al. (2009) show that crises become framing contests in which rival actors compete to fix these meanings. The organisation at the centre of a crisis is one of those actors and its press releases are its most controlled contribution. Jacobs (1999) shows that press releases are preformulated so that journalists can reuse them with little change. A release therefore carries the frame the organisation wants the public to adopt.

Dangote Group is Africa's largest industrial conglomerate. Its 650,000 barrels per day refinery places it at the centre of Nigerian energy policy. Between 2020 and 2025, the Group faced crises across four categories. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted its supply chains. State agencies questioned its conduct. In January 2024, EFCC officers visited its Lagos headquarters during an inquiry into foreign exchange allocations to Dangote and 51 other firms (Techeconomy, 2024). Rival importers and marketers accused its refinery of market abuse and poor product quality. In September 2025, PENGASSAN ordered a nationwide withdrawal of services, accusing the refinery of dismissing workers for joining the union (Igwe, 2025). The Group answered each crisis with press releases.

This article asks one question: what framing types and patterns characterise the press releases Dangote Group deployed during its 2020 to 2025 organisational crises? This study answers it through Entman's framing theory. It read each release for its frame type and for Entman's four functions. The article makes three contributions. It documents the complete absence of apologetic framing and explains that absence through the causal function. It identifies a pattern called adversary-contingent framing. It

shows how a market-dominant firm uses the nation as a master frame that hands the remedy for its crises to others.

Review of Relevant Literature

Framing research has grown into several traditions. Scholars now distinguish frames in communication from frames in the minds of audiences (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Chong and Druckman (2007) also show that frames compete, and that a frame's strength depends on the rival frames around it. De Vreese (2005) separates frame building, where communicators shape frames, from frame setting, where frames shape audiences. This study examines frame building.

Studies of news frames supply a vocabulary for crisis framing. Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) identified five generic news frames: attribution of responsibility, conflict, human interest, economic consequences and morality. An and Gower (2009) applied these frames to 247 crisis news stories and found that the attribution of responsibility frame dominated coverage, although frame use varied by crisis type.

Hallahan (1999) carried framing into public relations. He treated the organisation as an active framer. Schultz et al. (2012) showed how this works in a major corporate crisis. BP's press releases during the 2010 oil spill dissociated the company from the cause while presenting it as the solver of the crisis. In Entman's terms, BP managed the causal function by distancing itself and the treatment function by claiming it. A more recent study took a different path. Nzau (2025) found that Southwest Airlines' press releases after its 2018 crisis carried accountability and concern-for-passengers frames, and that news coverage largely aligned with them.

Social movement research offers a parallel scheme. Benford and Snow (2000) divide collective action framing into diagnostic, prognostic and motivational tasks. Diagnosis and prognosis mirror Entman's causal and treatment functions. Benford and Snow (2000) add that frames resonate when they are credible and when they fit the cultural narratives of their audience.

Furthermore, an apology is a frame in which the organisation places itself inside the causal interpretation. It admits cause, accepts a negative moral evaluation and names corrective action as the treatment. Nigerian evidence shows that apology is available locally. Ogunyombo et al. (2024) found that MTN Nigeria used reminder, ingratiation, excuse, apology and compensation during its SIM registration crisis. The literature treats apology as available to firms under pressure but says little about firms that never use it. National belonging, by contrast, is a resource firms use readily. Yue et al. (2024) found that firms with more domestic customers were more likely to endorse a nationalist movement as they sought legitimacy. No study has traced how a private African firm uses the nation as a crisis frame.

To add, Nigerian framing research has concentrated on news media. Adeyemo and Elegbe (2019) reviewed 115 studies of industrial crisis reporting and found that content analysis and interviews dominated the field. Odoemelam et al. (2021) analysed 531 newspaper stories on oil pollution in the Niger Delta using Semetko and Valkenburg's five frames. Mbamalu (2020) found that Nigerian newspapers framed government as the most dominant actor in renewable energy coverage. These studies read frames in news, not the frames corporations build before the news is written. Dangote Group's own crisis texts have not received a framing analysis.

Entman (1993) defines framing as selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text "in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (p. 52). Three features of the theory guide this study.

