A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION TOOLS USE IN AID DELIVERY TO INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN POST-CONFLICT AREAS: A CASE STUDY OF HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES IN NIGERIA

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CONTENTS

Acronyms

EU - European Union

GPS - Global Positioning System

ICTs - Information and Communication Technologies

IDPs - Internally Displaced Persons

NGOs - Non-Governmental Organizations

OCHA - Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

UN - United Nations

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

WFP - World Food Programme

Abstract

With the rise of conflicts in Nigeria, humanitarian agencies have been helping thousands of internally displaced persons who had to flee their homes because of violence. The Nigerian government and local and international aid agencies have used digital communication tools to close information gaps, deliver aid, and spread awareness among displaced people. This study aimed to understand how these digital tools help in the aid process and to find the challenges of using them in post-conflict areas. Twelve communication experts were interviewed to gather information. These experts were involved in delivering aid to IDPs and shared how they use digital media to send important information and ensure aid reaches those in need.

The findings from the interviews revealed that digital communication tools, such as mobile phones, messaging apps, and social media, make aid delivery faster and more efficient by allowing quick information sharing and reducing the need for travel. Digital tools also support fundraising and help track aid distribution. However, risks arise from reliance on technology in areas with poor internet access and there are concerns of external control over aid resembling colonial practices. The study suggests combining digital tools with traditional community-based methods to improve aid delivery. Recommendations include improving digital infrastructure, teaching digital skills to local populations, and maintaining face-to-face interactions to better understand local needs. Future research should explore the best digital communication tools for use in post-conflict Nigeria, how IDPs with low literacy engage with digital tools, and how digital communication reduces gender-based violence and protects vulnerable groups, such as women and children, from human trafficking.

Keywords:

Digital, communication tools, aid delivery, humanitarian agencies, post-conflict, internally displaced persons, Nigeria

Justification and relevance of this research

In today's digital age, access to timely information is important for vulnerable persons, including internally displaced persons, as it improves their access to support and resources. This study is important because it seeks to understand the effect of digital communication tools on aid delivery to IDPs. The study examines the relationship between aid delivery and digital communication tools and how this relationship shows how technology improves coordination, makes processes quicker and empowers IDPs through information. Nigeria presents a critical case for this investigation due to its longstanding humanitarian crises and increasing population of IDPs estimated to be one of the highest in Africa. Nigeria has seen an increase in humanitarian agencies adopting digital communication tools in recent years in areas affected by conflict and displacement. This shift reflects a global trend toward integrating technology in aid efforts but raises unique challenges in post-conflict settings.

The research contributes to understanding how digital communication tools are optimised to reach and support IDPs well while explaining the obstacles IDPs face in Nigeria such as access to devices, connectivity, and digital literacy. As technology rapidly evolves, assessing the practices of humanitarian agencies using digital communication tools contributes to wider discussions on integrating technology into humanitarian aid. Moreover, findings from this study will offer strategic results to improve aid delivery frameworks and support systems for IDPs in Nigeria and other areas with similar contexts globally. Adopting innovative approaches in humanitarian assistance has the potential to create more sustainable development outcomes in conflict-affected regions. This research is further justified by the existing knowledge gap regarding the integration of digital communication tools in humanitarian work targeted toward IDPs in Nigeria. There is a growing body of literature on digital tools in humanitarian response. However, limited research has been done on how humanitarian agencies are deploying these tools to reach out to the IDP population in Nigeria.

Chapter 1

1.0 Introduction

The study examines the role of digital communication tools in providing information and raising awareness among internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria. With over 3 million Nigerians displaced due to the activities of Boko Haram, armed groups, and violent conflicts between herders and farmers in the North-East, Middle Belt, and North-West regions, the humanitarian need has surged (UNHCR, 2021). In collaboration with local and international agencies, the Nigerian government has been working to minimise the risks of information gaps and improve awareness among displaced populations (Beigbeder, 2023). Digital technologies are being adopted in humanitarian responses worldwide, changing how aid is delivered and received in crises. Digital messaging applications like WhatsApp and SMS have shown greater efficacy in quickly reaching displaced individuals than traditional communication channels. They allow for good coordination among field operatives who rely on these tools for timely updates and information sharing. Humanitarian organisations use social media to solicit donations and increase awareness to improve their outreach efforts (Akyildiz et al., 2020).

Beyond communication, digital tools such as biometric systems, including iris scans and fingerprint verification are reshaping how aid recipients are identified and supported. These technologies enable aid distribution and improve security, reducing fraud and misuse of resources. In recent years, humanitarian agencies have also adopted predictive models using machine learning to trigger funding for communities likely to experience crises, such as drought or food insecurity. This evolving digital approach impacts nearly all facets of humanitarian work, from operational efficiency to resource allocation. While digital tools provide advancements, they also present challenges related to ethical responsibility. Issues such as equitable access to technology, consent, and data privacy remain pressing concerns. Digital mapping tools and social media enable some crisis-affected populations to advocate for themselves, while others are recorded without clear control over their data. The lack of agency exposes the already vulnerable individuals to further risk, as in the case of the unauthorised sharing of Rohingya refugees' biometric data with the

Myanmar government (HRW, 2021). In this study, the focus on Nigeria helps to examine digital communication tools in humanitarian efforts as the integration of digital technologies in aid work continues to grow.

1.1 Contextual background

Digital technologies have been important to humanitarian responses and fasten access to crisis support worldwide. Information and communication technology tools are becoming major in humanitarian work (Bock et al., 2020). In response to the increased number of internally displaced persons in Nigeria due to Boko Haram and other non-state armed groups, as well as clashes between herders and farmers, UN agencies and other humanitarian organisations use digital tools in their programs and projects alongside the commonly used traditional methods which require complex logistical resources (Madon & Schoemaker, 2021). In conflict-affected areas, using digital communications is important to improve access to information. In traditional methods, if the organisation wants to give basic needs like food to the displaced people, their staff must travel and register beneficiaries on paper, which is time-consuming and sometimes poses a threat to the staff (Ada & Abdullahi, 2022). On the other hand, when digital tools are used, these vulnerable persons receive a text for any humanitarian assistance (Alencar et al., 2019).

In the same way, the Nigerian government is working along with local and international agencies to provide basic assistance to displaced individuals to minimise the risks of information gap regarding aid and create awareness among IDPs. "Information is an important form of aid itself", thus people affected by conflicts need information as much as food, water, medicine, or shelter. Information saves lives, resources and livelihoods (Bowsher et al., 2021). The internet has more influence today than mainstream media such as television or radio and as such smart devices have been developed for every aspect of life (Macias, 2020). Humanitarian agencies have adopted digital tools in their operations for various purposes, for example Redcross Nigeria has a donation button on its website so that people can watch and help their initiatives (Mahmoud, 2023). However, many IDPs do not have access to these

digital tools and being on the receiver end, they cannot receive information about aid through digital media (Talhouk et al., 2020).

Previous studies suggest that digital communication technology is a 'driver and a result' of humanitarian development (Sandvik, 2016:20). These tools have the potential to challenge the traditional 'top-down structure of humanitarianism' by giving affected individuals a measure of voice (p.22). Read et al. (2016) argue that digital tools offer opportunities to transform power relations and reshape power relations between agencies and recipients. However, a research gap remains in understanding whether and how these tools increase the efficiency of aid delivery. Most existing studies have focused on how digital communication is integrated into humanitarian work, with limited research employing field studies to establish its effects on aid delivery efficiency. This study seeks to address this gap by assessing digital communication tools used in aid delivery in post-conflict areas.

1.2 Research problem

The displacement of individuals from their homes and countries due to war and crises is a global phenomenon that affects millions of persons globally (Chamie, 2020). Over the years, the number of individuals displaced has been increasing, and during this life-threatening issue, the use of digital communication tools has become important (Bock et al., 2020). Bock et al. further extend that digital communication tools have the potential to improve efforts to assist displaced individuals, liberate them, or assist each other. Digital communication tools are used to share important information and stay connected with relatives. In most cases, during transition, many IDPs rely on the Global Positional System [GPS] function on their phones to guide themselves and arrive at the right destinations (Nguyen et al., 2020). Many apps have been designed for IDPs which share information on language, shelter, food aid, application for asylum, culture and language. Therefore, digital communication tools are a major source of information access for IDPs (Sklar, 2021).

Although most studies focus on the benefits of digital communication tools, there are risks associated with their use. Pajuste et al. (2022) document

that misinformation causes displaced populations' panic and leads to misdirected aid efforts. In response, humanitarian organisations have used digital communication tools to improve worker coordination, allowing for faster aid distribution. Many NGOs and governments collaborate during crises using these tools to disseminate information about aid and manage logistics (Kovács & Falagara Sigala, 2021). In addition, several agencies use digital platforms to raise awareness and funds, embedding donation buttons on their websites to engage the public in their initiatives. Despite these advances, many IDPs do not have access to these digital tools, and being on the receiver end, they cannot receive information about aid through digital media (McKeon, 2020). Therefore, this study critically examines digital communication tools used in aid delivery by humanitarian agencies in post-conflicted areas in Nigeria.

1.3 Chapter outline

The first section of the RP introduces the study and presents a contextual background and statement of the research problem. Further, it shows the justification of the study, describing why it is important to carry out it. Also, research questions and objectives are presented, including the current state of the academic field in the research area. The second chapter reviews the existing literature on the area of study. In this review, the study presents the research gaps that need to be addressed. The third chapter presents the methodology I used to complete the study. The nature of the data needs to be mentioned, as well as the plan to collect, analyse, and present that data. The findings of the study are presented in chapter four. In chapter five, the researcher discussed the findings and what other scholars have done in line with the study topic. Finally, chapter six presented conclusions for the study and give recommendations on what could be done to improve practices on the topic.

Chapter 2
Theoretical and literature review

The use of ICT in the humanitarian sphere is growing in its design and implementation at prevention and response levels (Suifan et al., 2020). Social media, mobile phones, electronic transfers, big-data analytics and crisis mapping allow beneficiaries to make informed decisions in humanitarian work, create situational awareness and improve delivery of aid (Sandvik et al., 2014). This section presents review on the use of digital communication tools for humanitarian activities, Information as aid, structure compositions of humanitarian aid agencies, humanitarian aid as a new form of colonialism.

2.1 Use of digital communication tools for humanitarian activities

Digital communication tools in the humanitarian sector refers to use of technology to improve the quality of mitigation, prevention, preparedness to the crisis, effective response, recovery and rebuilding, and collective efforts (Shittu et al., 2018). It is seen in a notion of information-as-aid corresponding to an emerging conception of a right to and access to humanitarian information. Digital communications tool are more widespread and increasingly universal in aid sector (Ghadge, 2023). With the potential to correct inefficiencies and increase transparency in local communities, digital technologies facilitate two-way communication between agencies and affected communities (Shuvo et al., 2022).

Previous studies have identified that digital communication tools improve the effectiveness of humanitarian activities, especially in humanitarian crises. First, these tools facilitate improved information-sharing during all stages of crisis management: mitigation, prevention, preparedness, response, recovery, and rebuilding (Shittu et al., 2018). This aligns with the emerging idea of "information-as-aid," which shows the right to access humanitarian information as a key aspect of assistance. The widespread adoption of digital communication tools in the aid sector reflects a shift toward greater transparency and engagement with local communities (Ghadge, 2023). Second, digital communication tools enable two-way communication between humanitarian agencies and affected populations, allowing information exchange. Shuvo et al. (2022) argue that digital tools address inefficiencies and

facilitate response. This interaction is important in post-conflict areas, where timely information improves aid delivery.

Humanitarian needs have grown ever-increasingly over the past two decades (Pusterla and Pusterla 2021). The emergence of COVID-19, coupled with existing crises, led to an increase in the need for humanitarian assistance over the globe. In 2021, over 30 million people were said to require humanitarian assistance, and nations experiencing pro-longed crises have doubled to over 36 in the last 10 years. According to UNHCR (2021), there were over 82.4 million forcibly displaced people worldwide at the end of 2021. People affected by a crisis need timely and enough humanitarian assistance. However, globally, the available resources compared to the humanitarian needs is big and expanding (Joshi et al., 2022).

In response to the challenges humanitarian organizations face, there has been a growing trend towards integrating digital communication tools in the humanitarian sector. Over the past two decades, global internet access has increased with widespread availability of affordable smartphones facilitating participation in social media networks. Smartphones have become common devices that provide internet access which is important when using border crossings in search of shelter (Niyazi & Behnamian, 2023). Researchers have sought to understand how digital technology such as social media can aid in humanitarian assistance. Kumar et al. (2022) highlighted how refugees receive vital information from governments, NGOs, and fellow migrants via social media channels, noting that "In migration networks, information coming from governments, NGOs, and previous migrants' experiences circulates. This information is exchanged through social media" (p.575).

Talhouk et al. (2016) revealed that humanitarian agencies face obstacles in disseminating health information due to the low literacy rates prevalent among refugees in Lebanon. They found that female refugees relied more on face-to-face communication with their peers rather than seeking information from healthcare providers. In addressing the Syrian crisis, UN agencies and other organisations employ digital tools alongside traditional methods like in-kind distribution, provision of health kits, and winter kits, which often involve complex logistical processes and time for packaging and distribution.

Electronic-enabled information dissemination through mobile phones and text messages improves humanitarian procedures. For instance, cash distributions require staff to transport cash and manually register beneficiaries, which is time-consuming and poses safety risks (Talhouk et al. 2016). However, using digital means, refugees receive a text message each month notifying them that their monthly allowance has been deposited into their account, thus reducing the risk of fraud and improving staff safety.

The emergence of new digital communication technologies has introduced novel methods of information sharing within aid work, aiming to improve service delivery and increase the efficiency of humanitarian efforts. Many humanitarian agencies now consider digital tools, such as mobile phones in their interventions. Organisations like UNHCR rely on mobile phones as core means of communication and information dissemination to IDPs. In addition, tablets and other ICTs are used for data collection and assessments. In Jordan, UNHCR uses mobile teams to conduct home visits and gather data to develop their Vulnerability Assessment Framework. In this, many digital tools facilitate access for IDPs to submit claims related to cash and other services appeals (Ghadge, 2023).

In Zimbabwe, Vhikai et al. (2024) established that integrating digitalised supply-chain management systems, such as barcode readers and tracking solutions, was important in creating improved information management and co-ordination. However, the study found knowledge-sharing barriers and increased vulnerability to cyber security threats as challenges caused by use of digital tools in humanitarian work in Zimbabwe. Jurko (2022) found that digital communication tools also contribute to disaster preparation and response, besides helping transfer information via remote communication and establishing management procedures during a crisis. They mitigate the effect of a crisis by spreading early warning through text messages and getting direct feedback from affected individuals receiving aid through SMS.

From the literature reviewed, it is established that digital communication tools have led to increased efficiency on aid delivery, especially for conflicted areas (Ghadge, 2023). However, in many cases, technical experts have manipulated digital systems to misappropriate resources. For example, fund

transfers intended for aid receipts are diverted by corrupt officials, who alter records to cover up the fraud. In addition, individuals who control access to digital platforms create new gatekeeping forms that negatively affect aid delivery. These intermediaries charge fees for access to digital platforms, proritise others, manipulate information flow and create inequalities within the affected communities. As such they hinder direct communication between aid organisations and recipients, making it difficult to assess needs and respond well (Talhouk et al. 2016).

2.1.1 Information as aid

Information is an important form of aid because individuals affected by a crisis need information as much as they need food, water, medicine, or shelter (Ragini et al., 2018). After a disaster, such as an earthquake or outbreak of war, the first individuals to act are the affected persons. If humanitarian agencies get the right information to them during that time, it will save lives, resources, and livelihoods. During this time, humanitarian agencies work hand in hand to ensure messages about the kind of help needed, such as where to shelter, get food, or fetch safe water to drink. Borkrt et al. (2018) did a study on 83 refugees who came to Europe, and the purpose of their study was to understand the information needs and digital literacy of the people in Europe. Their study found out that 71% of information was about learning a new language while 61% said they used communication technology to understand culture of destination nations. The study established that information was very useful in understanding the political, social, and economic situation of the destination states and helped them choose the state they wanted to go to.

A study by Twigt (2018) on the mediation of prolonged displacement in the Iraqi refugee household in Jordan found that digital communication tools helped to wait in prolonged displacement conditions and showed that staying in Jordan is a temporary shelter for them – giving an experience of waiting. She explained that having digital connectivity supports refugees when they want to stay in another state. Similarly, Gillespie et al. (2018) established that migrant deaths were common in areas with no mobile phone coverage and rescue operations were initiated by migrants using their mobile phones. The study

noted that smartphones supported them with information on safe areas, locating areas and movement.

In addition, humanitarian agencies use digital platforms such as social media to coordinate management functions, communicate and educate their affected people about their programs. For example, Sandvik et al. (2014) found that digital communication tools such as mobile phones contributed to disaster response besides assisting in transferring information and remote communication. They help to spread early warnings through text messages and direct feedback from affected communities.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA] operates a virtual platform, 'On-site operations coordination centre' that stores data about a crisis and facilitates communication with the international communities. The platform aims to give real-time information concerning the crisis. Therefore, digital communication platforms create awareness about a disaster and helps lobby support for victims and get more aid from international community. NGOs such as UNHCR have a good network with governments of leading countries including big corporations, thus can spread messages about the vulnerability of people who need humanitarian assistance using digital public network of political leaders, activists and journalists. The area where assistance is needed gets more attention from many platforms such as X, Facebook, Tiktok, Instagram, and others.

Humanitarian organisations use social media networks to show their activities during crises. Almost every humanitarian group whether local or international has an account or page on popular social networking sites like Facebook, X, or Instagram. Humanitarian agencies have invested enough resources to create engaging websites, produce short videos and documentaries, and package their content in formats that allow easy sharing across different media platforms. Yang and Saffer (2018) found that while NGOs have limited influence over traditional media coverage, they have impact on social media discussions about refugee crisis. Therefore, NGOs gather information and human-interest stories that portray the reality of refugees' journeys and struggles and distribute this information through social media.

While digital communication tools have created effective information flow, there is an issue of loss of human contact in aid processes which could help in understanding the needs of affected communities and ensure that aid is delivered appropriately (Lucien-Fobi, 2017). The provision of aid through digital means leads to disconnect between the agencies and the communities they serve, reducing the quality of aid interventions (Hirblinger et al., 2023). In addition, I believe that putting emphasis on digital tools marginalises those without access to technology or digital literacy. In many post-conflicted areas, reliable internet access and digital infrastructure are lacking, even in well-developed economies. Thus, vulnerable populations lack skills and resources to use digital tools well. This digital divide results in imbalances in aid distribution, and those who are already disadvantaged become more marginalised. The other issue I have identified in using digital communication tools in aid delivery is decrease in personal accountability of aid workers. When aid is delivered through digital platforms, there is a risk that aid workers become detached from human impact of their work leading to less responsive aid delivery (Roth, 2015).

2.2 Colonial History of Nigeria

The colonial history of Nigeria has created social, economic, and political structures that continue to affect humanitarian aid in helping internally displaced persons in post-conflict situations. The British colonial system introduced "indirect rule," governing through local leaders and creating regional differences in education and resources (Utile, 2022). This led to imbalanced development across Nigeria, with the North and South experiencing different levels of access to education, infrastructure, and economic opportunities (Fisher, 1984). This imbalance still affects how aid is delivered, as regions with limited infrastructure (North) face extra challenges in adopting digital communication tools that are important for aid distribution.

The British also strengthened power balance by allying with influential groups such as the Fulani rulers in the North, to maintain control (Lange, 2005). Such alliances privileged certain groups over others, leading to long-lasting social divisions. In humanitarian work, similar power relationships

emerged when agencies, for logistical ease, work with dominant regional groups (Seybolt, 2009). This unintentionally resemble colonial practices, favouring elites and excluding local communities who feel that aid distribution prioritises certain regions. In addition, religion also affected how different parts of Nigeria view humanitarian efforts. In Southern Nigeria, missionary education empowered a Christian-educated elite, creating a tradition of resistance to outside influence, while certain Northern communities remained doubful of Western aid (Barnes, 1995). These historical attitudes affect how digital tools for aid are received today. Humanitarian aid still shapes Nigeria's society and politics, keeping some of the same unfair power structures that existed during colonial times. Humanitarian agencies must be mindful of these legacies to avoid increasing mistrust, as poor handling of aid delivery could deepen existing societal divides (Fast, 2014).