The first is the four functions. Problem definition decides what the issue is and what it costs. Causal interpretation identifies the forces or actors behind it. Moral evaluation judges those actors and their effects. Treatment recommendation proposes remedies and predicts their results. Entman (2004) later distinguished substantive frames, which perform at least two of these functions, from simpler mentions. A crisis press release is a strong candidate for substantive framing, because it must explain a problem and position its author in relation to it. Matthes and Kohring (2008) showed that the four functions can be coded as separate elements and read together as a pattern.

The second is salience through selection and omission. Entman (1993) argues that frames work as much by what they leave out as by what they include. A frame gains power by making some information more noticeable and by keeping competing definitions, causes and remedies out of view. For a crisis text, the omitted cause can matter as much as the named one.

The third is power and resonance. Entman (1993) locates frames in the communicator, the text, the receiver and the culture. Entman (2007) links framing directly to the distribution of power. Consistent frames across many texts can favour one side of a conflict over another. For a conglomerate that feeds preformulated texts to a national media system, frames are attempts to win a contest over responsibility.

Methodology

The study used a descriptive qualitative design based on framing analysis. The population comprised every official Dangote Group press release that addressed a specific crisis event between January 2020 and December 2025, excluding routine product, price and financial announcements. Each text had to be traceable to an official Group channel and available in full. Twelve releases qualified across four categories: pandemic response, state and regulatory disputes, disputes with rivals and media allegations, and labour relations.

This study applied critical case sampling, which selects cases whose patterns are likely to hold elsewhere (Patton, 2015). Selection criteria were coverage of all four categories, variation in communicative posture, spread across the five years and completeness of text. Where several releases answered one event, it kept the earliest. The sample held ten releases, about 83% of the population. Texts came from dangote.com, refinery.dangote.com, the Group's Africa Newsroom archive and verified Nigerian media, each cross-checked against a second source. For PR4 it analysed only the statements of Devakumar Edwin, Vice President of Dangote Industries Limited.

The analysis ran in two stages. In the first, it coded each release for one dominant frame and any secondary frames from six types. Defensive framing denies wrongdoing. Accommodative framing acknowledges concern without accepting full responsibility. Apologetic framing accepts responsibility and commits to correction. Resistance framing rejects critics and asserts that the Group acted correctly. National interest framing ties the Group's position to Nigeria's development, sovereignty or security. Victim framing presents the Group as a target of unfair treatment. In the second stage, it traced Entman's four functions through each release, following the element-based logic of Matthes and Kohring (2008). This study's analysis also recorded omissions, such as a critic's stated grievance that a release never mentions. Ten excerpts, chosen by the same critical case logic, illustrate the findings.

Findings

The findings follow Entman's four functions.

Problem Definition: Each release defined its crisis in a way that set up the frame that followed.

Excerpt 1: "Currently, our supply chain is operational, but there may be slight delay to our usual turn-around time due to the prevailing circumstances. Nonetheless, please be rest assured of our concerted efforts to continue to produce and deliver safe and wholesome Sugar brands." (PR1)

PR1 is the only release with no accuser behind it. It defines the problem as a global event that reached everyone. The excerpt holds the only concession of harm in the sample. "Slight" shrinks the delay before the reader meets it. "Nonetheless" turns the reader back to reassurance. The frame is accommodative. Earlier in the release, the Group calls itself "a responsible corporate citizen" with "a recognised and important role to play in this crisis". The national interest frame is present even in a sugar company's pandemic update.

Excerpt 2: "These reports are false, malicious, and misleading... The cargo in question is an intermediate feedstock, not finished petrol, and will be fully refined in our units to meet Nigerian and international quality standards." (PR7)

PR7 answers unattributed reports that the refinery imported high-sulphur petrol. It defines the problem as false information. The denial is the bluntest in the sample, yet the frame does not escalate. With no named source, there is no one to condemn and no saboteur to invoke. PR7 is the clearest case of pure defensive framing.

Excerpt 3: “This exercise is not arbitrary. It has become necessary to safeguard the refinery from repeated acts of sabotage that have raised safety concerns... Only a very small number of staff were affected...” (PR10)

PR10 answers criticism of worker dismissals. The problem is not job loss. The problem is sabotage. The release makes the threat to the refinery salient and keeps the dismissed workers’ account out of view. The passive “were affected” removes the Group as the agent of dismissal. The release later affirms “the right of every worker to freely decide whether or not to join a union”. That concession gives PR10 a partial accommodative frame, but it does not change the problem definition.