2.3 Structure compositions of humanitarian aid agencies

Humanitarian aid agencies in conflict zones, such as Nigeria's northeastern region affected by the Boko Haram insurgency, adopt adaptive structures to respond to the challenges posed by ongoing violence, instability, and displacement. In Nigeria, the conflict in states like Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa has caused displacement, leading to humanitarian needs, including food security, healthcare, shelter, and protection from violence. Humanitarian agencies operate through structures designed to meet immediate emergency responses and longer-term recovery efforts (Middleton & O'Keefe, 1998).

At the top of these agencies' structures are leadership and governance bodies responsible for decision-making. High-level decision-makers, including executive directors and regional heads, work with international bodies such as the United Nations (UN), regional agencies like the African Union, and national government authorities, coordinate with government bodies to ensure that humanitarian assistance aligns with national legal frameworks (Hossen, 2022). At the operational level, field teams are the backbone of humanitarian response. They comprise emergency response coordinators, logistics managers, health professionals, and security officers who implement relief efforts on the ground. The technical teams bring expertise in food security, health, water and

sanitation, protection, and education. They work alongside partners such as the World Food Programme to ensure food aid reaches the most vulnerable populations (Meyer, 2019). Health personnel, including doctors and nurses, provide life-saving medical care in areas where local health systems have collapsed.

Humanitarian work in conflict areas requires high levels of partnership among different actors to avoid duplication of efforts. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) facilitates coordination between international NGOs, local NGOs, UN agencies and the Nigerian government. The Nigerian Red Cross and other community-based organisations collaborate with international agencies to deliver services to displaced populations. Digital technology and information systems are important for humanitarian agencies in conflict zones. Agencies use satellite imagery, mobile data collection, and geographic information systems to monitor population movements and assess intervention impacts (Zarkov & Drezgic, 2019). Monitoring and evaluation teams use data to measure the impact of aid interventions. M&E specialists help agencies adjust strategies to respond to changing conditions, ensuring that aid remains relevant and effective (Meijer, 1993). Also, communication teams advocate for protecting civilians, opening humanitarian corridors, and additional funding. Norwegian Refugee Council and Oxfam provide direct services and engage in global advocacy campaigns to highlight the crisis (Marriage, 2018). These agencies ensure that the Nigerian government and international actors prioritise humanitarian issues during peace negotiations and that humanitarian access is safeguarded amidst ongoing military operations (Morel, 2020).

2.4 Humanitarian aid as a new form of colonialism

The question of whether humanitarian aid serves as a new form of colonialism has sparked debate among scholars in aid delivery to post-colonial states. At its core, this debate revolves around the dynamics of power between donor and recipient countries, raising questions about the implications of aid for sovereignty and self-determination. Humanitarian aid is framed as an altruistic endeavor to address natural disasters, conflicts, and extreme poverty. However,

some scholars argue that it can be used to strengthen donor nations' influence over recipient countries. Critics suggest that how aid is administered perpetuates dependency, limits local agency, and subtly maintains the socio-political order favouring the interests of former colonial powers (Vestergaard, 2013). This suggests that humanitarian aid continues colonial relationships by other means, described as "neo-colonialism." The aid recipients find themselves in a position where they are required to conform to the conditions set by the donors, compromising their autonomy and ability to design solutions that align with local needs and priorities (Middleton & O'Keefe, 1998). For example, some argue that through the structures of aid, donor countries are able to exercise soft power, influencing political, economic, and social frameworks in recipient countries, thereby ensuring a level of control reminiscent of colonial governance (Fentahun, 2023).

The delivery of aid is accompanied by expectations of political and economic reforms that serve strategic interests of donor states rather than the needs of the local populations. This has led to accusations that humanitarian aid strengthens a power imbalance that looks like colonial hierarchies, where the "global North" prescribes solutions to the "global South" without including the voices of the global south (Meyer, 2019). Such power makes aid-dependent countries align their policies with donors' preferences to secure funding (Seybolt, 2009).

In addition, humanitarian aid is based on the replica of the colonial structures through control of resources. Aid is funded and administered by donors from Global North who set the conditions for its use. The top-down approach diminishes the agency of local actors as they must conform to the agendas set forth by donors to receive aid. This creates continuous dependency on foreign aid. Key decisions about aid delivery are made by donors without the engagement of affected communities thus, local needs are never addressed appropriately (McNeice, 2024). This external decision-making authority shows colonial governance because affected populations have less said in policies imposed on them. Aid programs often come with certain cultural, social, political and economic assumptions that do not align with the local traditions (Brett, 2016). More so, using digital communication tools centralise control in

the hands of those who design, fund and manage these technologies. The digital divide indicates that affected communities in the Global South lack access to these technologies, which creates external dominance (Wade, 2002).

Historically, colonialism involved domination of one country over another leading to economic exploitation, political control and cultural imposition (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012). Although, overtime colonialism ended, the legacy of these relationships continues to exist in humanitarian aid intended to assist and support (Robinson, 2023). European powers often provided "aid" to their colonies in ways that primarily served their own economic and political interests. When countries receive aid for prolonged periods, they become reliant on external assistance for basic needs, discouraging self-sufficiency (Cherkas & Novytska, 2023). In Haiti for example, massive aid following the 2010 earthquake led to a situation where local businesses and industries struggled to compete with subsidised goods and services provided by international agencies (Beckett, 2019). In addition, donor countries or organisations influence recipient nations by shaping their policies to meet donor interests (Gray & Ariong, 2016). The conditions attached to aid confirms this narrative such as requirement to implement specific economic policies that may not align with recipient country's priorities or cultural values. According to Muyskens (2022), cultural imperialism is another issue that comes with humanitarian aid. Some aid comes with strings attached eroding local cultures and traditions as seen in most African countries where aid programs sometimes push for changes in social policies that clash with local customs and beliefs. The portrayal of aid recipients as helpless and needy diminishes the agency of local populations and creates a situation similar to colonial times.

For Beigbeder (2023), aid interventions save lives and alleviate suffering by offering essential services like medical care, food, and shelter. During the Ebola crisis in West Africa (2013-2016), international aid controlled the outbreak and provided healthcare services (Ohimain & Silas-Olu, 2021). In another part, many aid programs focus on building local capacity, empowering communities to manage future crises independently. Initiatives aimed at improving healthcare infrastructure, education, and local governance contribute to long-term development. In Bangladesh, aid efforts improved

public health outcomes and educational attainment. Also, humanitarian aid reflects an ethical commitment to global solidarity. The provision of aid supports universal human rights like the right to food, health and shelter. This imperative has driven the international community to respond to crises and disasters (Haque et al., 2016).

An anthropologist and scholar in development studies (Escobar, 2011), critically examines humanitarian aid using postcolonial theory. In his work, he argues that humanitarian aid sustains a "development discourse" that frames the Global South as constantly in need of Western intervention. This discourse, he suggests, constructs a hierarchical relationship between the "developed" and "underdeveloped" worlds, where the latter is seen as dependent on the former for progress. Escobar reveals how aid comes with a set of preconceived notions about what development should look like, typically modeled after Western standards and practices. This imposition of external ideas marginalises local knowledge systems and ways of life, leading to cultural domination. For Escobar, the problem lies both in aid itself and the underlying epistemological frameworks that guide it that create a colonial mindset by positioning Western methods as superior and universally applicable.

Easterly (2017) critiques the top-down, technocratic approaches employed by aid organisations. He says these approaches reflect a colonial attitude where aid agencies act as if they know what is best for the recipient countries without consulting or involving local populations in decision-making. Easterly notes that "searchers" over "planners" in aid efforts advocates for locally driven initiatives that are more responsive to actual needs of communities they aim to help. He further elaborates that many aid programs fail because they do not account for local conditions, instead imposing external solutions that are not sustainable.

Moyo (2009) argues that long-term aid has harmed Africa's development creating dependency, corruption, and economic stagnation. Her argument is grounded in a notion that continuous aid flows distort governance structures within recipient nations. She contends that aid creates a dependency cycle where governments rely on foreign assistance rather than creating a strong private sector or seeking sustainable sources of revenue such as taxes. This

reliance weakens institutions as leaders become more accountable to donors than to their own citizens. Moyo suggests that aid support corrupt regimes by providing them with resources to maintain power without needing to implement necessary economic or political reforms. Moyo advocates for a shift from aid to trade and investment, proposing that African countries focus on entrepreneurship, private investment, and market-based solutions.

Kwet (2019) explains that digital tools, though intended to help vulnerable groups, strengthen power imbalances because they are controlled by Western organisations that set data collection and access rules. Young (2019) adds that ICT tools centralise control, allowing aid organisations to monitor and make decisions for people without their input, limiting their freedom. Similarly, Soleman (2018) describes "data colonialism," where information gathered from displaced people is used mainly for the benefit of global organisations, extending Western influence and control. They suggest that ICT unintentionally continue colonial practices by concentrating power with aid providers rather than those receiving help.

While, literature has shown the progress that digital communication tools have contributed to aid delivery to IDPs in post-conflict areas, few studies have been done in a country where major of IDPs have no access to digital communication tools. Thus, this sought to understand a critical examination of digital communication tools use in aid delivery to internally displaced persons in post-conflict areas.

2.5 Research questions

The objective is to critically examine digital communication tools use in aid delivery to internally displaced persons in post-conflict areas, specifically focusing on activities of humanitarian agencies in Nigeria. The following research question and sub-questions were proposed.

Main question:

What are the impacts of using digital communication tools used by humanitarian agencies in aid delivery to internally displaced persons in post-conflict areas of Nigeria?

Sub-questions:

1. What are the benefits of humanitarian agencies' use of digital communication tools in their activities?
2. What risks are involved in using digital communication tools for aid delivery in post-conflict settings?
3. Is humanitarian aid a new form of colonialism, and does digital communication play a role in further centralising their power?
4. What strategies should humanitarian agencies adopt to mitigate the risks of using digital communication tools for aid delivery?

Chapter 3

Methodology and methods

This section presents methods that helped the study to collect and analyse data, including the study design, participants, tools for data collection, and data analysis.

3.1 Study design

Understanding the complexity of aid work, I carefully selected a method that would gather enough information about a critical examination of digital communication tools use in aid delivery to internally displaced persons in post-conflict areas. After thorough consideration, I determined that conducting in-depth interviews with experts at humanitarian agencies in Nigeria would be the most effective strategy to explore the impact of digital communication tools on aid delivery to internally displaced persons. In-depth interviews enabled me to develop an unstructured interview guide with open-ended questions, which allowed interviewees to share aspects of different facets of the topic (Yin, 2018). For instance, some core questions included: "How do digital communication tools influence coordination between agencies and field workers?" and "What challenges have you encountered when using these tools to communicate with IDPs?" In-depth interviews allowed participants to freely discuss various aspects of their work using open-ended questions. Open-ended questions encourage interviewees to respond spontaneously and avoid bias by suggesting specific answers (Reja et al., 2015). Adams and Cox (2008) also recommended keeping the interview structure flexible so that important points arise naturally during the conversation rather than being imposed on the interviewees. This approach ensured the discussion flowed freely and allowed participants to raise unexpected issues related to the research topic.

According to Chauhan (2022), conducting unstructured interviews facilitates a deeper exploration of the lived experiences of the communication participants. For example, one participant recounted a situation where an unstable internet connection in some areas limited the tracking of aid deliveries in time. These interviews provided a flexible environment where the researcher and participants engaged freely (Elhami & Khoshnevisan, 2022), without being

confined to predetermined questions, thereby creating richer discussions about the research subject.

Due to geographical limitations, as I was based in the Netherlands while the participants were in Nigeria, all interviews were conducted remotely via phone calls, Zoom, and WhatsApp. While these platforms allowed me to connect with participants despite the distance, the mediated nature of the conversations sometimes limited the depth of information exchange. During one Zoom interview, the interviewee lost connection, and I had to wait almost 3 hours before the interview resumed; thus, the flow of the conversation was disrupted, and the participants were prevented from fully expressing their thoughts.

However, the interviews allowed participants to share how digital communication tools are changing how aid is delivered. Keeping the research questions in mind, I developed an open-ended interview guide for this study. The guide consisted of several questions, allowing participants to offer detailed information about digital communication tools and their impact on aid delivery to IDPs. Some participants mentioned that these tools are making aid work more dependent on technology while raising concerns about too much control being in the hands of a few decision-makers. Others talked about how virtual communication, like phone or video calls, creates emotional distance and makes building trust with displaced people harder. The flexible style of the interviews made it easier for participants to talk about these important topics (Yin, 2018), giving me a clear picture of how digital tools affect humanitarian work.

3.2. Participants

Per the study questions, I need to interview individuals who implement communication tools for people working inside camps. The primary informants were the communication officers. The participants were selected from RedCross Nigeria, The Skill Women Initiative, UNESCO, and WFP. The study used a purposive sampling technique targeting prominent organisations known for humanitarian response for IDPs. The criteria for selecting these orgaisations was based on their established presence in Nigerian IDP camps

and track record of implementing programs aimed at improving information dissemination to vulnerable populations. Participants from these organisations were selected purposely because they talked from personal experience about the research issue they knew well (Heath et al., 2018). To access these participants, I initially contacted the administrative departments of the targeted humanitarian agencies to explain the purpose of the study and specific expertise required. Following this, I requested they connect me with communication experts within their organizations who could provide information based on personal experience. After identifying potential participants, I confirmed their willingness to participate in the study and scheduled interviews at their convenience.

According to Ward et al. (2018), the qualification for an expert to be interviewed involves having the know-how and internal organisational experience since they were positioned to give qualified information on organisational structures. I called them experts because they had acquired knowledge from their activity and access to organisational information – not necessarily from training (Korkeaaho & Leino, 2019). My understanding of experts has made me interview communication officers working with humanitarian agencies as experts. It was the researcher's judgment to recognise someone as an expert, but knowing analysing the research issue is for the experts to be interviewed (Ward et al., 2018). The researcher contacted the administration of humanitarian aid agencies to explain the purpose of the study to them. After, I asked them to lead me to the communication experts in their organisations. The interested participants were asked to confirm their willingness to participate in the study and were then invited to participate. The researcher then agreed with them when it was appropriate for them to do the interview. All the names used in this paper were anonymised and did not reflect their real identities.

3.3 Data collection

In-depth interviews were chosen as this primary data collection tool to gather detailed information on the impact of digital communication tools on aid delivery in post-conflict areas. Osborne and Grant-Smith (2021) state that such

interviews obtain detailed information on complex issues. The interviews allowed participants (communication experts) from organisations like Red Cross Nigeria, The Skill Women Initiative, UNESCO, and WFP to share their first-hand experiences. Before the interviews, the researcher developed a set of 17 open-ended questions to guide the discussions and ensure they stayed focused on the research questions. These questions were designed to understand aspects of using digital tools, such as their benefits, risks, humanitarian aid as a new form of colonialism, and strategies adopted by humanitarian agencies to mitigate the risks and improve aid delivery. This preparation helped maintain a clear direction during the interviews, allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences (Brent & Kraska, 2021). Each interview lasted approximately 18 to 38 minutes and was digitally recorded for accuracy. The recordings were transcribed verbatim, and the transcriptions were cleaned to remove any identifying details to ensure confidentiality. In addition, a detailed coding process was used to identify and categorise themes from the interview responses. For example, the benefits of digital communication tools were coded under themes such as time and resources, communication, fundraising and campaigns, monitoring, evaluation, and record keeping. The risks involved in using digital communication tools were coded as "dependence on digital tools" and "internet and network instability." This coding was crucial for organising the data and extracting meaningful patterns and insights relevant to the research questions.

3.4 Data analysis

The recorded interviews were transcribed, and any information that could reveal a participant's identity was removed from the final transcripts. I used a deductive thematic analysis approach to analyse the collected data (Wilson, 2019). The analysis was guided by the research questions, allowing me to systematically identify themes related to the benefits, risks, and implications of using digital communication tools in aid delivery. As a humanitarian worker involved in aid delivery in post-conflict areas, I connected well with the participants' perspectives. The transcripts were read multiple times, enabling me to understand the experiences of participants. I noted that many

participants talked about using digital tools as communication mediators with IDPs during critical stages of aid delivery, which led to the initial coding of "communication efficiency." During the initial coding phase, codes were assigned to specific responses that reflected different aspects of using digital tools. One of the participants mentioned, "We send information to displaced persons quickly, and this reduced delays in distributing relief items." This statement was coded as "improved aid delivery speed." Other examples of codes included: digital literacy challenges (for responses related to participants' struggles with understanding how to use digital platforms), security threats (for concerns about exposure of sensitive data), donor influence (for references to how decisions of donors shape aid distribution). After coding, I grouped related codes into broader categories. A case in point, the codes "improved aid delivery speed" and "communication efficiency with IDPs" were merged into a theme called "time and resource efficiency." Similarly, responses that showed 'donor influence' and 'top-down decision-making' were categorised under the theme "humanitarian aid as a new form of colonialism." The themes were then reviewed to ensure that they reflected the data. The theme "risks of digital communication tools" was refined based on repeated mentions of network instability, personal safety risks, and dependency on digital systems by the participants. This ensured that the themes met the purpose of the study while capturing the participants' viewpoints (Salmona & Kaczynski, 2024).

3.5. Ethical choices and postionality

According to Holmes (2020), positionality describes where I stood in relation to my study. My decision to conduct this research stems from growing up in a conflict-affected country, where I witnessed the devastating effects of displacement. During those challenging times, humanitarian agencies provided essential services to displaced persons. However, security risks often hindered aid delivery, with armed groups hijacking vehicles carrying aid, sometimes resulting in fatalities. From this experience, I recognised that it is necessary to integrate digital communication tools to coordinate with internally displaced persons about safe sones and streamline humanitarian responses. My connection to this issue is both personal and professional. In past roles, I

collaborated with some humanitarian organisations, gaining insight into their challenges in efficiently reaching IDPs, especially in remote or high-risk areas. Through this experience, I realised what digital tools can do in overcoming some of these barriers by facilitating good communication with IDPs. This familiarity with the field, paired with my background knowledge, positions me well to establish the integration of digital tools for improving aid delivery to IDPs.

Throughout my study, I adhered to key ethical principles such as justice, respect for persons, autonomy, beneficence, and non-maleficence. I sought approval from the relevant humanitarian agencies and obtained informed consent from all participants. Participants' rights and privacy were protected through the anonymisation of their identities, and oral consent was recorded for those unable to provide written consent. These recordings were securely stored, with access restricted only to myself to maintain confidentiality. In addition, ethical clearance for conducting this research (Appendix II) was presented to participants, and they were assured that the information gathered would only be used for research purposes. Many interviews were conducted via Zoom and phone calls due to the logistical challenges and distance. However, these mediated interviews sometimes limited the flow of honest and open communication. For example, during a phone interview, one participant hesitated to elaborate on a sensitive topic about donor influence in decision-making, expressing concern about being overheard. I sensed that face-to-face interaction would have allowed for a more trusting environment where the participant could have spoken more freely. Also, internet instability during some Zoom interviews resulted in interruptions, making it difficult for participants to fully express their thoughts. One participant, who was discussing the strategies to improve aid delivery with digital tools, lost connection multiple times, and when the conversation resumed, their earlier enthusiasm decreased. These technical disruptions limited the depth of the discussion and hindered the willingness of participants to share honest answers.

3.6 Limitations of research and possible practical problems

Not all the institutions I consulted as sources of information gave me free access to reports and available information. To overcome this, I intend to interview communication experts at those humanitarian agencies [both international and local]. In the process of collecting data, some participants refused to provide confidential information. This was minimised by explaining to them the purpose of my study and then assuring them that whichever information they shared with me was kept well and access by me and my academic supervisor(s). In addition, time needed to conduct this study was not sufficient since the study was using a qualitative approach. I minimised this by including a small sample size and following the work schedule of the ISS to meet deadlines. Although, the sample size was limited to less than 10 interviews, in-depth analysis of interviews, data obtained from informal conversations and extensive literature review was still important to answer study question.

Chapter 4

4.0 Impacts of using digital communication tools by humanitarian agencies in aid delivery to internally displaced persons in post-conflict areas of Nigeria

In response to Sub-research question 1, *What are the benefits of humanitarian agencies' use of digital communication tools in their activities?* Four key themes were identified through the interviews. The first point is communication. Participants shared that digital communication tools like mobile phones help agencies talk to community leaders, such as camp chiefs, who pass on important information to IDPs. Agencies rely on these local leaders to ensure messages reach everyone. The second point is time and resource efficiency. Digital tools make aid delivery faster by reducing the need for travel. Participants mentioned that tools like Kobo Collect help gather data and talk to volunteers without visiting far-off locations. Using mobile phones and location services, staff communicate across different areas quickly. In addition, fundraising and campaigns was the third, as digital tools, especially social media, spread awareness about aid efforts. Participants explained how their organisation shares stories from the camps on social media to get support from local and international audiences. The fourth theme was monitoring, evaluation, and record-keeping, where it was established that digital tools make it easier to keep track of who is receiving aid and report progress to donors.