Causal Interpretation: The causal function shows the sharpest pattern in the sample. No release places the cause of a crisis in the Group’s own conduct. The releases moved cause outward in three ways: onto state conduct, onto another state body and onto hidden collectives.

Excerpt 4: “Whilst our representatives were still at the EFCC’s office to deliver the documents, a team of their officers proceeded to visit our offices to demand for the same documents in a manner that appeared designed to cause us unwarranted embarrassment.” (PR2)

PR2 opens with dates, letters and the detail that 51 other companies received the same request. That detail makes the inquiry routine. Excerpt 4 then moves the causal interpretation from coincidence to design. A victim frame surfaces inside a defensive release. This study calls this procedural victimhood. The Group presents itself as wronged by the manner of state action rather than its substance.

Excerpt 5: “To clarify, we have never accused NNPC of not supplying us with crude. Our concern has always been NUPRC’s reluctance to enforce the domestic crude supply obligation.” (PR3)

PR3 does not deny that a supply problem existed. It moves the cause from one state body to another. PR4 works in a similar way. There, the Vice President lists shifting demands from an unnamed “they”, first about crude availability and later about price. The accumulation implies bad faith without answering any single claim.

Excerpt 6: “For nearly three decades, cartels and their collaborators have sabotaged efforts to develop Nigeria’s refining capacity, keeping the country dependent on imported products.” (PR5)

PR5 began as a reply to one executive. Here the cause expands into a faceless collective with a thirty-year history. A commercial disagreement becomes national sabotage. It also becomes impossible to test, because an unnamed cartel cannot answer back.

Moral Evaluation: Moral language rose sharply whenever a release named a person or an organised group.

Excerpt 7: “he had deceitfully approached us and pleaded that we extend the pipeline from our refinery to Pinnacle’s tank farms... We categorically rejected his request... because it would be a betrayal of the Nigerian people’s trust.” (PR5)

PR5 names Robert Dickerman, chief executive of Pinnacle Oil and Gas. “Deceitfully” judges character, not policy. The Group’s refusal becomes loyalty to “the Nigerian people”. Resistance and national interest frames join in one sentence.

Excerpt 8: “If anyone claims they can land PMS at a price cheaper than what we are selling, then they are importing substandard products and conniving with international traders to dump low quality products into the country, without concern for the health of Nigerians.” (PR6)

PR6 answers the IPMAN and PETROAN associations. The conditional sentence turns any lower price into proof of wrongdoing. The release passes a moral judgement without citing a specific act. Public health enters as a national stake.

Excerpt 9: “This statement is both misleading and mischievous, deliberately aimed at undermining the milestone achievement recorded today, September 15, 2024, towards addressing energy insufficiency and insecurity” (PR8)

PR8 names Olufemi Soneye, spokesperson of NNPCL. “Mischievous” judges motive. Within one sentence, a pricing dispute becomes an attack on national energy security. The same pattern reaches its peak in PR9. There, the Group calls its side of the labour dispute “our righteous cause” and sets itself against “rent seekers, economic saboteurs and economic squatters”.

Treatment Recommendation

Excerpt 10: "...who worked tirelessly to roll back the lawless directives of PENGASSAN and restore sanity and order to the energy subsector were Nigeria's Security Chiefs" (PR9)

The union's conduct appears only as "disruptive" and "lawless". The release never states what the union demanded. That omission is the frame's most important choice. The treatment is state force, credited after the fact. Naming the Security Chiefs moves a workplace dispute into the register of national security.

PR5 recommends a similar treatment in plainer words. It calls on "the government, patriotic Nigerians, and local businesses to remain steadfast in defending the country's sovereignty and economic independence". Across the sample, the remedy lies with the state, the public or an outside body in six releases. Where the Group names itself as the remedy (PR1, PR2, PR7, PR10), that remedy is precaution, cooperation, disclosure or reorganisation. It is never correction of the Group's own conduct.