For research question 2: *What risks are involved in using digital communication tools for aid delivery in post-conflict settings?* The interviews revealed three main risks. The first was dependency on digital tools where participants shared that relying on digital tools too much causes problems due to poor network coverage. If there is no stable connection, aid delivery gets delayed. A second theme identified was internet and network instability. Unstable internet connections slow down aid delivery and sometimes cause loss of important data. Participants explained that weak networks force them to restart apps, leading to delays and sometimes require to re-enter lost information.thirdly, participants raised concerns about the personal safety of aid workers when they share too much information about their activities or locations online. Posting

details of their work on social media or other digital platforms makes them more vulnerable to threats or attacks, especially in areas with high-security risks.

Research question 3: Is humanitarian aid a new form of colonialism, and does digital communication play a role in further centralising their power? Three main themes were identified. The first theme is donor control and influence. Participants revealed that donors provide digital tools for collecting biometric data, which gives them control over how aid is delivered. Also, donors maintain too much control over aid operations where outside powers set the terms of aid, which feels like a new form of colonialism. Local organisations cannot make decisions that fit their communities as donor requirements bind them. The second theme is the top-down approach to aid delivery. Donors impose their standards and processes without meeting the actual needs of the people it is meant to help. The aid can be inappropriate because it focuses on donor expectations rather than the real conditions on the ground. When decisions are made far from the affected areas, aid becomes ineffective without proper input from local agencies and fails to address urgent problems. The third theme is contextualised aid. Participants expressed concerns that aid is not meant for specific needs of different groups within the IDP population. Aid provided based on broad donor requirements lacks the customisation needed for various groups. The focus on generic aid packages, shaped by external requirements, makes aid less relevant to the real challenges faced by local communities.

On research question 4: *What strategies should humanitarian agencies adopt to mitigate the risks of using digital communication tools for aid delivery?* Three key strategies were identified from participants' views. The first strategy is combining digital and traditional methods, which they suggested using digital tools and traditional methods, like face-to-face meetings and working with community leaders. This combination ensures that aid reaches people, even if digital tools fail or are unreliable in some areas. The second strategy is training for the effective use of digital tools. Proper training helps prevent mistakes and make aid delivery more efficient. Without training, digital tools may be underused or misused, and sensitive information could be at risk. The third

strategy is improving data security measures. Participants suggested enhancing data security to protect the sensitive information collected through digital tools. The study suggested the use of encryption, secure access, and regular audits to prevent unauthorised access or data breaches.

4.1 Benefits of humanitarian agencies' use of digital communication tools

During the interviews, four themes were identified on the benefits of humanitarian agencies' use of digital communication tools in their activities and they include: time and resource, communication, fundraising and campaigns, monitoring, evaluation, and record keeping. Digital communication tools save time and resources by making it easier to deliver aid without the need for physical travel. Second, they improve communication, as mobile phones and messaging apps help agencies stay in touch with community leaders and IDPs. In addition, digital tools like social media make it easier for agencies to run fundraising campaigns and reach a wider audience. Also, these tools help with monitoring, evaluation, and record-keeping, making it simpler to track aid distribution and measure the impact of their efforts.

Communication

Three participants established that digital communication tools ease working with community leaders, such as camp chiefs or heads of communities, who serve as intermediaries to relay information to internally displaced persons. These leaders ensure that messages reach the people effectively. Balogun (female, ICT specialist from the skill women initiative) stated: "We contact the head of the particular community to carry out whatever outreach we intend to." This was supported by second participant who said that,

> "We communicate through the mobile phones through the chiefs who fore communicate people on what they do and on what they have to do." [Balogun (female, ICT specialist from the skill women initiative)]

Similarly, Okpala (male, communication expert from Nigeria RedCross) said:

> "We communicate through mobile phones via the chiefs, who then inform people about what they need to know and what actions to take."

In addition, the community leaders help humanitarian agencies in reaching out to the people quickly (Adeyemi (female, ICT officer at UNESCO)) added. This shows that use of community leaders is a practical strategy and clearly shows that humanitarian agencies know the value of local leadership in facilitating communication in areas where digital access is limited. The approach builds trust within the community and ensures that the aid process is well-coordinated and supported at grassroots level (Alencar et al. 2019).

Beyond use of community leaders, digital tools like mobile phones and WhatsApp are widely used by humanitarian agencies to disseminate information to large groups of IDPs well. This reliance on digital tools allows agencies to quickly reach large numbers of displaced persons in urgent situations. As Emadi [*male, media personnel at WFP*] shared, "WhatsApp groups have been very effective in getting messages across quickly." Likewise, Balogun of the Skill Women Initiative mentioned: "We do actually use phones... especially through WhatsApp." This integration of digital tools enables rapid, extensive communication, enabling coordination of responses in large-scale crises and making it easier for agencies to manage their communications well.

The researcher found that humanitarian agencies depend on face-to-face conversations with people in the camps. Digital tools are used as a backup way to help provide aid. One of the participants, Ibekwe, *male, officer in ICT department at Nigeria RedCross* said that they have volunteers who go door to door to share information about aid and raise awareness on different issues in camps. This method of direct contact provides a human touch that digital communication cannot replicate in sensitive situations involving displaced persons. Another participant added that their agency hires volunteers permanently and, in some instances, they recruit others for specific projects.

The Skill Women Initiative, as noted by their communication officer [Balogun] has established designated areas within camps like women-friendly spaces where "we conduct one-on-one and group discussions to assess specific needs and provide aid directly." Meanwhile, RedCross Nigeria volunteers use visual aids, such as picture cards showing hygiene practices like handwashing,

to communicate important information in accessible ways that resonate with different groups. As Kelechi, *female, communication manager at Nigeria RedCross*, shared, "We use pictures to show how to wash hands and explain hygiene practices." According to ICRC (2019), new technologies are a communication gamer changer and humanitarian innovation opens up new ways for agencies to serve the affected populations. Digital innovations offer lower cost, better quality, and more effective ways for humanitarian actors and their partners to resolve humanitarian issues. They make humanitarian response more accountable.

Time and resource efficiency

Digital communication tools are essential for making aid delivery faster and more efficient. Damilola, *a communication officer at UNESCO*, explained that using tools like Kobo Collect, a data collection app, allows her team to gather information from field workers without traveling to remote locations. She shared: "Using tools like Kobo Collect saves time and reduces the need to travel to distant areas. It lets us gather important information easily." This shows how these tools help humanitarian teams overcome travel challenges and save time and resources that can be better used to support people.

Similarly, Okpala, *a communication expert with Nigeria RedCross*, explained how mobile phones and GPS location services make staying in touch with team members in different areas easier. He said: "With mobile phones and GPS, we can see what is happening in different places without being in person. It helps us respond to people's needs much faster." Using phones and GPS, humanitarian staff check on situations in multiple areas at once – enabling them to help more people in less time.

Three other participants talked about how these digital tools reduce the need for costly travel, making it possible to respond to internally displaced people IDPs more quickly. Emadi, *a media personnel at WFP*, explained:

> "Digital tools help us cut down on travel costs, meaning we can spend those funds directly on aid. By coordinating less time in person, we can reach people in need more quickly."

This means agencies use saved resources to buy more food, medicine, or shelter supplies rather than spend it on travel. Kelechi, *a communication manager*

at Nigeria RedCross, explained how simple apps like WhatsApp speed up communication within the team:

> "We use WhatsApp to quickly connect with field agents, which helps us avoid delays."

Quick messaging through WhatsApp allows team members to share updates instantly, improving how fast they can act on new information. Chioma, *an officer in the IT department at Nigeria RedCross*, pointed out how digital tools keep everyone updated with the latest information, which makes decision-making faster. She said:

> "With digital tools, we keep everyone on the same page. Information saves us much time in our operations."

With up-to-date information, teams do not waste time on outdated data, and decisions are made immediately based on what is happening on the ground.

On time and resources, participants shared that these digital tools save time and money by reducing travel, simplifying communication, and ensuring that everyone has access to the latest updates. Bryant (2022) established that digital tools help organisations to operate better by responding more quickly and using resources to help people in need. Using digital communication, humanitarian agencies can focus on supporting communities directly, overcoming logistical challenges to ensure help reaches those who need it most.

Fundraising and campaigns

Digital tools are used to raise money and increase awareness about aid efforts. Participants mentioned that these tools allow organisations to run online campaigns, attract donations, and share their work with a larger audience. Okpala, *a communication expert at Nigeria RedCross*, provided a clear example:

> "We use digital tools to create awareness and attract support, especially for financial donations."

This indicates that digital platforms are good for organisations to gather funds by reaching people who may want to support their cause. Ibekwe, *an officer in the ICT department at Nigeria RedCross*, further added that social media is used to show the public what life is like in the camps. He noted: "We post stories about our daily activities in the camps on social media, which gets much support from both local and international audiences." Agencies like Nigeria

RedCross gain visibility and attract financial support from people worldwide who may be moved to help by sharing updates from within the camps.

Three other participants described how creating various types of content such as photos, videos, and text updates is good for engaging audiences. Kelechi, *a communication manager at Nigeria RedCross*, explained: "We create photos, videos, and even sign language content to reach different audiences, which helps us raise funds." Using different formats, the organisation ensures its message is accessible to more people, including those who rely on visual aids or have hearing impairments.

Chioma, *an officer in the IT department at Nigeria RedCross*, added that posting engaging content encourages donations and builds a supportive community around their work. She stated:

> "Using social media to share our work raises funds and lets people see the impact they are making by contributing."

This shows that digital platforms help create a sense of connection, as supporters can follow along and feel part of the effort. Emadi, *a media personnel at WFP*, shared how their team uses popular social networks to make their work more visible and credible. He said: "Digital media helps us build trust with the public, showing them where their support is going." Using social media in this way ensures that people see their donations as impactful, boosting the likelihood of continued support.

We have shown in this theme that digital tools are good for raising funds and running awareness campaigns. Digital media enables agencies to share powerful stories from the field, gather financial support, and build trust with audiences globally. According to Joshi et al (2022) use of digital tools allows humanitarian agencies to expand their reach, secure more funds, and provide better assistance to those in need.

Monitoring, evaluation, and record keeping

Digital tools help in tracking how aid is distributed, evaluating its effectiveness, and keeping records of who receives the aid. Participants established that these tools make it easier to organise aid delivery well. Balogun, *an ICT specialist from*

The Skill Women Initiative talked about that how they use a digital app called Kobo Collect in data collection. She noted,

> "We use Kobo to collect information on aid distribution – it is an easy way to ensure aid reaches the right people."

We record whoever receives aid to share to our donors that the resources are used transparently. Nwankwo, *an innovation specialist at WFP*, explained that they keep digital records of aid recipients to track support. She said,

> "We use digital tools to keep track of our beneficiaries."

This helps agencies monitor the progress of each beneficiary, ensuring needs are met and resources are not duplicated. Accurate records also enable agencies to assess the reach and effectiveness of their programs over time.

Other participants noted that donors also rely on these digital records to stay informed about the impact of their contributions. Kelechi, *a communication manager at Nigeria RedCross*, explained that donors receive updates through reports, photos, and progress updates sent electronically. She stated, "Digital tools allow us to share project updates with donors without requiring them to visit sites in person." This builds trust with donors, who can see the work being done without the need for costly site visits.

In addition to monitoring aid distribution, digital tools help agencies coordinate volunteer activities and manage resources well. Chioma, *an officer in the IT department at Nigeria RedCross*, shared that digital communication is good for managing teams in different locations, ensuring that volunteers are directed to areas in need. She noted,

> "We use digital tools to coordinate volunteers, helping us respond faster and reduce miscommunication."

It is seen that digital tools improve tracking and support transparent communication with donors and better resource allocation. Digital records maintain internal and external confidence in humanitarian projects by ensuring aid reaches those who need it most (Talhouk et al., 2016).

4.2 Risks involved in using digital communication tools for aid delivery

The section is presented based on data obtained from participants in the field. It analyses the risks involved in using digital communication tools for aid delivery in post conflict settings. As in the section before, the attention is given to the voices of the participants and the way they understand the situation. Narratives shared by the participants enabled the researcher to identify three themes: internet and network instability, exposure to personal risk, and dependency on digital risks.

Dependency on digital tools

One major risk humanitarian agencies face is over-reliance on digital communication and aid coordination tools. This is about problems that arise from relying too much on digital tools. It looks at how issues with technology cause difficulties in aid delivery. Participants explained that issues with network coverage, technology malfunctions, or even device limitations disrupt aid efforts, causing delays. This reliance becomes problematic in remote areas with weak or non-existent network stability. Balogun, *an ICT specialist from The Skill Women Initiative*, shared a common issue they encounter:

> "Relying too much on digital tools... is a problem, especially where the network is poor."

In her work, she noted that areas with inconsistent network connectivity face frequent delays, as updates on aid delivery are missed. She added that when their tools go offline, it becomes difficult to inform field teams about logistics changes that affect the people they serve.

Adeyemi, *an ICT officer at UNESCO*, explained that their reliance on digital communication can backfire in emergencies. She said, "Dependence on digital tools creates problems when these tools do not work." She described a situation where a system glitch prevented them from accessing a tracking platform for food distribution. The setback confused and delayed food distribution in several camps. Damilola, *a communication officer at UNESCO*, also spoke about how weak connectivity in certain camps makes it challenging to rely on digital tools alone. She shared,

> "When we do not have enough network, the tools we use do not serve us well, and we have to find other ways."

She stated that during such times, they depend on community leaders or local volunteers to help pass information.

Kelechi, *a communication manager with the Nigeria RedCross*, mentioned that digital dependency causes delays if tools fail for quick decisions. She said, "We once had a technical issue with our data system that stopped us from updating who received aid and who did not." This disrupted the record-keeping and caused us to temporarily revert to manual tracking, slowing operations. She expressed concerns that aid agencies cannot fully depend on digital systems for processes without reliable network access. Emadi, *a media personnel at WFP*, gave a similar perspective, noting that

> "Connectivity issues mean that we sometimes miss urgent calls or messages that affect how fast we respond."

He explained that their teams miss sensitive updates in areas with no signal, like changes in security conditions or new emergency zones, because digital tools depend on stable internet access.

These experiences show that due to uncertainties, agencies have had to adapt by developing backup methods like working directly with local leaders, increasing in-person visits, and setting up strong network solutions. Bryant (2022) argued that having digital and non-digital systems ensures continuity in critical situations.

Internet and network instability

Unstable internet connections delay aid delivery and cause data loss. This problem is common in areas with poor network coverage. Five participants explained how unstable connections slow down essential processes, sometimes requiring repeated efforts to complete tasks, which delays aid in reaching those in need. Balogun, *an ICT specialist from The Skill Women Initiative*, explained that

> "Unstable internet connections delay aid and cause loss of important data."

She shared that their data collection efforts get interrupted when the connection drops, leading to gaps in information and the need to restart processes. Adeyemi, *an ICT officer at UNESCO*, shared a similar experience,

> "Sometimes I have to restart the app... I lose some information and have to fill it again."

She described a scenario where connection issues made it difficult to submit important updates about food distribution, leading her to redo the work. This slowed the team down and created stress as they rushed to prevent delays in food delivery. Chioma, *an officer in the IT department at Nigeria RedCross*, narrated that their digital tools depend on consistent internet to track aid, but "when we have network issues, it means some updates do not go through and then there is a delay." she explained that teams in the field sometimes cannot update the central database with information about who has received aid. This delay affects other teams that rely on accurate data to make distribution decisions. Okpala, *a communication expert at Nigeria RedCross*, pointed out that internet instability stops them from coordinating well with their main offices. He said,

> "Without steady internet, we cannot always communicate when necessary. It is tough when we are trying to update on high-risk areas."

He recounted a case where a delayed message about flooding left some camps unprepared, stressing the need for backup solutions when digital communications fail. Kelechi, *a communication manager at Nigeria RedCross*, explained that teams could not access certain digital forms and checklists essential for monitoring and evaluation during severe network outages. "Sometimes we cannot access or share the updates we need on time, and it impacts everyone," she noted, stressing how these issues can create bottlenecks in aid delivery.

These examples show that a stable internet is good for humanitarian work, and unreliable network access can slow or halt aid delivery. Multiple communication channels – digital and manual help aid agencies maintain workflows in areas with network challenges (Kumar, 2022).

Exposure to personal risk

A third cluster of risks involved in using digital communication tools for aid delivery involves the risks aid workers face when their activities are visible online. Using digital tools sometimes makes their safety more vulnerable. Four participants discussed how the online visibility of their activities compromise

their safety. When aid workers share their activities or locations on social media or other digital platforms, their safety can be at risk. Public visibility can lead to potential threats or attacks.

Okoro, *an ICT officer in the ICT department at Nigeria RedCross,* expressed:

> "Putting myself out there on social media [...] in terms of security is a risk."

She shared a personal experience where, after posting about a successful food distribution event, she received messages from unknown individuals asking about future distributions. Kelechi, a communication manager at Nigeria RedCross, stated, "Whenever I post about our work, I think about who might see it. It could attract the wrong attention." She described an instance where her team had to change their operational route after a social media post revealed their location. This led to an urgent reassessment of how they communicate online activities to avoid unintended exposure to security threats.

Emadi, *a media personnel at WFP*, established that "While it is important to show our work, we must remember that revealing our schedules invites danger." He noted that some agencies have begun using code names for locations in their online communications to minimise risk, ensuring that sensitive information is not easily accessible to those who may wish to cause harm. These examples reveal that digital platforms in conflict areas require strict security protocols to prevent unintended exposure.

4.3 Is humanitarian aid a new form of colonialism, and does digital communication play a role in further centralising their power?

This section presents the explanations whether humanitarian aid is a new form of colonialism. Addressing this research question seeks to show how digital communication aid it. Three ways were identified inductively as *donor control and influence*, *top-down approach to aid delivery* and *contextualised aid.* Following this assertion, the three themes are described including their associated conditions.

Donor control and influence

The first response that emerged on how humanitarian aid has created a new form of colonialism was whether these digital communication tools give donors excessive control over aid operations. Participants explained how these tools provided by donors could give them excessive control over aid operations, which undermines the autonomy of local agencies and creates dependency on external entities. Okoro, *an ICT officer in the ICT department at Nigeria RedCross*:

> "Digital communication tools, especially those provided by donors, allow donors to maintain control over aid operations."

She noted that when donors require local organisations to use specific data collection or reporting software, it often prioritises donor interests over local needs. If a donor mandates using a particular biometric data collection system, local agencies must adapt their programs to fit this system, even if it does not align with community priorities. Ibekwe, *a male officer in the ICT department at Nigeria RedCross* added that:

> "When we use donor-specified tools like biometric data collectors, it limits how we manage aid. We must follow their rules instead of focusing on what our community needs."

This illustrates how donor-defined parameters shape aid delivery in ways that may not benefit local populations. Nwankwo, *a female innovation specialist at WFP,* said, "This control creates a feeling of dependency, where local groups have little say in important decisions, even though they are the ones delivering aid on the ground." She recounted an instance where the organisation had to adjust its disaster response strategy to align with donor requirements. This situation reflects a modern form of neo-colonialism, where outside powers

dictate the terms of aid, limiting the independence of local organisations. Adeyemi, *an ICT officer at UNESCO*, said:

> "When donors set conditions that must be met for aid, it feels like we are losing our ability to make decisions that suit our communities."

Other participants talked about this statement and described how local voices often get sidelined by the influence of external donors. The unequal power from this donor control creates a barrier to effective aid delivery. As the donors' conditions bind local agencies, they struggle to respond to the specific needs of their communities. Madianou (2019) argues that these power dynamics change how local organisations interact with outside donors. For example, Okoro noted that "digital communication tools allow donors to maintain control over aid operations," which reflects Cinnamon's (2019) point about a new digital divide. This divide means that the people affected by crises cannot fully participate in decisions impacting their lives. The lack of involvement creates a dependence on outside help, which Krishnan (2022) says can harm local communities and take away their power. Nwankwo also talked about local organisations having to follow donor rules instead of focusing on what their communities truly need. In addition, many digital tools are designed for different contexts, as Bryant (2022) noted, meaning they do not work well in places outside North America and Western Europe. This leaves local voices unheard. The perception that technology is neutral makes it easy to overlook these power imbalances and the political issues involved (Krishnan, 2022).