Table 1: Adversary, Frames and Frame Functions Across the Ten Press Releases

Release	Adversary	Dominant Frame	Secondary Frame(s)	Causal Interpretation	Treatment Recommendation
PR1	None	Accommodative	National interest	Global external event	Group's own precautions
PR2	State agency	Defensive	Victim, national interest	Regulator's conduct	Group cooperation
PR3	State agency	Defensive	National interest	Another regulator's inaction	Regulator to enforce obligation
PR4	Unnamed critics	National interest	Victim, resistance	Shifting demands of "they"	External monitoring of NNPCL
PR5	Named individual, cartels	Resistance	National interest, victim	Cartels and saboteurs	State and patriotic public
PR6	Rival associations	Resistance	National interest, defensive	Substandard importers	Public distrust of cheaper imports
PR7	Unattributed reports	Defensive	None strongly present	False reports	Documents offered to public
PR8	Named state official	Defensive	National interest	Mischievous misattribution	Public to await official pricing
PR9	Organised labour	National interest	Victim	Lawless union action	State and security intervention
PR10	Labour critics	Defensive	Accommodative, national interest	Sabotage	Reorganisation

Source: Authors' analysis (2026)

Table 1 shows three patterns. First, no release carries an apologetic frame. Second, frame intensity rises with the identity of the accuser. Unattributed reports receive plain denial. State agencies receive defence with procedural victimhood. Named individuals and rival associations receive personal moral accusation. Organised labour receives national security framing. Third, the national interest frame appears in nine of the ten releases and in every crisis category.

Discussion

Adversary-Contingent Framing

The Group's frames tracked who accused it more closely than what it was accused of. A pricing dispute with a named official drew moral language. A detailed charge about fuel quality from unnamed sources drew none. This study calls this adversary-contingent framing. It fits Boin et al.'s (2009) view of crises as framing contests and Chong and Druckman's (2007) point that frames respond to rival frames. When the rival is an institution, the Group contests procedure. When the rival is a person, it contests character. When the rival is organised labour able to halt fuel supply, it recruits the state.

Entman's functions show how the escalation works. As the accuser becomes more concrete, the moral evaluation grows harsher. As the accuser becomes more powerful, the causal interpretation widens

from a person to a hidden collective, and the treatment moves from the public to the state. For market-dominant firms, the identity of the accuser may predict frame intensity better than the type of crisis.

The Absent Apology

The absence of apology follows from the causal function. An apologetic frame requires the organisation to name itself as a cause. Not one release in the sample did so. Every causal interpretation pointed to a pandemic, a regulator, a rival, a cartel, a union or false reports. Once cause sits elsewhere, the moral evaluation cannot fall on the Group, and the treatment cannot be correction of its conduct. The four functions lock together to exclude apology.

Southwest Airlines framed its crisis around accountability (Nzau, 2025). MTN Nigeria apologised and offered compensation (Ogunyombo et al., 2024). The Nigerian setting alone therefore does not explain Dangote's pattern, but market position may help. Nigerian buyers of refined fuel have few domestic alternatives to the Dangote refinery. A firm under weak competitive pressure may feel little need to accept blame. It offers this as an interpretation that texts alone cannot test. News coverage of crises centres on responsibility (An & Gower, 2009), so a firm that never frames its own responsibility leaves that task to the press.

The Nation as Master Frame

Entman (1993) argues that frames resonate when they draw on culture. Benford and Snow (2000) call this narrative fidelity. The national interest frame is the Group's most culturally resonant choice. The Group tells a story in which its commercial survival and Nigeria's sovereignty are one. PR10 presents job cuts as protection of "this strategic national asset".

The treatment function shows why this matters. BP distanced itself from cause but claimed the solution (Schultz et al., 2012). Dangote Group distanced itself from cause and also assigned the solution to government, security chiefs and patriotic citizens. In Benford and Snow's (2000) terms, the Group's diagnosis blamed others and its prognosis asked others to act. Entman (2007) argues that consistent frames can tilt the distribution of power. A frame that makes the nation both victim and remedy lets a private firm's disputes become public obligations. Yue et al. (2024) treat nationalism as a source of legitimacy. Our evidence shows that it can also redistribute responsibility.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Dangote Group framed every accusation between 2020 and 2025 through denial, redirection or counter-accusation. Its causal interpretations always pointed away from itself, so it never apologised. It matched the intensity of its moral evaluations to the identity of its accusers. It used the nation as a master frame and placed the remedy for its crises mostly with others. Communicators in dominant firms should weigh the long-term cost of this pattern, since audiences who notice the escalation may discount the national claim.

The study has limits. It examines frame building in the releases and does not measure frame setting in audiences. It covers one firm in one national setting. Future work can compare other market-dominant firms, test accuser identity experimentally and study how Nigerian audiences receive the national interest frame.

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