Top-down approach to aid delivery

The second form identified by participants reveals that the expectations of donors and rules dictate aid delivery. Some donors impose their standards and processes without fully understanding the local circumstances and conditions. This leads to aid that does not address the specific challenges faced by IDPs. Damilola, *a communication officer at UNESCO*, stated, "Donors set the rules, and we have to follow them, even if they do not fit what people here really need." She added that sometimes they are given solutions from outside that do not fully connect with the on-the-ground realities. Emadi, *a media personnel at WFP*, spoke about how the focus on donor standards limits flexibility. He explained, "Donors fund specific things, and we have to follow their agenda. It is hard to

adjust if local needs fall outside of that." This elaborated that donor priorities restrict ability of humanitarian workers to respond to urgent needs as they arise.

Kelechi, *a communication manager at Nigeria RedCross*, shared, "The aid is planned from outside countries with little understanding of the local challenges." Kelechi explained that, without direct input from the affected communities, aid fails to address the problems on the ground. This indicates a "knowledge imbalance" where external decisions overshadow local expertise. Chioma, *an officer in the IT department at Nigeria RedCross* said, "The systems they want us to use are not suitable here." Chioma shows the obstacles posed by solutions that work well in other places but fail in Nigeria.

Using digital tools in aid delivery, driven by a top-down approach, results in a "new digital divide." As Cinnamon (2019) notes, this divide is marked by those who produce data locally and those who, from a distance, analyse and make decisions based on that data without a deep understanding of the local context. Chioma, an officer in the IT department at Nigeria RedCross, explained this as, "Our people do not have much say in how their information is collected or used. The tools are just given to us, and we have to work with them." This indicates how a top-down approach places control in the hands of a few, creating a knowledge gap in the aid process. In addition, the tools and platforms used for aid delivery have been developed for other Western markets or corporate environments. They may not be suitable for on-the-ground humanitarian challenges in places like Nigeria. According to Okpala, a communication expert at Nigeria RedCross, "We are using systems designed for different environments and when they do not work here, the local teams have to struggle with them." This concurs with Coppi and Fast (2019), who points out that humanitarian technologies are experimental and not necessarily made for the areas where they are deployed.

In addition, data collected from IDPs is used to train AI and other digital systems – benefiting external third parties rather than the communities themselves (Coppi et al., 2021). Emadi, *a media personnel at WFP, observed,* "Data about people here is collected, analysed, and sent away. We rarely see any benefits come back." This reveals that local communities are data sources without seeing improvements in their aid experience. Krishnan (2022) argues

that such practices limit the autonomy of people affected by crises, thus creating a system of dependency on external powers. Another side in which we can see this approach is a belief that digital tools are always corrected and donor-led aid processes are done based on them – making it hard for local teams to question whether these tools work well in IDP camps. Damilola *from UNESCO observed*, "It is like they believe the tools are always correct, no matter the situation. We cannot question them because they are seen as more 'advanced.'" This attitude stops local teams from looking at whether the tools truly meet their needs or if they strengthen existing power differences.

Contextualised aid

An aspect of donor-driven humanitarian aid is its lack of adaptation to the needs of the IDP community in Nigeria. Participants indicated that, due to the many donor requirements, aid is delivered in a "one-size-fits-all" manner, failing to consider challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, women, children, and other vulnerable groups. Okoro, *a female ICT officer with Nigeria RedCross*, noted, "The aid we receive follows a pattern defined by those outside Nigeria. It is more about ticking boxes for the donors than helping people in ways that matter here." This means that donor-driven processes limit aid by putting emphasis on accountability to donor standards over local relevance. Nwankwo, *a female innovation specialist with the World Food Programme*, said:

> "We get supplies that are not suited for people with specific needs, for example, items that people with disabilities cannot even use."

When external standards shape aid, it does not truly benefit everyone here. This indicates that unintended harm occurs when aid fails to be flexible enough to meet the different needs of the IDP population. *Emadi*, *a media personnel at WFP*, observed that "a rigid, donor-driven model of aid delivery leaves room for the flexibility needed to address community-specific issues." His comment indicates that when donor-controlled systems dictate aid provisions without local consultation, they disregard the socioeconomic context of the communities they serve. This lack of adaptability mirrors colonial systems in which the realities of local populations were secondary to the interests of the external power.

Moreover, *Kelechi*, *a communication manager at the Nigeria Red Cross*, noted that when local organisations do not get the authority to modify aid to fit local contexts,

> "The impact of the aid is diluted, as it fails to respond to the needs of displacement persons."

The persistence of these donor-driven structures thus reveals a neo-colonial aspect where foreign entities continue to exert control over the aid process and ignore the voices of locals. From these narratives, it can be seen that having donor-driven and standardised aid approaches to neglect the specific needs of community groups results in a model of aid delivery that recalls colonial practices where there is an unequal relationship where external powers impose solutions without a true understanding of or regard for the realities on the ground. Krishnan's (2022) donor-centric model creates a form of neo-colonialism in aid delivery, where affected communities have little say in what aid is provided or how it is distributed.

4.4 Strategies to mitigate risks of using digital communication tools

The findings here unveil the different ways through which humanitarian agencies reduce the risks of using digital communication tools in aid delivery. Addressing research question four, I identified different ways including work closely with local partners, community engagement before digital implementation, training for effective use of digital tools and combining digital and traditional methods.

Work closely with local partners

One of the strategies to mitigate risks associated with digital communication tools in humanitarian aid is creating close relationships with the affected communities. Humanitarian agencies reduce the risks of digital communication tools by engaging trusted local intermediaries who bridge the gap between digital systems and the affected populations. Establishing local connections ensures aid recipients feel secure and understood, creating transparency in aid delivery. Okoro, *an ICT officer at Nigeria RedCross*, noted,

> "When people see someone, they recognise – like a community leader – involved in the process, they feel more comfortable participating. It is different than just receiving a message from an unknown source."

Local intermediaries help contextualise digital communication, making it more relatable for aid recipients. Involving local figures also reduces the risk of misinformation or misunderstanding of digital tools. Emadi, *a media specialist at WFP*, described this as essential in their communication strategy:

> "Having someone within the community to relay information prevents fears around misuse of technology. People are more willing to engage with the aid systems because they feel their needs are represented well."

This approach lowers privacy concerns that might discourage people from participating in digital-based aid systems, especially in communities with low digital literacy or pre-existing mistrust of external agencies. In addition, familiar channels like community WhatsApp groups managed by local leaders have been instrumental in ensuring that aid recipients receive reliable information. Chioma from Nigeria RedCross noted, "People trust messages in groups they are already part of, especially when the group is managed by someone they know." This ensures that aid messages are received and taken seriously,

reducing the risk of ignoring important information. Agencies communicate important updates such as health and security information with fewer misunderstandings by using familiar platforms in their strategy. However, Nwankwo, *an innovation specialist at WFP*, wondered about scalability of digital tools with a local presence, saying,

> "Digital tools allow us to reach many people, but without someone on the ground, it is hard to ensure they work as intended for everyone."

This combination of scalable digital technology and trusted intermediaries helps humanitarian agencies reach many IDPs while maintaining a personal touch that respects local customs. Agencies mitigate data collection and privacy risks by employing local figures alongside digital tools, thus improving accessibility of aid delivery. Using local intermediaries ensures that digital communication tools aid recipients' specific needs and concerns, reducing distant aid delivery risks. Local intermediaries facilitate a better understanding and acceptance of digital tools and strengthen the relationship between humanitarian agencies and the communities they serve. Holloway et al. (2021) suggest that digital systems risk being misinterpreted without on-the-ground presence, especially in settings with a general wariness toward external organisations. Using local channels, like community WhatsApp groups, reflects Gutierrez's (2019) findings from the Haitian earthquake response, where locally adapted communication increased engagement.

Community engagement before digital implementation

Humanitarian agencies should prioritise educating communities offline before implementing new digital systems to reduce the risks associated with digital communication tools in aid delivery. This ensures that any fears or misunderstandings surrounding the use of technology are addressed early on. In-person sensitisation sessions help agencies explain these tools' purpose, benefits, and safe usage. Damilola, a communication officer at UNESCO, said, "People need to know why and how these tools are being used, and that only happens when we go there in person and answer their questions." This approach makes the technology easier to understand, which helps reduce doubts and makes community members feel more confident using digital tools.

Furthermore, humanitarian agencies should focus on understanding how the affected communities already use technology in their daily lives, adapting existing practices to fit the aid delivery needs. This ensures that digital tools introduced by aid agencies align with the community's comfort level. Kelechi, *a communication manager at Nigeria RedCross*, noted,

> "If people are already comfortable using social media, we can use those instead of introducing a completely new system."

Agencies minimise the learning curve and empower communities, integrating aid delivery into their routines. Also, adapting existing digital practices helps avoid overwhelming community members with unfamiliar technology. Okpala, *a communication expert from Nigeria RedCross*, established, "When we use platforms people are already familiar with, we see higher engagement and fewer issues with misinformation." This reduces risks related to improper use as people are less likely to misuse tools they already understand.

Offline engagement of existing technologies also enables humanitarian agencies to identify and address community-specific barriers early on. For example, by discussing digital tools face-to-face, agencies identify misconceptions such as data privacy concerns. Chioma from Nigeria RedCross observed, "Sometimes, people fear their personal information being misused. Talking directly to them helps clear up these issues and shows them we are there to support, not intrude." In doing so, agencies reduce risks tied to digital implementation. Therefore, investing in offline, in-person sensitisation and using familiar technologies, humanitarian agencies make digital tools safer, more accessible, and more aligned with the existing tech practices.

Training for effective use of digital tools

Training humanitarian staff and volunteers in digital tools reduces risks and improves aid delivery to internally displaced persons. Without proper skills, using digital tools leads to inefficiencies and even compromises sensitive data. Adeyemi, an ICT officer at UNESCO, said, *"Training staff and volunteers on how to*

use digital tools well is important for avoiding errors and improving aid delivery." This is important when supporting IDPs, who may have limited technology exposure and need accessible and secure support systems.

Training helps bridge the gap between aid workers and IDPs by ensuring that tools are used safely. Ese, an officer in the ICT department at Nigeria RedCross, established that training should cover the basics of digital tool use and secure data handling practices. He mentioned, *"Without guidance on handling data securely, we risk exposing information that could harm those we are trying to help."* Training aids in adapting digital tools to the specific needs of IDP communities. Nwankwo, an innovation specialist at WFP, pointed out that many IDPs lack familiarity with digital tools, making it challenging for them to benefit from tech-based aid if workers are not well-trained. She noted that *"proper training helps our teams engage with IDPs in clear and useful ways, ensuring aid reaches those who need it most."* This prevents miscommunication and helps to align aid delivery with the realities of IDP communities.

Balogun, an ICT specialist from the Skill Women Initiative, added that training also enables aid workers to work well by ensuring that digital tools are used to their full potential, especially in IDP camps where quick responses are needed. Proper training, she explained, *"reduces the time spent correcting errors, allowing us to focus on delivering aid where it is needed."* When well-trained, humanitarian teams can offer IDPs better support by effectively bridging technological gaps and ensuring that aid is delivered to IDPs' specific needs.

Combining digital and traditional methods

This addresses situations where digital tools alone may not be effective due to technological limitations. Many participants explained that relying solely on digital tools can create barriers, especially in remote. Balogun, an ICT specialist from the Skill Women Initiative, explained, "Using digital tools and traditional methods like face-to-face communication helps ensure effective aid delivery." Humanitarian agencies improve aid distribution's reliability through in-person meetings and community leaders, ensuring it reaches those in need, even if

digital tools encounter obstacles. This approach allows agencies to adapt to the communication needs of each community. For instance, community leaders and face-to-face interactions provide a direct and trusted communication channel, often resonating more with residents than impersonal digital notifications. Okoro, an ICT officer at Nigeria RedCross, noted,

> "People here respond well to leaders they know, so mixing both methods makes them feel involved and more open to our support."

Agencies build rapport and increase community buy-in by incorporating familiar, traditional methods, bridging potential gaps left by digital-only strategies. Moreover, combining these methods helps ensure that information is not missed. Traditional methods are a fallback in areas with unreliable mobile networks, or residents may have limited digital literacy. Nwankwo, an innovation specialist at WFP, said, "If people do not get the message digitally, community leaders or in-person visits can step in to fill that gap." This ensures continuity in aid delivery, mitigating risks that come with digital disruptions. Traditional methods can be deployed immediately if digital tools experience outages due to connectivity issues. Using both digital and traditional methods, humanitarian organisations can reliably deliver aid and maintain community trust.

Chapter 5

5.1 Discussion of results

The study revealed that digital communication tools make it easier and faster to work with community leaders who help share information with internally displaced persons. This agrees with Shuvo et al. (2022) who established that digital tools improve how agencies communicate and respond to the needs of people in crisis areas. Mobile phones and social media help agencies get important messages to large groups (Kumar et al., 2022). Humanitarian agencies respond to crises using digital communication tools in their intervention strategies, for example, Redcross Nigeria use mobile telephones to oversee distribution of supplies and health kits to IDPs. The use of mobile phones and text messaging simplify these processes. In addition, during, cash assistance programs, staff no longer have to travel with cash or manually register beneficiaries, instead, beneficiaries receive a text notification when their allowance is deposited. The study found that digital communication tools have created new ways to increase support for humanitarian work. WFP uses tablets to collect data and carry out needs assessments. The study also found that digital tools save time and resources, as they reduce the need for physical travel to remote areas. This allows agencies to respond more quickly to emergencies. Similar findings were reported by Talhouk et al. (2016), who showed that using electronic methods like text messages helps reduce the effort and risks involved in aid delivery. In addition, digital tools are also useful for fundraising and raising awareness. They allow agencies to reach a wider audience, collect donations, and run campaigns easily. As Ghadge (2023) puts it digital tools help agencies connect with more people and increase support for their work. Agencies such as RedCross Nigeria use social media to share stories and get support from local and international audiences. More so, digital tools make it easier to track who receives aid and how effective it is. This is similar to what Jurko (2022) noted, where digital tools help organise aid delivery, making sure that it reaches the right people. While digital tools have many benefits, the study found several risks of using digital tools for aid delivery in post-conflict areas: reliance on technology and unstable internet.

Sometimes, people in control of these tools create barriers that affect how aid is delivered (Vhikai et al., 2024).

The findings revealed that humanitarian aid resemble a new form of colonialism where digital tools give donors too much control over aid delivery, reducing local autonomy, and making communities dependent on external entities. Calhoun's (2010) view of the top-down nature of aid, where donors set terms that may not align with local needs, similar to how colonial powers once dominated their colonies. Donor-driven aid, as noted by Drury et al. (2005), imposes sometimes standards that ignore local contexts. McNeice (2024) argued that top-down approaches diminish local input and control, strengthening a neo-colonial balance. Escobar (2011) argue that these practices reflect a colonial mindset by imposing Western ideas as superior, while Moyo (2009) points out that long-term aid create dependency and weaken local governance, echoing colonial patterns of control and influence. Therefore, while aid aims to help, it sometimes replicates power imbalances that resemble colonialism.

5.2 Conclusion

Humanitarian agencies in Nigeria that work with internally displaced persons in post-conflict areas rely on digital communication tools for aid delivery. Digital tools can improve the speed of aid delivery, enabling rapid information sharing, better coordination, and enhanced fundraising. However, many IDPs in Nigeria live in areas with limited internet access or lack the resources to use digital devices. This reliance on technology risks excluding some of the most vulnerable groups, deepening existing inequalities. In addition, the heavy dependence on digital tools exposes aid delivery to disruptions, such as poor connectivity or technical failures. On the other note, when international agencies maintain control over digital communication channels, the influence of local communities is diminished. This looks like neocolonial practices where outside powers impose decisions that do not align with local needs. The imposition of top-down digital strategies risks create a system where aid recipients cannot provide support. Digital communication tools quickly spread vital information but should not replace personal interactions that build trust

within affected communities. Therefore, for digital tools to help humanitarian agencies conduct their work well, the government of Nigeria should make a strong network system inside the IDP camps so that they have access to the internet and other digital supports.

5.3 Recommendations for further research

The study reveals many facts about the use of digital communication tools by humanitarian agencies in aid delivery to IDPs in post-conflict areas of Nigeria. However, there remain gaps in knowledge that future research could explore, such as:

a. Future research could assess the best digital communication tool that can be used by humanitarian agencies in post-conflict Nigeria.

b. There is also a need to investigate how IDPs with limited literacy skills engage with and respond to digital communication tools in settings where digitalisation is rapidly evolving.

c. There is an opportunity to explore how digital communication contributes to reducing gender-based violence in IDP camps, as many humanitarian agencies have programs focused on addressing this issue.

d. Researchers could also examine the role of digital communication in protecting vulnerable groups, such as women and children, from human trafficking and explore how digital tools improve their safety in conflict-affected areas.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Interview Guide Protocol

1. A critical examination of digital communication tools use in aid delivery to internally displaced persons in post-conflict areas: a case of humanitarian agencies in Ni Please tell me about yourself?
2. How do you communicate with internally displaced persons about an aid or service?
3. Do you apply digital forms of communication to spread information?
4. What are the different purposes of using digital tools? (Probe for: coordinating aid, communication, fundraising, campaigns…)
5. What different types of usages do you use them for? (Probe for: internal communication, training, monitoring…)
6. What digital communication tools do you apply to coordinate the aid?
7. What tools are more effective according to your organisation?
8. Why do you think it is effective?
9. Why aren't they effective according to you?
10. How do you think digital communication tools are playing an important role to get more support for internally displaced persons?
11. What are specific types of risks encountered in using digital communications?
12. What risks do you face in applying digital communication tools for aid delivery in postconflict settings?
13. How do donors monitor how aid provided to humanitarian agencies is used?
14. In what ways do donors use digital communication tools to influence the operations of humanitarian agencies?
15. How do you believe that donor-imposed requirements and monitoring practices affect aid-delivery?
16. How do digital communication tools create dependencies on donors for humanitarian agencies and local communities in Nigeria?
17. In your view as a person experienced in this area, how donor rules hinder the proper addressing of urgent needs in the community.

18. Share with examples of when aid delivery did not fully support vulnerable groups like people with disabilities?
19. How do donor-influence affect decision-making processes within local aid organisations?
20. In what ways do you think digital communication tools could be better used to ensure aid is more relevant to the specific needs of local communities?
21. What suggestions do you think can be established to make digital communication with internally displaced persons safer?

Thank you for your cooperation

Appendix II: Consent to participate in a Research Study

Title of the Study: A critical examination of digital communication tools use in aid delivery to internally displaced persons in post-conflict areas: a case of humanitarian agencies

Investigator: Fashanu Abiola

ISS

The purpose of this research is to understand a critical examination of digital communication tools use in aid delivery to internally displaced persons in post-conflict areas. The research question is, "Why do humanitarian organisations use digital communication tools in aid delivery to IDPs in post-conflict areas?"

You are being requested to participate in an interview. The process is voluntary and will take about 30-45mins to complete.

The risks attacked to this session are very minimal and all responses are anonymous where no names, emails, addresses, work information or any identifiers are solicited. All responses will be eliminated [deleted] after analysis.

The practice has no direct benefits to the participant but their contribution will benefit humanitarian work on how to improve communication between humanitarian organisation and IDPs receiving aid.

Participation in this session is voluntary and I appreciate your involvement and encourage you to continue doing work to improve the lives of people in need.

If you have any questions about this interview, I will be happy to answer them via email. I may be contacted at via Whatsapp +234 809 536 5907

Appendix III: Summary of participants

No.	*Pseudonym*	*Gender*	*Position*	*Institution*
1	Balogun	Female	ICT specialist	The skill women initiative
2	Okoro	Female	ICT officer	Nigeria RedCross
3	Adeyemi	Female	ICT officer	UNESCO
4	Eze	Male	Officer in IT department	Nigeria RedCross
5	Ibekwe	Male	Officer in ICT department	Nigeria RedCross
6	Nwankwo	Female	Innovation specialist	WFP
7	Damilola	Female	Communication officer	UNESCO
9	Okpala	Male	Communication expert	Nigeria RedCross
10	Emadi	Male	Media personnel	WFP
11	Kelechi	Female	Communication manager	Nigeria RedCross
12	Chioma	Female	Officer in IT department	Nigeria RedCross